

## **Blackfield 311**

Chapter 311: Taught Very Well (2)

Although Kang Chan and Gérard were heading to the same building as Kang Dae-Kyung and Yoo Hye-Sook, they moved separately from them and entered the office from a different entrance.

*Sightseeing in Seoul?*

Unless it was to cheer him up, Kang Chan had no intention of dragging the poor guy to palaces and other famous tourist spots. The glances of the women gathering around Gérard also bothered him.

“What’s wrong?” Gérard asked.

Kang Chan gave him a rough idea of the situation.

“They really want to do that?” Gérard asked in surprise.

“Right?!”

“They’re simply selling cars and accepting donations, aren’t they?”

“It could turn into a battle for rights later on.”

Gérard looked confused.

No matter if they were Korean or Western, one used to armed combat would have trouble grasping such subtle nuances.

“Anyway, do people really feed each other food like that in Korea?” asked Gérard.

Kang Chan smirked. Yoo Hye-Sook had fed him bulgogi wrapped in lettuce, which he accepted since he felt bad for being away for so long. Gérard likely found that scene quite strange.

“In Korea, we ask someone to eat with us as a way to express our gratitude. If you’re close enough with the person to feel like they’re family, that’s what you do,” answered Kang Chan.

Gérard nodded in understanding. “I see.”

His explanation was easy enough to understand.

“Captain, what do you call the parents of someone close to you in Korean?”

Now that he was living with him, he questioned everything.

“Abeoji,” Kang Chan stated.

“Appeoji,” Gérard followed.

“Abeoji,” Kang Chan clarified.

“Abuji?”

“Just go with the first one.”

“Abvji?”

“Yeah! That’s good!”

“Abvji? Abvji? Then what about mère[1]?”

“Eomeoni.”

“Eomeuni.”

“Yeah!”

As Kang Chan lit a cigarette, Gérard repeatedly uttered ‘Abvji’ and ‘Eomeuni.’ Eventually, even Kang Chan felt as if his pronunciations were right.

*Buzz buzz.*

Kang Chan’s phone vibrated, notifying him that he had received a text.

Pulling out his phone, Kang Chan squinted at the sender's number.

It was from the DGSE.

The message contained three thumbnail-sized photos of a man in a suit, and below them was the name ‘Berlin International Airport.’

Kang Chan doubted that the DGSE was just informing him that they had suddenly started selling suits. Pressing on the last photo with his thumb, it expanded and filled the screen.

“Huh?”

Kang Chan’s surprised exclamation made Gérard lean over. Staring at the phone, his expression hardened. The man in the photo was Gérard—or someone who resembled him. The date yesterday was printed in small numbers next to the text ‘Berlin International Airport.’

Swiping left, Kang Chan viewed the next photo. The man, wearing sunglasses, now had his head bowed slightly. Finally, the last photo showed him turning his face away from the CCTV. Unlike Gérard's cheeks, his face was clean and unblemished.

"What are those?" asked Gérard.

"The DGSE sent these. Below each photo is yesterday's date with 'Berlin International Airport' written on it."

With this evidence coming to light, Kang Chan’s heart became so weightless that he felt like he could fly. The DGSE’s capabilities were certainly commendable.

Gérard, getting a glimpse of the DGSE’s skills as well, looked as relieved as Kang Chan. These photos were proof that they were already on the tail of the damn guy. They just had to wait for more secrets to be unraveled now.

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

While Kang Chan was staring at the photo with a cryptic smile, a call came in from Lanok. He was just about to make a grateful call anyway.

"Mr. Ambassador."

- Have you seen the photos?

"Yes, I was just looking at them. He was at the Berlin International Airport yesterday?"

- I hope they have somewhat eased your mind, Monsieur Kang.

"Thank you, Mr. Ambassador," Kang Chan said from the bottom of his heart.

- Hahaha! You have a way of touching hearts in unexpected situations.

That didn't really matter. Kang Chan was simply glad that Gérard wasn't the guy in the damn CCTV footage.

- Mr. Kang Chan, the man in the photos is named Gabriel.

"Gabriel?"

Gérard looked at Kang Chan with a startled expression.

- Vasili was the one who found him. Gabriel was the son of Gérard's father's younger brother, so a cousin.

Kang Chan turned to Gérard. Gérard wouldn't be stupid enough not to recognize his cousin.

- Sergey Gee seems to have smuggled something out of Russia. The Russian intelligence bureau caught wind of it, Mr. Kang Chan.

Lanok said Kang Chan's name with a peculiar tone.

"What do you mean?"

- Gabriel is likely an agent of the Star of David.

*Pfft.*

Somehow, it had never seemed like it would be easy from the start.

- I was hoping you could unravel the secret behind the year Gérard disappeared before the DGSE interrogated him.

Kang Chan's eyes met Gérard's. He was more than relieved to know that the DGSE wouldn't shoot this man.

"Mr. Ambassador, do you trust me?"

- If I didn't, I wouldn't have sent you the photos, Mr. Kang Chan.

Lanok's words left a strange emotion in Kang Chan's heart.

"Thank you."

- Let's have dinner together with Gérard soon. I would like to meet him as well.

"Yes, sir."

After ending the call, Kang Chan put his phone on the table.

"Is Gabriel your cousin?" he asked.

"Captain! That guy definitely didn't look like me."

"The Russian intelligence bureau has found him. They think he's an agent of the Star of David."

"Hmm."

Gérard softly exhaled.

"Let's take our time processing this. For now, all that matters is that the false accusation has been cleared. I'll find time to show this photo to Oh Gwang-Taek."

If Kang Chan had been suffering internally, now it was Gérard with a troubled face.

"We have to figure out why this Gabriel guy looks like you and how he became an agent of the Star of David. Since it has come to this, we might as well use this chance to catch the tails of those Star of David bastards too."

"Yes, sir," Gérard answered with a nod.

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Samseong-dong branch office of the National Intelligence Service.

Sitting behind his desk, Hwang Ki-Hyun looked through the documents that Kim Hyung-Jung had brought. He sighed deeply.

"We really don't deserve to be called an intelligence bureau," he muttered to himself.

Kim Hyung-Jung, sitting across from him, remained silent.

"According to the satellite data and the basic information their country's intelligence bureau possess, they've always had access to detailed personal information about renowned special forces team members..."

Hwang Ki-Hyun slowly flipped through the documents.

Following Lanok and Vasili's suggestion, spaces had been provided at the Samseong-dong branch for French and Russian agents, who in turn taught the NIS how to use the satellite that Russia and China had provided and analyze the information it gathered. They also transferred data to South Korea, the content of which was beyond the NIS' imagination.

Hwang Ki-Hyun looked through the documents with a devastated expression. The foreign intelligence bureaus only gave them basic information. It was foolish of them to assume that they would hand over top-tier information just because Kang Chan was involved.

Nevertheless, these basic pieces of information were still tiers above the National Intelligence Service's data.

"Wheew. If they wanted to, they could easily figure out what the supreme leader of North Korea snacked on."

"We should improve the security around the information our intelligence bureau handles."

Hwang Ki-Hyun nodded. "Learn, Manager Kim. Learn despite the insults they throw and the humiliation they force upon us. We have to make sure that our successors won't have to feel this miserable."

"Yes, sir," answered Kim Hyung-Jung.

Hwang Ki-Hyun raised his gaze from the documents. "How's the situation in Jeungpyeong?"

"They have finished their training today."

"When are they leaving?"

"If we grant their request, tomorrow."

Kim Hyung-Jung took out some documents from under the pile and neatly put them on top for Hwang Ki-Hyun to see.

"They want to take ten soldiers from Jeungpyeong?"

"The assistant director has requested to treat it as a vacation leave."

Hwang Ki-Hyun stared at the documents with a heavy expression.

"You do understand that if this operation fails, not even resignation will solve anything?"

"I am aware."

"We deployed troops to Libya without the consent of the parliament. The opposition members of the National Assembly Defense Committee have already been keeping a fierce eye on us. If this operation were to be exposed, we wouldn't be able to handle the backlash."

"The opposition party is already visiting the families of the agents and soldiers who fell in Libya. They seem to have noticed that they didn't die during training."

Hwang Ki-Hyun focused on the documents again, seemingly having made up his mind.

"Remove his name from this report," he ordered.

Kim Hyung-Jung looked at Hwang Ki-Hyun with surprise.

"Give the agents fake passports. I'll manage this operation myself and personally handle all decisions."

"Director, the Samseong-dong branch will be conducting this operation independently. If a problem occurs, we'll just have to relocate."

Hwang Ki-Hyun smiled.

"We can't afford to expose our branch, then. Honestly, not even a hundred directors like me combined will be as valuable as the assistant director. That's why we have to protect the Samseong-dong branch at all costs."

Kim Hyung-Jung's cheeks twitched as he clenched his teeth.

"Since other intelligence bureaus already have all the information about our special forces soldiers, I want to issue our men fake passports. Make sure the reports state that I'm the one who made that decision."

"Director, if you disappear, then the Samseong-dong branch will eventually be exposed."

"The newly formed counter-terrorism team will be under the deputy director and if I think there's going to be a problem, I'll remove the Samseong-dong branch from the National Intelligence Service altogether."

Finally looking relaxed, Kim Hyung-Jung turned to Hwang Ki-Hyun. "Director?"

"Do you remember what I told the soldiers in the hospital?" Hwang Ki-Hyun asked.

"Yes, I do."

"I can't fight beside them on the field. That's why I promised them that I would never back down from fights like this."

Noticing that Kim Hyung-Jung was speechless, Hwang Ki-Hyun smiled.

"We might never get another opportunity like this again. Although this can prevent us from leaving our names behind, we should still act in a way that won't embarrass the agents who have become nameless stars."

Kim Hyung-Jung lowered his gaze to the table.

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Anyone who had used a knife or practiced close-quarters combat would know that while a gun could end battles in one shot, knife fights were a completely different story.

Such battles would have the combatants covered in blood by the time it ended, making it common for both to die. After all, one severed artery in the thigh was all it would take for them to bleed excessively while fighting.

That was why the soldiers wore protective gear and coated their wooden knives with lime powder during combat training. The lime powder would stick to their body during sparring matches, marking where they'd have been cut open if they were in actual combat.

Unless their body was a wooden training dummy, no one wielded a knife to their own neck. Hence, by the time their training was done, they would usually be covered in lime powder.

All the soldiers present were part of the South Korean special forces team that had fought fierce battles in China, North Korea, Afghanistan, France, Africa, and Libya. Nevertheless, they still wore protective gear for this training session.

Their eyes glinted with the resolve not to disappoint their seniors.

"Yang Dong-Sik," Kang Chul-Gyu called.

"Yes, sir!" Yang Dong-Sik vigorously responded.

"Nam Il-Gyu."

"Sir!" Nam Il-Gyu replied.

"You two will demonstrate," ordered Kang Chul-Gyu.

"Yes, sir!" they answered.

The two stepped forward and stood in front of the others, sharp knives in hand.

Kwak Cheol-Ho felt a chill crawl down his spine. Before training, they had been such affectionate seniors. Now, their eyes glinted so violently that they looked as if they had just come across the murderer of their father.

The stance of the Jeungpyeong special forces soldier in close combat was different. Like Kang Chan, they held their knives in a reverse grip.

*Zip! Zip! Thud! Zip! Zip! Thwack! Zip! Zip!*

The battle ended in the blink of an eye.

Yoon Sang-Ki unknowingly gulped.

Blocking each other's right hand, Yang Dong-Sik and Nam Il-Gyu swung their knives at each other, fraying their sleeves.

*Zip! Zip! Zip! Thud! Thud! Zip! Zip!*

There was not even time to swallow. The second collision caused blood to stream down Yang Dong-Sik's neck.

"Yikes!"

Yang Dong-Sik charged toward Nam Il-Gyu.

*Zip! Zip! Zip! Zip!*

Nam Il-Gyu, who maintained a cruelly calm demeanor, slashed Yang Dong-Sik's armpit, shoulder, and nape.

"Stop."

Kang Chul-Gyu's soft voice had an indisputable authority.

Nam Il-Gyu stepped away. Meanwhile, Yang Dong-Sik just stood in place, seemingly frozen.

"Yang Dong-Sik," called Kang Chul-Gyu.

"Sir."

"Come here."

Yang Dong-Sik was bleeding so much that the neck opening of his protective gear was soaked. Heavy silence pressed down on the training ground.

"The juniors are not here to watch you lose your senses and flail around with a knife."

"Yes, sir!" Yang Dong-Sik, who was already over forty years old, shouted at the top of his lungs.

"Are you some drunk trying to pick a fight at a bar?"

"No, sir!"

"What happens when you get all excited while facing an enemy?"

"Our comrades die!"

"Look behind you."

Yang Dong-Sik turned his gaze toward the Jeungpyeong special forces team.

"If you lose your senses during an operation, it won't be the enemy who will die. It's those people."

"I was wrong, sir!"

Yang Dong-Sik's shout echoed across the training ground. Blood continued to flow from his neck, making the others wonder, 'Should we really leave that be?'

"Go get treated."

"Thank you, sir!"

Yang Dong-Sik turned around. He then walked a few steps, stopping in front of the Jeungpyeong special forces soldiers.

*Wasn't he told to get treated?*

Yang Dong-Sik looked like he urgently needed treatment. Hence, everyone focused on him, wondering what was happening.

"I'm sorry, Juniors," Yang Dong-Sik apologized.

Watching him made Yoon Sang-Ki feel as if something hot was rising in his chest.

He continued, "I will never let our juniors die on my watch."

After a brief silence, he resolutely walked toward the barracks.

Chapter 312: I Can Understand (1)

The soldiers' stab-proof vests were in tatters, and blood was seeping through them.

"Captain Cha," Kang Chul-Gyu called.

"Yes, sunbae-nim!"

"Let's end our training here."

"Yes, sir," Cha Dong-Gyun answered.

Following Kang Chul-Gyu's orders, the soldiers stepped back.

Kang Chul-Gyu sheathed his knife and then started taking off his protective gear.

"Are you okay?" Nam Il-Gyu asked Yoon Sang-Ki.

"I'm fine, sunbae-nim."

Feeling bad for Yoon Sang-Ki, Nam Il-Gyu examined him. Just a moment ago, he had been swinging his knife at him with the intent to kill.

If Yoon Sang-Ki had met Nam Il-Gyu for the first time today, he definitely would've thought that Nam Il-Gyu was insane or a pervert.

"Dong-Sik went off the hook because you guys are here," Nam Il-Gyu explained.

Suddenly curious, Yoon Sang-Ki, who was in the middle of taking off his gear, turned his head toward him. "Really?"



“Yeah. I thought Kang sunbae was going to beat Dong-Sik to death earlier.”

Yoon Sang-Ki discretely glanced at Kang Chul-Gyu.

*A person like that hits people?*

Reading Yoon Sang-Ki’s mind, Nam Il-Gyu chuckled.

“Dong-Sik used to act out a lot. During his prime, he even once let his anger get the best of him. He ended up falling for a trap at the DMZ.”

Everyone had taken off their stab-proof vests.

“Please let me carry that for you, sir,” Yoon Sang-Ki offered.

“It’s fine. It’s not heavy anyway,” Nam Il-Gyu said.

The two walked to the barracks.

“What happened to him afterward?” Yoon Sang-Ki asked.

“To Dong-Sik?”

“Yes.”

Nam Il-Gyu was the one who looked at Kang Chul-Gyu this time.

“Kang sunbae ran to Dong-Sik’s aid with four other soldiers and rescued him.”

“I see,” Yoon Sang-Ki nonchalantly responded, realizing that there was nothing special about the story.

However, he was proven wrong when Nam Il-Gyu added, “That got two of our brothers killed.”

Yoon Sang-Ki quickly checked Nam Il-Gyu’s mood. He wasn’t aware that they had gone through something so heartbreaking.

“All that happened simply because Dong-Sik lost his temper and went after China’s baekrang team. He was already covered in blood by the time Kang sunbae dragged him back into a warehouse. We were so outnumbered that day that we thought that place would be our grave.”

Yoon Sang-Ki didn’t know how to respond. All he could do was wonder if Kang Chul-Gyu had to beat up an injured soldier that badly.

“I still vividly remember the two men who died that day.”

Looking at Nam Il-Gyu, Yoon Sang-Ki found him staring at the sky.

“One of them had a pregnant wife at the time. The other had just come back from his father’s funeral...” Nam Il-Gyu trailed off.

Not long after, they arrived at the barracks.

Yoon Sang-Ki took Nam Il-Gyu’s stab-proof vest as if he was snatching it away from him, then went to the warehouse.

At the same time, Yang Dong-Sik opened the barracks and walked outside. The wound on his neck was covered with bandages.

“You good?” Nam Il-Gyu asked.

“I’m sorry,” Yang Dong-Sik replied.

“Then don’t fucking overdo it, asshole!”

Yang Dong-Sik just scratched his head.

One after another, the soldiers stopped in front of the barracks. Kang Chul-Gyu was the last to arrive.

“How are you feeling?” Kang Chul-Gyu asked Yang Dong-Sik.

Yang Dong-Sik’s head dropped in shame. “I’m sorry.”

“Dong-Sik,” Kang Chul-Gyu called.

“Yes?”

They were talking in front of all of the soldiers.

“I forgot you’re also old now. I was too harsh on you in front of our juniors.”

“No...”

“I’m sorry.”

Yang Dong-Sik’s eyes glistened.

Kang Chul-Gyu continued, “I’d understand if you’re upset, but...”

Yang Dong-Sik covered his eyes with the back of his arm as he burst into tears.

“Ugh. I’m so sorry. I was wrong.”

Saliva dripped out from Yang Dong-Sik’s open mouth.

Kang Chul-Gyu approached him and stroked his shoulder. “... I can still count on you in this operation, right?”

“Urgh! Ugh.”

*Why is he so sad?*

Among the soldiers from Jeungpyeong, only Yoon Sang-Ki had an idea why Yang Dong-Sik was crying.

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While spending time with Gérard and talking about random topics, Kang Chan considered going home with his parents.

Amid their conversation, his phone suddenly rang. When he picked up the call, Yoo Hye-Sook’s excitement came through.

- Channy! Be home by seven tonight.

Kang Chan and Gérard could just have the agents drive them to their new house. However, Kang Chan thought they should go home with his parents since they had just moved and this was his first time going there.

Yoo Hye-Sook had clearly told them to come home at a specific time because she wanted to make food for them.

Smiling, Kang Chan told Gérard about his conversation with Yoo Hye-Sook.

“Captain, I want to buy wine and flowers. Is there a place nearby that sells them?” Gérard asked afterward.

“Are you thinking of giving them to my parents as gifts?”

“That’s right.”

Fortunately, some shops on the way to their new home had those items for sale. Since spending that much wouldn’t be a burden for Gérard and he would be giving them to Kang Dae-Kyung and Yoo Hye-Sook, Kang Chan thought it wasn’t such a bad idea.

Kang Chan got in the car that Lee Doo-Bum brought over with Gérard. They then headed to the big shopping center nearby.

The wine store was located on the first floor of the underground level.

It was rush hour, so many homemakers were at the shopping centers to prepare dinner. Women who dropped by on their way home from work stopped and turned around to stare at Gérard. They looked like hungry fish.

This was fascinating. In Africa and Afghanistan, Gérard was just an okay guy. Now, almost every woman they had walked past had turned, their gazes following him.

As Kang Chan entered the wine store with Gérard, a tall and slender female employee approached them.

“Hello. Do you guys need help with anything?”

Gérard looked at Kang Chan, seemingly asking him to explain in his stead.

*I wonder how frustrating it is for Gérard to be in South Korea when he can’t speak Korean.*

Kang Chan decided not to go out with Gérard to buy things ever again.

Thankfully, there was a flower shop next to the shopping center.

After buying a bouquet, the two got back into the car and headed to Kang Chan’s new home.

They crossed the Hannam Bridge and went up to the right side of the hill. After taking another turn, they finally reached their destination.

After getting out of the car, Kang Chan softly gasped while looking at the villa before him. He felt as if Kang Dae-Kyung and Yoo Hye-Sook would find this house uncomfortable.

They walked to the entrance of the villa with a shopping bag filled with new clothes, Gérard's old bag, a bouquet, and wine. Once they were close enough, the door automatically opened. Someone seemed to have been watching them through the CCTV.

They went up to the second floor and rang the doorbell.

*Beep beep beep.*

"We're home," Kang Chan said.

"Welcome home, Channy! Gérard!" Yoo Hye-Sook responded.

"Hello, Mother," Gérard greeted in awkward Korean.

"Pardon? Ah, hello. Welcome."

Smiling, Gérard handed the bouquet and wine to Yoo Hye-Sook.

"My goodness! Thank you."

"Thank you," Gérard responded, unaware that it wasn't the right reply.

"Welcome," Kang Dae-Kyung said as he walked toward the front door.

"Hello, Father," Gérard greeted.

"Ah, hello! Come inside quickly."

This was Kang Chan's first time going inside this house as well. That was why when he was walking to the sofa in the living room with Gérard, the two looked around the house.

"You two haven't had dinner yet, have you?"

"Of course not, Mother," Kang Chan answered. "Where's my room? I'd like to change before we eat."

"Ah, right! Show Channy his room," Yoo Hye-Sook told Kang Dae-Kyung.

"Alright. This way."

Kang Dae-Kyung turned around and went upstairs.

There were two rooms.

"We have already designated the room further down the hall as yours and decorated it accordingly. Your friend should use the one closer to the stairs," Kang Dae-Kyung suggested.

"You two must have had to go through a lot to move here."

"Not at all. We didn't even have to lift a finger; they did everything for us. Anyway, dinner's almost done, so be quick. We'll wait for you two downstairs."

"Alright."

Kang Chan and Gérard first went into the room that Gérard was going to use.

“Woah!” Gérard exclaimed in amazement as he looked around the room. Not only did it offer a luxurious view of the river, but it also had quite a grandiose bathroom, walk-in closet, and bed.

“This is amazing,” Gérard commented.

“Use this room for now. After we change, we’re going to have dinner.”

“Alright.”

Leaving Gérard behind, Kang Chan headed to the room further down the hall.

*Click.*

His room was the same as Gérard’s room, but it was flipped.

The only furniture they moved from his previous house was his desk. Everything else, including the bed, was new.

On the bookshelf were books that were in his previous room. He was happy to see them, even though he had only read them a few times.

Kang Chan opened his closet and changed into comfortable workout clothes.

The house felt strange. He missed the apartment that they used to live in. This seemed more like a luxury hotel, not a home.

“Phew,” Kang Chan sighed.

For Kang Dae-Kyung and Yoo Hye-Sook’s sake, he decided to do his best to grow attached to this house too.

After washing his hands, he headed to the kitchen with Gérard.

Since this was a split-level villa, they had to go down the stairs and walk past the living room to get to the kitchen.

If they weren’t initially hungry, after walking around this much, they would be.

The japchae, stir-fried pork, kimchi, and soup on the table made Kang Chan feel a bit better. Getting to see Kang Dae-Kyung and Yoo Hye-Sook did, too.

Considering his parents likely found this house even more unfamiliar and uncomfortable than Kang Chan, he did his best to hide his dissatisfaction.

“Wow!” Kang Chan exaggeratedly exclaimed on purpose.

“Channy! Go have a seat,” Yoo Hye-Sook said.

“Do you need help with anything?”

“I’m already done, so just wait at the table.”

As Yoo Hye-Sook filled separate bowls with soup, Kang Chan filled a cup with water.

“Time to eat! Dig in, Gérard,” Kang Dae-Kyung invited.

When he started eating, everyone else did.

Even though a fork had been prepared for him, Gérard insisted on using chopsticks.

People were certainly quick to adapt to the situation. Kang Chan didn't expect Gérard would be able to use chopsticks by clenching and unclenching his fist.

Although Gérard was somewhat used to spicy food, he still seemed to be having trouble eating kimchi.

He also had a unique way of eating Korean food. Although he used chopsticks to make lettuce wraps, he grabbed it with his fingertips to eat it.

“Have you shown him around the city?” Kang Dae-Kyung asked Kang Chan.

“Yes. I first showed him the area around Gangnam.”

He technically wasn't lying. They did look down at the city from a high building.

After answering, he gave Gérard a blank look.

*He's not some squirrel gathering acorns during autumn. Is he treating the wrap like a sandwich?*

After putting two slices of lettuce next to each other on the extra plate in front of him, Gérard put rice and stir-fried pork on top of the lettuce.

Kang Dae-Kyung and Yoo Hye-Sook also stopped eating to watch him.

He looked like he was clenching his fist every time he moved his chopsticks. With a serious expression, he added more stir-fried pork to the lettuce.

Finally running out of patience, Kang Chan asked, “What are you doing?”

Instead of answering, Gérard carefully held up the lettuce wrap on the left with the tips of his fingers.

“Father,” Gérard called in awkward Korean, then held out the wrap to Kang Dae-Kyung.

*Oh, fuck!*

“He asked why Mother fed me a wrap earlier today, and I told him that we do this with people we consider family. That's probably why he's offering you the lettuce wrap,” Kang Chan explained.

Like a proper businessman, Kang Dae-Kyung controlled his expression. He then opened his mouth to eat the lettuce wrap that Gérard was offering him.

“Mmm! It's good! Thank you!” Kang Dae-Kyung exclaimed.

Seemingly satisfied with Kang Dae-Kyung's reaction, Gérard held up the next lettuce wrap.

“Mother,” he called, again in awkward Korean.

Yoo Hye-Sook glanced at Kang Chan.

Unfortunately, perhaps because Kang Chan knew about Gérard's family matters, he couldn't bring himself to stop him.

"Try it. It's good," Kang Dae-Kyung suggested.

"Please, Mother. Just this once," Kang Chan insisted.

Yoo Hye-Sook raised her hand and ate the wrap that Gérard was holding out.

"It's good, thank you," she said.

Gérard smiled, causing the scar on his cheek to curve.

"Gérard, you only have to do that once," Kang Chan said.

"Alright."

Kang Chan sighed deeply.

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The next day, Jeungpyeong had a cold morning.

The DMZ soldiers, already done with breakfast even though the sun was yet to rise, gathered in front of the bus.

"Sunbae-nim," someone called.

"Yes?"

Nam Il-Gyu shook Yoon Sang-Ki's hand.

Since the joint training only lasted for a day, they had only spent one night together. Nevertheless, the special forces soldiers looked very disappointed that the DMZ team was already leaving, making them seem as if they had been living together for a few years.

The Jeungpyeong special forces team felt bad because their sunbaes' faces showed all the hardships that they had endured. On the other hand, the DMZ team couldn't help but be worried about their juniors, who were so lively.

"I'll see you soon," Cha Dong-Gyun said.

Kang Chul-Gyu just nodded and smiled in response.

Looking away from their juniors, he commanded, "Get on the bus."

"Sunbae-nim!"

Kwak Cheol-Ho yelled so loudly that he sounded as if he would injure his throat.

The DMZ team turned around.

As if on cue, the soldiers from Jeungpyeong simultaneously yelled, "We're proud of you all!"

Nam Il-Gyu looked away, seemingly checking if they were yelling at someone else behind the DMZ team.

"Jeungpyeong's special forces team! Atteention!"

Military boots clicked against each other.

“Salute our sunbaes!”

The soldiers moved as one.

The Jeungpyeong special forces soldiers firmly saluted the DMZ team.

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Gérard, Kang Chan, and his parents sat around the table and had cereal, toast, and fried eggs for breakfast. They likely prepared these for Gérard, but it wasn't a bad idea to have a light breakfast.

“What did you two think of the rooms?” Kang Dae-Kyung asked.

“It was so large that I found it a little uncomfortable,” Kang Chan replied.

“Right?”

Kang Dae-Kyung seemed happy to hear that since he felt the same way.

“What about you, Mother?” Kang Chan asked Yoo Hye-Sook.

“It makes me uncomfortable too. I'm not sure about the rest of this house, but I at least really like the kitchen.”

“Good to know. We'd probably find this house cozy once we've grown attached to it. We just have to give it a chance, right, Father?”

“Keep in mind that who you're with is far more important than where you are. The first house that your mom and I lived in was as big as this kitchen, but I was still happy.”

Kang Chan laughed, amused by Kang Dae-Kyung's cheekiness. Gérard just stared blankly at them.

“Dig in,” Kang Dae-Kyung told Gérard while pointing to the bread.

Smiling, Gérard thanked him in awkward Korean. He was quite tactful.

“Channy, what are your plans for today?” Yoo Hye-Sook asked.

“I'm thinking of going out with Gérard and touring him around the city a bit more.”

“Sounds fun.”

After breakfast, Kang Chan returned to his room and changed. He decided to go to the office with Gérard for now.

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

Picking up the call, Kang Chan greeted, “Hello?”

- It's Kim Hyung-Jung. The agents from the counterterrorism team have left for Mongolia.

Kang Chan gazed toward the window.



He already expected Kang Chul-Gyu not to call him before their departure. He had always been that kind of person.

- Hello?

“Ah! Sorry, I heard you. What about Oh Gwang-Taek?”

- He’s with them. Anyway, how flexible is your schedule today?

“Can I get back to you in two hours?”

- Sure.

Kang Chan quickly called Michelle.

Now that they had cleared up the misunderstanding with the DGSE, it wouldn’t be that much of a problem to ask Michelle to stay with Gérard.

It would be better for them to bicker around instead of forcing Gérard to stay inside an office.

Fortunately, Michelle happily accepted Kang Chan’s request. She seemed to have been worried about the recent incident.

After seeing Kang Dae-Kyung and Yoo Hye-Sook, Kang Chan stayed at home for a bit longer before leaving with Gérard.

They got into the car that Lee Doo-Bum had prepared for them and headed straight to the office.

“Gérard, I have to go to the National Intelligence Service today. I want you to stay with Michelle until I return,” Kang Chan said in French.

Smiling, Gérard met Kang Chan’s gaze.

Kang Chan added, “You’d prefer that anyway, wouldn’t you?”

“You’re relieved that the DGSE no longer has a reason to kill me since they have found Gabriel, aren’t you?” Gérard cheekily asked.

*Did this fucker really just ask me that?*

“What’s with that expression, Cap? Did you really think I was as stupid as Daye?”

“Hey! Daye has been using his brain a lot lately.”

“Even if that fucker uses his brain, it’ll be like beating his head against a wall.”

The two snickered as they crossed the Hannam Bridge.

Chapter 313: I Can Understand (2)

Upon arriving at the office, Kang Chan and Gérard comfortably enjoyed some coffee together. Kang Chan then headed to the DI office with Gérard.

It would feel awkward to greet Michelle inside the office. Hence, Kang Chan asked her to come out for a moment.

“How have you been?”

Michelle awkwardly greeted Gérard.

“Let’s go somewhere without motorcycles today,” Gérard brazenly responded.

“Thanks, Michelle,” Kang Chan said.

“Don’t worry about it.”

After uttering a short phrase in Korean, Kang Chan turned around.

“See you in the evening, Cap.”

“Don’t cause any trouble today,” Kang Chan replied without turning his head.

A chuckle soon escaped him. He felt like he was dropping off a kid at an international kindergarten and telling him to listen to his teacher.

Having gone up to the office, Kang Chan called Kim Hyung-Jung.

“Manager, I’m at the office. When would be a good time for you to meet?” Kang Chan asked.

- Can you come to Samseong-dong now?

“Sure. I’ll leave right away.”

*Who’s with him?*

Kim Hyung-Jung sounded different than usual.

*I don’t have to worry about this right now. I’ll find out once I get there anyway.*

Kang Chan and Choi Jong-Il headed to the Samseong-dong office.

“Did you spend the night at home?”

“I was at the villa on the third floor yesterday.”

In terms of security alone, a villa was certainly significantly better than an apartment.

The two exchanged various stories until they arrived at Samseong-dong. Once out of the car, Kang Chan immediately headed to the fifth floor.

*Click.*

Kim Hyung-Jung opened the door before Kang Chan could even ring the bell, which was really convenient.

“Please come in. The director is inside.”

Following Kim Hyung-Jung into the office, Kang Chan saw Hwang Ki-Hyun standing in front of a table.

“Hello, sir,” Kang Chan greeted. “Seeing you here makes me feel strangely welcomed.”

Hwang Ki-Hyun reached out and shook Kang Chan's hand.

"Have a seat."

"Thank you."

Drinks, bottled water, and cups were set in front of Kang Chan.

"Have you gotten some rest?"

"Yes, sir."

Hwang Ki-Hyun nodded. He then said, "We plan to issue fake passports to ten members of the special forces team. Captain Cha Dong-Gyun will be the one selecting and commanding them. They're scheduled to depart tomorrow morning."

Kim Hyung-Jung slid a list toward Kang Chan.

"Cha Dong-Gyun and Kwak Cheol-Ho are still heavily injured, aren't they?"

"Captain Cha Dong-Gyun is currently their highest-ranking member, so we chose to trust his judgment. Would you like to call him?"

Considering Cha Dong-Gyun had become pragmatically cold enough to give up on the Libya operation, his judgment could certainly be trusted now.

Kang Chan shook his head. "No. We can trust him."

"Assistant director," Hwang Ki-Hyun called.

"Yes, sir?"

"As you predicted, Abibu has requested a meeting with you under the pretext of meeting the key figures behind the Eurasian Rail project," Hwang Ki-Hyun said with a stern expression. "If you're okay with it, it would be best to meet with Director Song Chang-Wook and Chairman Kim Gwan-Sik in advance, maybe even tomorrow."

"Got it. I'll be sure to do that"

It was only natural for him to meet the two people he had specifically arranged appointments with anyway.

Everyone in the room had a heavy expression. Just as Lanok had mentioned, Abibu's request to meet with Kang Chan served as proof that the Mongolian base was at a high risk of being attacked.

"We also have several other issues we'd like to discuss," Hwang Ki-Hyun confessed.

"The last operation in Afghanistan had solid national support, so the parliament approved it afterward. However, not only the opposition but also some members of the ruling party have concerns regarding the operation in Libya."

Kang Chan was not well-versed in this area. Hence, he knew it would be wise for him to listen intently.

"Members of the National Defense Committee are talking to the families of those who fell in Libya to verify our men's deployment. Although nothing has surfaced yet, these matters will inevitably come to light."

"That does seem likely."

Hwang Ki-Hyun looked directly into Kang Chan's eyes. "We plan to negotiate with the National Defense Committee if necessary, but in the worst-case scenario, I might have to step down."

"The Korean Peninsula is the most strategically important location in Asia. The reason China, Japan, and the United States have been rejecting our unification is because of their desire to control the strategic pivot of Asia."

Kang Chan squinted.

*He's not about to give me a lesson on geopolitics, is he? That would just be going too far.*

Seemingly reading Kang Chan's mind, Hwang Ki-Hyun continued, "Significant funds are flowing into North Korea."

"The United States is leading economic sanctions against North Korea. Even though it's through unofficial channels, the fact that funds are flowing in means the US has either consented to or at least turned a blind eye to this."

"What does the US have to gain from this?"

"The creation of tension in the Korean Peninsula, or even war."

Kang Chan snorted. "I'm sorry. I mean no offense, but this is insane. Do you know who sent the funds?"

"On paper, the sender is a company that uses a Swiss bank account."

Could this be the work of the Star of David?

Recalling the stories that he had heard at the French embassy, Kang Chan wondered if they were supporting North Korea because they couldn't bankrupt South Korea itself.

A heavy silence filled the office.

"Eight agents dispatched by the four country have started their activities on the floor below. If not for them, we wouldn't have acquired this information. I am ashamed to say this, but I have a request for you," Hwang Ki-Hyun said.

After glancing at Kim Hyung-Jung, he continued, "We urgently need to cooperate with the intelligence bureaus of China, Japan, and the United States. The moment North Korea launches a missile toward Seoul, this situation will spiral out of control."

Kang Chan couldn't help but sigh. Curious, he asked, "Can North Korea even do that?"

"The regime is weakening. If North Korea was alone, it would have been impossible. However, the external support they're receiving changes things. Right now, there is a good chance they would provoke us. After all, increasing their supplies and solidifying their hostility toward 'South Korea and the Yankees' would help maintain the regime."

"What if we retaliate?"

"War would break out. All oil-producing countries that didn't get development rights to the next-generation energy would gladly support North Korea."

"The US would be thrilled."

"Japan wouldn't dislike it either."

It was an utterly laughable statement.

They felt as if Mount Everest had just started to show itself even though they had already been climbing strenuously for quite some time now.

"Director, Is the NIS capable enough to resolve this? If the actual backers are in Saudi Arabia, then we won't be able to go to war with them. Moreover, the US' involvement will only make this even more problematic."

Hwang Ki-Hyun shook his head. "Unfortunately, our agents aren't skilled enough to deal with this yet. That's why we're seeking advice and help from neighboring intelligence bureaus before this situation escalates."

Kim Hyung-Jung lowered his gaze, his expression heavy.

Hwang Ki-Hyun added, "The president's rushed announcements about our negotiations with Japan for the undersea tunnel were also part of the efforts to deter war. The larger their investment, the less likely they are to stand on the side of conflict."

Kang Chan let out a soft sigh.

Politics had intriguing aspects. Who would have thought that behind such a sudden announcement lay deep calculations?

"Moreover, false information is also slowly spreading. They seem to be trying to sow fear among the people by making them believe that the next-gen energy project will lead to war."

"Is that why Abibu is visiting South Korea?"

"We believe he will disseminate information while contacting the lawmakers. It's a leap, but he might be prepared to offer compensation as well. If so, then the lawmakers would be able to prevent war and get paid for it, which would be a win-win for them. If North Korea ends up firing a missile at an uninhabited island, it could provoke public opposition."

*That bastard's trying to inflate the economy while we're still busy with the Libya case!*

"Assistant director."

Suppressing his anger, Kang Chan looked at Hwang Ki-Hyun.

"North Korea just has to fire a missile to reap substantial rewards. Even if war were to break out because of their actions, they would have strong nations to back them up. Our country can't withstand the influence of the United States and other oil-producing countries. I humbly request that you ask for help from our allies."

Even though Kim Hyung-Jun, who had averted his gaze, was in the room with them, the director of the National Intelligence Service still asked Kang Chan a favor.

"We've already had this conversation before. I will meet and discuss this with Ambassador Lanok."

"Thank you."

Hwang Ki-Hyun let out a soft sigh and looked at Kim Hyung-Jung.

"Manager Kim, you have to work as hard as you feel ashamed right now, if not more. Don't forget that the benefits from the Eurasian Rail and next-gen energy facility include the development of our National Intelligence Service."

His words sounded more like a retirement speech from someone about to step down.

"Assistant Director, I will be taking my leave now."

Kang Chan and Kim Hyung-Jung stood up, following Hwang Ki-Hyun.

"Okay."

Kang Chan shook Hwang Ki-Hyun's hand.

No words were exchanged. With a regretful smile, Hwang Ki-Hyun simply held Kang Chan's hand tightly.

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When meeting the heads of intelligence bureaus, Vasili had always used the special forces' barracks due to the strict security it offered. If someone attempted an assassination here, they could immediately retaliate. Lanok, Yang Beom, Sherman, and Ludwig wouldn't dare kill him here unless they were prepared to get shot to death on the spot.

For that reason, he had never had to worry about his safety when meeting leaders in this place.

Ethan had visited too. However, Vasili didn't consider him a threat. Ethan was nowhere near his level.

Vasili opened the door to the barracks.

"It's been a while," a young Englishman greeted in fluent Russian. He had his curly hair cut short, causing him to closely resemble the ruthless Vasili.

He stood up from the sofa. "Has the real deal finally shown up?"

Vasili squinted at the man, then silently walked to the wall-mounted bar.

"If you have vodka, that would be great."

"Why not sit over here instead?"

"Sure."

As the Englishman moved over, Vasili put a bottle of vodka and two glasses on the table.

*Clink. Clink.*

After filling the glasses, he sat down across the bar from the Englishman.

"What about Ethan?"

"He's always liked doing nonsensical things that are unnecessary."

When Vasili smiled, the man raised his glass. Both men simultaneously finished their drinks.

"Josh, since you started to move, Lanok and Romain must be losing some sleep, huh?"

*Clink. Clink.*

"I've come for a different matter today," Josh said.

Vasili, pouring them more alcohol, raised his eyebrow at Josh. Before Kang Chan appeared, Josh had been set to become the next head of the information world. In the same way France gained strength from Lanok, the next generation speculated that Josh would be the reason behind the increase in British influence.

The reason Lanok entrusted France to Kang Chan and even Vasili paid attention to stop him from becoming the head of the British intelligence bureau was because of his recognized abilities.

Under Vasili's gaze, Josh remained steadfast.

"I don't like wordplay," Vasili said.

"I'm aware."

Vasili set down the vodka bottle and straightened up. "What are you really here for?"

"It's about Korea."

Vasili briefly laughed, but it was cut short by Josh's unexpected proposal.

"I will give you half of the shares of the next-generation power facility," the Englishman said. "As you know, a Blackhead only appears maybe once every few decades. The nutrient-depleted rock we had went over to America."

Fiddling with his glass, Josh continued, "The God of Blackfield gave the one he found in Africa to Lanok. And then there's another treasure that Abibu has."

"So you're aware that there's one more?" Vasili asked.

Instead of denying it, Josh just laughed in amusement. "Russia's intelligence bureau is certainly frightening."

"So, where did this amazing offer come from?"

"From our plan to start a war on Korea."

Vasili blankly stared at Josh.

"That should eradicate all their plans to build the Eurasian Rail and the next-generation energy facility."

"North Korea isn't stupid enough to fall for that. South Korea won't easily fall for such provocation either."

"There certainly won't be any war if South Korea can turn a blind eye to three missiles exploding in the middle of Seoul."

Just as Vasili shook his head, John continued, "One of them will be equipped with a nuclear warhead."

Vasili's eyes suddenly glinted.

"You know about the nuclear warhead that Sergey Karakayev, also known as Sergey Gee, smuggled out, don't you?"

"Was it the British intelligence bureau that killed him?"

Vasili looked as if he was about to draw his weapon.

"How could Ethan, that bungler, kill someone under the surveillance of Russian intelligence? He probably still doesn't even know about it."

"Josh, I acknowledge your ability, but you should know better than to behave insolently in front of me."

"I know, I know. Finding out about Sergey Karakayev was also a coincidence for me."

Vasili let out a soft hum. "Hmm."

"The world really is small, isn't it? Or is it the circle that's small?"

"Is this connected to Gerard de Mermier?"

"Honestly?"

"Josh," Vasili called, causing Josh's expression to turn serious.

"Believe it or not, this part is also difficult for me to understand. He should have died in the plan to smuggle out the Blackhead. Just another name on the list of casualties. However, right before the operation, he was sent somewhere else."

Vasili just listened.

"After that, I got preoccupied with resolving the nuclear warhead issue. Since he was part of the Foreign Legion's special forces team, I assumed he'd die sooner or later."

Josh laughed, seemingly astonished. He then added, "Although the plan was to kill him before he's discharged, he has stubbornly survived every danger thrown against him."

"The Foreign Legion's special forces commander?"

"Yes. He's gained quite a reputation, hasn't he?"

"The fact that he holds that position means his efforts are being acknowledged."

Josh nodded in agreement.

"I was wondering if it was coincidence or if Lanok was trying to keep us in check through the God of Blackfield."

Puzzled, Vasili frowned.

"Contrary to the plans made, he was unexpectedly sent to Mongolia. He was then targeted by snipers during a civil war but ended up in Afghanistan. Now, just as we were starting to think that he would finally be eliminated in Africa, he fought his way through six hundred Quds. That last one is the most surprising feat he has done so far."



Vasili shook his head in disbelief.

"As you know, we also planned to use the Congo civil war, but he suddenly requested leave."

"That would be for his recent trip to Korea."

"Exactly."

Josh couldn't help but laugh due to how ridiculous the situation was.

"I thought he'd just keep embarrassing us if we kept using the same tactic, so we planned to give him a heart attack on the plane instead. Guess what? The man switched flights, again on the God of Blackfield's orders."

Vasili's laughter sounded quite eerie.

"Josh," he called, abruptly cutting his own laughter. His expression sharpened. "Is the Star of David finally making its move?"

"It's not unrelated."

Josh held a steady gaze on him.

"You know what result my words can bring about here?"

"Are you considering forsaking Russia's significant interests for the sake of your loyalty to Lanok?"

"If you think a few words will shake me, you better prepare your last words here."

Vasili downed the vodka in one gulp. He then leaned over the bar and reached out his hand.

*Click.*

In Vasili's hand was a Gsh-18 pistol.

"You can use the nuclear warhead Sergey smuggled as you like. However, we have already put too much investment in the construction of the next-generation power facilities and the Eurasian Rail to back out now."

"If Russia joins us, the Middle Eastern oil-producing countries will reduce their oil production."

"Do you plan to keep playing games until the end?"

*Clink.*

Vasili refilled his glass with his left hand. His posture remained perfect, leaving no room for Josh to act carelessly.

"Do you know that famous Russian song that goes, 'Before the cold vodka burns the throat...'"

Vasili nodded, gripping the glass with his left hand, his gaze as cold as a serpent's. "... red blood will soak the floor."

"If Lanok dies, would you consider joining hands with us?"

Vasili's serpentine gaze intensely lit up.

"Is Gabriel also involved with the Star of David?"

"He died a moment ago."

Vasili's eyes narrowed.

"He suffered a heart attack in the bathroom. He has always had a weak heart."

"How do you plan to eliminate Lanok?"

Josh's lips curved into a sardonic smile.

"I trust you're familiar with the nature of intelligence bureaus. You may question the outcome, but it's impolite to inquire about the process."

"Are the funds sent to North Korea also from the Star of David?"

"From what I've heard, Sherman had a part in it."

Incredibly, Josh answered and raised his glass.

"If a nuclear bomb goes off in Seoul, North Korea won't be safe either."

"They won't know that the missile will have a nuclear warhead. It will be launched from a submarine we provided."

"What about the sacrifices of the US forces?"

"They have a rock that has been depleted of all its energy, yet they still dream of becoming the main players in this vie for the ownership over the next-gen energy. A suitable sacrifice seems required to secure shares of the Korean Peninsula later on. They have already secretly joined hands with Japan anyway."

"If I kill you, will the war still happen?"

Josh downed the vodka and spoke.

"It has already begun."

A moment of silence passed.

"A large force is moving toward the Mongolian base as we speak."

Vasili frowned.

Josh continued, "Just when Russia is distracted by a nearby local conflict."

"Are you planning to destroy the base?"

"We plan to kill all personnel left in it. There will be no survivors."

Vasili sighed. He then downed his vodka.

"Hmm."

Chapter 314: It Has Already Begun! (1)

*Dududududu.*

Helicopter blades chopped through the air, sending out fierce winds and loud noises, as the DMZ team's aircraft descended onto the field in front of the Mongolian base.

The Taegeukgi[1] fluttered above the container-made barracks. It had machine guns, portable missiles, and guards next to it.

Kang Chul-Gyu, lowering his posture, moved toward the base.

"Glad to have you back!" Kim Tae-Jin greeted over the noise.

"Did anything happen while we were gone?"

"Just a couple of minor protests, but we've already dealt with them."

As they talked, various supplies were being unloaded. Oh Gwang-Taek, Nam Il-Gyu, and Yang Dong-Sik also greeted Kim Tae-Jin. The two headed into the barracks.

*Creak.*

Now that the harsh winter had passed, the barracks' interior finally felt somewhat warm.

"Would you like some coffee?"

"Sure."

Kang Chul-Gyu lightly smiled as he watched Kim Tae-Jin make coffee.

"Why are you smiling?"

"I'm just relieved. I feel like we're finally getting back on track."

"It does seem so," Kim Tae-Jin agreed. He brought over two paper cups to the sofa. "Losing that extra weight really makes a difference in how you move."

Kang Chul-Gyu nodded. "Thank you, Tae-Jin. You're the reason I get to serve our country again."

"You must have gotten older. Back then, even if I brought you water, you'd barely look."

Kang Chul-Gyu laughed out loud.

"You're laughing now. Did something good happen?"

"It's a bit late, but I did get my health back. You're all also still with me, which makes me happy."

After taking a sip of his coffee, Kang Chul-Gyu's expression became serious.

"We're expecting a surprise attack from the enemy within a week."

Kim Tae-Jin's gaze tensed up as he focused.

"About ten juniors from Jeungpyeong will join us tomorrow under the guise of vacation leave."

"Do you know who the enemy is?"

Kang Chul-Gyu briefly shook his head. "The assistant director already had to go through so much just to get intel about this attack."

"The assistant director? You mean...?"

"Assistant Director Kang Chan."

"Ah!"

Kim Tae-Jin felt that Kang Chul-Gyu had changed.

"We'll thoroughly respond to their offensive in our own way. They'll likely use the night, so let's start preparing tomorrow. When the juniors from Jeungpyeong arrive, we'll assign them to the same positions."

"I'll prepare as you command, sunbae-nim. Is there really no way for us to know how many enemies we'll be up against?"

"Well, it's a surprise attack, and this place is on the border of Russia, Mongolia, and China, so I doubt they'll be sending a large force."

Kim Tae-Jin nodded. "Good point."

Soon, they heard laughter from outside.

"I'll be back in a moment."

"No rush."

After Kim Tae-Jin left the barracks, Kang Chul-Gyu entered a room with a shopping bag and a suit cover. He then walked over to the closet on the left, which was for his use.

After opening it, he took off the suit cover and hung the suit on the door. This way, he could see the suit whenever he opened the closet.

Kang Chul-Gyu then placed the shoes from the shopping bag inside the closet. These were the pair that he had worn once when dining with Kang Chan. After looking back and forth between the suit and the shoes, he hung the rest of the clothes on hangers in the closet.

All that was left was to close the door. However, before he could, his gaze fiercely sharpened.

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*Thud, thud, thud, thud.*

Right after leaving the Samseong-dong office, Kang Chan's heart began pounding heavily, sending him a suffocating warning.

"Are you okay?" Choi Jong-Il asked.

"Have you assigned security personnel to Mr. Seok's hospital?"

"Yes. Would you like me to double-check?"

Kang Chan nodded.

Choi Jong-Il made a quick call. After a brief conversation, he hung up.

"He's asleep now, probably because of the medication. They say his condition has improved significantly and that he might be discharged soon."

Kang Chan deeply exhaled.

As if nothing happened, his heart was now beating normally.

*Was it the mention of war that made me sensitive? Damn!*

It was as absurd as throwing away gum and then putting the wrapper in one's mouth. Just a few days ago, he had fought a battle; was it likely his heart would pound from the sound of war?

For now, he was just glad that his heart had calmed down.

From Lanok Kang Dae-Kyung, and Yoo Hye-Sook to the base in Mongolia, too many people flashed in his mind, albeit briefly. It wasn't just one or two people or one or two places.

He continued his way to the office.

*Buzzzzz, buzzzzz, buzzzz.*

The phone rang.

Recognizing the number, Kang Chan immediately answered.

"Mr. Ambassador? Is everything okay?"

- Mr. Kang Chan! Where are you right now?

"I'm on my way to the office right now."

Having just gotten a warning from his heart, Kang Chan focused on the call.

- Can I stop by for a bit?

Kang Chan smiled faintly. The relaxed reply was reassuring.

"Please do, sir. Do you know where it is?"

- Of course.

"Come in from the barricaded side in the underground parking lot. How long before you arrive?"

- I'm leaving the Samseong-dong Hotel now.

"Got it."

After hanging up, Kang Chan told Choi Jong-Il about their conversation.

"Shouldn't we buy lunch, then?"

*Is that how this goes?*

Noticing Kang Chan's gaze on him, Choi Jong-Il tilted his head. "What tea does the ambassador usually drink?"

"Black tea. He also fancies a cigar during long conversations."

"We have tea bags, but no cigars. We should buy quality ones from a hotel. I'll ask the guys to bring some."

"Do we really have to?"

Although they didn't have any cigars, Kang Chan saw no reason to procure some immediately. They could just take their time.

"We can ask the Security Team Two."

"Let's not make too much of a big deal out of this. It's only touching if a gift's prepared in advance, not hurriedly."

"Yes, sir," Choi Jong-Il responded as he drove into the building's underground parking lot.

*What to do?*

Since Lanok mentioned the Samseong-dong Hotel, he would probably come the same way as Kang Chan. If so, then he'd be arriving soon.

As Kang Chan stepped out of the car, a sedan drove into the underground parking lot. It then turned toward the barrier and stopped in front of it. The familiar license plate and the model caught his attention.

Louis got out from the passenger side and briefly greeted Kang Chan.

The barrier immediately went up. Louis walked alongside the car until it stopped in front of the exclusive elevator.

"Kang Chan!"

"Welcome, Mr. Ambassador."

After exchanging French-style greetings, Kang Chan and Lanok walked into the elevator with Choi Jong-Il, Woo Hee-Seung, Louis, and another French agent.

Lanok seemed pleased with Kang Chan's demeanor.

*Ding.*

Choi Jong-Il scanned his fingerprint on the security device and opened the door.

"This way, please."

Kang Chan led Lanok to a table in front of a window.

"I wish for your further success, Mr. Kang Chan," Lanok said.

At the same time, Louis handed Kang Chan a shopping bag containing Lanok's gifts.

"Thank you. May I open it?"

"Of course."

As Kang Chan opened the two wrapped gifts, Woo Hee-Seung brought over coffee, black tea, an ashtray, and cigarettes.

"Woah!"

Upon opening the box, Kang Chan's excitement burst. Inside was an antique porcelain teapot and teacup set, cigars, a cigar cutter, and premium black tea.

"I didn't expect you to like it this much."

"I really do. Thank you, Ambassador."

Lanok still had a relaxed, unmasked expression. Kang Chan signaled Woo Hee-Seung to prepare them some tea using the tea set, then offered Lanok a cigar.

"Thanks to your gift, I'm able to offer you a cigar, Mr. Ambassador."

After accepting the cigar, Lanok trimmed the end of it and lit it.

Kang Chan had tried cigars in Africa a few times but never sought them out again due to their distinctive smell and the harsh sensation that he had felt as the smoke went down his throat.

Although the one Lanok was having now was certainly more expensive and refined than the ones Kang Chan had smoked before, his opinion of it still hadn't changed.

Kang Chan lit a cigarette as Woo Hee-Seung brought over tea. He then poured Lanok a cup.

"Louis, there's a lounge inside. You can rest there. Choi Jong-II, please accompany him."

"Yes, sir."

Louis followed Choi Jong-II out of the room, leaving only Kang Chan and Lanok in the spacious area.

"You've got a really nice view here."

Kang Chan followed Lanok's gaze to the sprawling road in the distance.

"Mr. Kang Chan."

After a moment, Lanok turned back to Kang Chan.

"Gabriel was found dead in a hotel bathroom. He died of a heart attack, but according to the autopsy, it's caused by a poison that intelligence bureaus use."

Kang Chan suddenly felt as if things were moving faster than expected.

"Gérard's adoptive father was Sergey Karakayev, the man who managed Russian nuclear missiles. He smuggled a small nuclear warhead into France."

Kang Chan didn't expect a nuclear warhead to come into play, but he did predict that the situation would quickly escalate to this point.

Calmly, Lanok continued, "I came across two more crucial pieces of information while investigating this matter. The first one is that Josh, the second-in-command of the British intelligence bureau, is connected to the Star of David."

Kang Chan wasn't really surprised since he didn't know the man. Moreover, it was only natural for such capable individuals to plant someone of that caliber among them.

"The other is that Romain is also allegedly connected to the Star of David."

*Damn it!*

The news was so startling that Kang Chan couldn't help but frown deeply.

"The Star of David, which has been moving under our radar, has decided to show itself because of you, Monsieur Kang."

"Can't you replace Romain, Mr. Ambassador?"

“It was possible until the Afghan operation. I no longer have control over the DGSE,” Lanok answered as if it no longer concerned him—as if it was someone else’s problem now.

“This is the true nature of intelligence bureaus. I could have ordered Romain's assassination back then, but I have lost that authority now. More importantly, Josh is offering tantalizing proposals to various intelligence bureaus under the name of the Star of David.”

Lanok smirked as he added, “It wouldn’t be wrong to say that the agreements between intelligence bureaus have been broken. From now on, assassination and conspiracy will dominate the chaos until someone takes control of this world.”

Kang Chan took a deep breath. The possibility of war, as mentioned by Hwang Ki-Hyun, felt chillingly real now.

“We all have vested interests in the construction of the next-generation power facility in our country. There are also a lot of agreements already in place,” Kang Chan countered. He then asked, “Can everyone just suddenly switch sides even though we’ve already concluded so many meetings?”

Lanok smiled.

“The Star of David probably offered conditions as attractive as the construction of that facility in South Korea, and the DGSE has likely already agreed to cooperate with them.”

Lanok ashed his cigar and turned toward Kang Chan.

“The fact that the Russian intelligence bureau found Gabriel, that the DGSE failed to uncover Gérard's past year, and that Gabriel was eventually found dead all clearly show the DGSE's current stance.”

What would it feel like if the National Intelligence Service turned its back on Kang Chan?

Even after his wife died and his daughter became permanently disabled, Lanok continued working for France. Kang Chan couldn’t even begin to imagine how Lanok was feeling now that the DGSE had turned its back on him.

“Ambassador, is it possible for you to return to France?”

Lanok looked at Kang Chan as if asking why he would ask such a thing.

“I was just wondering if the DGSE can make that happen.”

As if Kang Chan had just told a really funny joke, Lanok laughed heartily.

“Getting to witness your progress, Mr. Kang Chan, has truly been a joy for me.”

Once his laughter had died down, Lanok picked up his teacup. “Not right now, but once they’ve completed their preparation, it is possible.”

Kang Chan lit another cigarette.



“Does the chaos you mentioned include your and Anne's safety?”

Lanok smirked. “Well, you haven't forgotten my request, have you, Mr. Kang Chan?”

“Your and Anne's safety—”

With a firm look in his eyes, Lanok interrupted, “I entrust France to you. If there's anyone in France who can develop like you have, I'd like you to help them.”

He sounded prepared.

Kang Chan silently watched Lanok. Like Oh Gwang-Taek and Kang Chul-Gyu, Lanok had prepared himself for the worst. As his last request, he entrusted France to Kang Chan.

“I heard that there's a possibility of a war on the Korean Peninsula,” Kang Chan said. “Without the next-gen facility, I won't have the means to accomplish that.”

“Shouldn't we protect the next-generation power facility, then?” Lanok countered, indirectly acknowledging the possibility of war.

Lanok, whom Kang Chan had always sought for advice and assistance, was now the one looking for his help.

“Do you really believe I can do this?”

“I am confident in my choice.”

The smoke from Lanok's cigar and the cigarette in Kang Chan's fingers curled up to the ceiling. For some time, the two sat motionless. If not for the smoke, one would have likely thought that time had stopped.

“Mr. Ambassador,” Kang Chan called as the smoke turbulently billowed out. “I believe you'll know when I become a monster.”

“I do not like being threatened.”

Kang Chan made his signature smirk, and Lanok responded with a smile of his own.

“Monsieur Kang.”

“Sir.”

Lanok pressed his cigar into the ashtray.

“Be cold-hearted. Utilize everything at your disposal, including me. Be prepared to strike anywhere in the world if necessary.”

Kang Chan immediately realized that Lanok was teaching him how to confront the Star of David.

“Move as you see fit. There's no need to consult me anymore. Until the next-generation power facility has been constructed, whether you need help, cooperation, or even commands, just let me know.”

*Is that all? Was Lanok trusting no one to that extent, not even Anne, Raphael, or Louis?*

“I believe you will do well in navigating through this crisis.”

Kang Chan silently listened.

“From now on, can no longer trust the DGSE,” Lanok advised.

Lanok stood up and looked out the window. After calling Choi Jong-Il and Louis back, he turned around.

“Let’s go.”

Kang Chan felt a chill run down his spine. Lanok extended his hand in the same manner and expression as Hwang Ki-Hyun. After firmly shaking Kang Chan’s hand, Lanok headed toward the exit with a smile.

*The war has already begun!*

The look and expression Lanok gave him until the elevator door closed was all the answer that Kang Chan needed.

Kang Chan slowly walked to the office’s large glass front, bringing into view the sunlight, the car-filled roads, and the people in white shirts across the building.

After a brief moment, he glared at the door that Lanok had exited through.

Those bastards! They dare reduce my mentor to such a pitiful state? You fucking want war? Fine! I’ll make sure not even an inch of your land remains unbroken!

Chapter 315: It Had Already Begun! (2)

Choi Jong-Il, who was about to enter the room, stopped by the door, noticing Kang Chan’s eyes were fiercely glinting.

Kang Chan had heard what he needed to hear. He now knew what was going on.

Other countries seemed to think that South Korea had too much now. Hence, they wanted to take everything away from them even if it meant they’d have to beat them up and kill them.

*Should we just give in and back off? Would that really be better than starting a war?*

*This fucking hurts. So many of our soldiers and agents sacrificed themselves to get to where we are now! How dare they demand South Korea to just bow down and let them beat us up and steal what we have?*

*If we listen to them, what will happen to us after? Do they expect us to just move on?*

Kang Chan had repeated this multiple times already, but if they bowed to the bastards once, they would be forced to keep obeying them from that moment on.

Choi Jong-Il approached Kang Chan and stood next to him, wondering what was going on.

“Do we have coffee?” Kang Chan asked.

“What kind are you craving for?”

“Instant.”

Looking like he expected him to say that, Choi Jong-Il immediately made two cups of coffee. When he got back, Kang Chan was still looking out the window.

The two went to the table and sat down.

Choi Jong-Il examined Kang Chan's expression and the look in his eyes.

"What's going on?" he asked.

Kang Chan couldn't tell him about the war yet. He first had to determine whether the soldiers and agents under his command could carry the weight of a war in South Korea.

Turning to Choi Jong-Il, he said, "I'm just angry that people are kicking up a fuss just because we're trying to build a power plant for the new energy."

"That's probably exactly what they hate." Choi Jong-Il smiled bitterly. "Before you came along, South Korea survived by maintaining good relations with China, Russia, Japan, and the United States. Now that we're standing at the center stage, they feel the need to take things away from us and detest us for no reason."

Choi Jong-Il seemed to be having similar thoughts as Kang Chan.

"We used to have one or two remarkable people in the past. As far as I know, they now live in the United States. I heard our government's the one that recommended they move there."

Looking at his paper cup, he continued, "Nearby powerful nations would pressure us if we have world-famous people, so our government probably wasn't sure if they could properly take care of those talents. I believe that's the reason our government gave them to the United States in exchange for small compensations."

Kang Chan held up his paper cup and drank his coffee.

Choi Jong-Il added, "Unlike our government, you never back down or surrender. That's why the soldiers and agents are drawn to you even though we know sacrifices would follow."

Kang Chan smirked, to which Choi Jong-Il responded with an awkward smile.

Choi Jong-Il's message was clear—he was asking Kang Chan not to step down.

The time had come for him to prepare everything he would need.

What he was about to do was selfish, so he didn't tell Gérard anything.

Right now, he needed people he could trust—people who wouldn't betray him the way Romain betrayed Lanok.

Kang Chan held up his phone and called the DGSE.

- It's Hugo.

"I want Gérard de Mermier—the soldier currently in South Korea—to be discharged. How long will that take to be approved?"

Hugo briefly hesitated.

- He's a commander of the Foreign Legion's special forces. It may be possible to give him a promotion, but it'll be difficult for him to leave the Foreign Legion right now.

Hugo sounded confused, but Kang Chan thought it didn't matter.

"Hugo, I'm not asking for your opinion right now. I want to know how long it'll take for it to be approved. Who's got the final say on this matter anyway?"

- For the DGSE to issue this order, the Director-General will have to give his approval first.

"If I apply for approval right now, how long will it take to get the results?"

- Twenty-four hours, sir.

"I'll wait."

After hanging up, Kang Chan looked outside the window again. He then called Kim Hyung-Jung.

- Kim Hyung-Jung speaking.

"Manager Kim, I'd like to see you as soon as you're available."

Kim Hyung-Jung paused for a moment, likely checking his schedule and his watch.

- If it's important, then I can go see you now.

"That would be great. Please meet me at my office."

- I'm on my way.

Kang Chan hung up, then scrolled through his contact list. He still had to make one more phone call.

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Another helicopter landed at the base in Mongolia. Soon, ten soldiers in plain clothing then hopped out of it. Cha Dong-Gyun and Yoon Sang-Ki were among them.

"Welcome," Kim Tae-Jin and Oh Gwang-Taek greeted.

At the same time, Kang Chul-Gyu, Nam Il-Gyu, and Yang Dong-Sik came out of the barracks.

Both groups were happy to see each other again. They patted each other's shoulders, then told each other that they went through a lot to come all the way to Mongolia.

*Ring. Ring. Ring.*

Kim Tae-Jin's phone rang. He walked away from the crowd before answering the call.

"Hello? Ah! How are you? That's right! Everyone here is doing well. We were just welcoming our juniors. They've just arrived for their vacation."

He glanced at Kang Chul-Gyu.

"One moment."

Kim Tae-Jin walked toward him.

“Sunbae-nim,” Kim Tae-Jin said. He then gestured to his phone with a glance, indirectly telling him that he couldn’t say who was on the call.

Kang Chul-Gyu accepted the phone and then walked to one side of the barracks.

“Hello?”

- We’re both busy, so I’ll get straight to the point.

Kang Chan sounded graver than usual.

- This might sound absurd, but I have a bad feeling about all this.

“Don’t worry. I feel the same way. It’s like we’re missing something about all this.” Kang Chul-Gyu glanced toward where the soldiers had gathered. “There’s probably a variable we haven’t factored into consideration.”

Kang Chan didn’t respond.

“Assistant Director.”

- I’m listening.

“We’re going to stop at nothing to protect this place. Please focus on reinforcing the security around you.”

An awkward silence followed.

- Think about what you want to eat next time.

Kang Chul-Gyu smirked and laughed. Kang Chan did as well.

Their call soon ended.

Kang Chul-Gyu walked toward the soldiers and handed the phone back to Kim Tae-Jin.

When the soldiers from Jeungpyeong went to the barracks, their surroundings quieted down again.

“It seems defending against the incoming attack will be a lot harder than we think,” Kang Chul-Gyu said.

Kim Tae-Jin simply listened.

“I’ll head out with Il-Gyu and Dong-Sik, but we’ll be back before dinner. I want you to strengthen our security while we’re gone.”

“Yes, sir,” Kim Tae-Jin answered.

The conversation that they used to have before entering the DMZ seemed to have transcended time and happened again.

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Kim Hyung-Jung reached the office so quickly that it made Kang Chan wonder if he had flown over.

“I apologize for making you come all the way here,” Kang Chan said.

“Don’t worry about it. I should leave my office from time to time anyway.”

Kang Chan led Kim Hyung-Jung to the table.

Noticing the paper cups, Kim Hyung-Jung said that he wanted instant coffee as well. Hence, Choi Jong-Il made one for him.

After taking a sip of it, Kim Hyung-Jung gauged Kang Chan’s mood.

“Did something happen?” he asked.

Kang Chan began by telling him about the Star of David and that it had been actively trying to stop South Korea from building a power plant for next-gen energy. He then revealed that their enemies were willing, capable, and powerful enough to go to war just to accomplish their goals.

“Do you think the Star of David is also behind North Korea’s recent actions?”  
Kim Hyung-Jung asked.

“I’m not completely sure about that, but they’re definitely related.”

Kim Hyung-Jung sighed as if he was in pain.

They were talking about war—something that could turn everything into ashes in an instant. He felt as if the Star of David was approaching them and revealing their true colors one step at a time.

“Manager Kim,” Kang Chan softly called. “I need my own organization.”

Perplexed, Kim Hyung-Jung raised his gaze to Kang Chan.

“My organization must not be reported on or need approvals. It will also need heavy support from the National Intelligence Service.”

Kim Hyung-Jung sighed heavily. “Haaa.”

His reaction evidenced how burdensome Kang Chan’s conditions were.

Kang Chan himself was aware of how unreasonable his request was and that it had a high chance of being rejected. However, right now, it was exactly what they needed.

“Can’t you at least tell me what kind of work will your organization be doing?”  
Kim Hyung-Jung asked. He would need to at least give some kind of a report to his higher-ups before he could establish an organization.

“Manager Kim, we’re facing a group that’s trying to start a war in South Korea. That same group is also about to launch an attack on our base in Mongolia,”  
Kang Chan responded with a determined expression. “Our first task will be assassination.”

Kim Hyung-Jung looked as if a member of his family had just lost all of their money because they had underwritten somebody’s debt.

“The second will be no different.”

After swallowing dryly, Kim Hyung-Jung took a sip of his coffee.

“This is...” he trailed off, then shook his head.

Kang Chan continued, “My organization will be like France’s DGSE. Instead of constantly waiting around for our enemies to hit us so we can finally respond, I’m planning to eliminate the person behind all of the attacks instead.”

Kim Hyung-Jung downed the rest of his coffee and held out a pack of cigarettes. After Kang Chan accepted the offer, the two lit up a cigarette each.

“Moving forward, I’m also going to need more special forces soldiers. Do we have any other team that’s as skilled as the Jeungpyeong special forces team?” Kang Chan asked.

“The 606’s Special Operations Unit would be your best bet. Most of the soldiers in Jeungpyeong were chosen from that battalion. Their training and skills aren’t that different, and the only problem with them is their lack of actual combat experience,” Kim Hyung-Jung answered.

Soon after, he shook his head, seemingly remembering something.

“The National Defense Committee is investigating us as we speak for sending our troops overseas without the National Assembly’s approval. If we do the same with the Special Operations Unit, we’ll be faced with grave consequences.”

Kang Chan smirked. “Where do you think the members of the National Assembly and the National Defense Committee will be when a war breaks out, Manager Kim? Will they protect our citizens? Will they charge toward our enemies with a gun in hand?”

“Haa. I get what you mean, but if I say something like that, I would be fired on the spot.”

Even though Kim Hyung-Jung was likely serious, Kang Chan couldn’t help but laugh feebly, finding the way he spoke funny.

“I’ll report what you told me to the Director. Since we’re going to have to earn the President’s approval for this, I’ll leave out your plan to assassinate our enemies,” Kim Hyung-Jung said.

“Feel free to do whatever you think is best. However, please make it clear to them that we’re running out of time.”

After extinguishing his cigarette, Kim Hyung-Jung glanced at the window. He seemed to be wondering if he could report to Hwang Ki-Hyun right now.

“I’ll get going. I’ll contact you as soon as I get results,” Kim Hyung-Jung said.

“Please do.”

Kang Chan walked Kim Hyung-Jung to the elevator and saw him off.

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Early that morning, an ambulance and five black vans drove off from the base in Lorium.

Sitting in the ambulance, Romain looked at the man lying on the bed with a terribly subdued look in his eyes.

“Where are we going?” Sharlan asked, his voice weak.

He was so skinny that his skin seemed to be wrapping around his bones, making him look like a talking skeleton.

Instead of answering, Romain asked, “Can you explain what happened in South Korea?”

Sharlan gazed at Romain. His gaze was poisonous.

Romain added, “I want to know why the God of Blackfield injured you and how Lanok found out about the perfect plan that Josh and I made.”

Sharlan’s lips twisted into a smile. “You’re not going to believe me.”

“I’ll be the judge of that, Sharlan.”

Romain’s expression didn’t change. “Sharlan, this is your last chance. I applaud you for keeping your silence while Lanok had you locked up, but you’re already useless. Don’t act like you’re all that.”

“Hmm.”

As the ambulance exited Lorium and merged into the national road, Sharlan began to confess everything that had happened in South Korea.

Romain sighed deeply. “I’m going to go crazy.”

Sharply glaring at Sharlan, he tried to make sense of the situation. “The God of Blackfield speaks fluent French even though he has never studied it, and he’s absurdly competent in executing operations and commanding soldiers. Even Gérard respects him. All things considered, your story makes sense, but...”

“Kang Chan executed an operation?” Sharlan asked.

“He has done feats that can’t be described in words.”

Spite emanated from Sharlan’s eyes. “Can’t the DGSE kill Kang Chan?”

When Romain didn’t answer, he continued, “I know his Achilles heel. Please let me kill him.”

Instead of replying, Romain simply sneered at him.

“I don’t care if you give me 99% pure cocaine,” Sharlan pleaded. “I’ll do anything for as long as I get to decapitate that bastard with my own hands.”

“What makes you think the DGSE can’t do that themselves?”



“I’m going to kill him in a way that’s far too dirty for the DGSE. I’ll even destroy everyone around him. Just give me a chance, and I promise you’ll see Kang Chan go berserk.”

For the first time throughout their entire conversation, Romain showed interest.

\*\*\*

Late in the afternoon, Lanok greeted his two visitors.

“How about we have tea before dinner?” Lanok asked.

“Hmph. You’ve been serving us that bitter black tea for over than ten years,” Vasili grumbled.

Yang Bum, looking at Vasili, burst into laughter.

“How’s our main character doing?” Vasili asked.

While pouring black tea, Lanok answered, “He’s probably thinking about what he should do right now.”

Vasili clearly didn’t like that.

“We can’t afford to wait for him until he’s done thinking, Lanok. I didn’t kill Josh because the nuclear warhead is on the line. Otherwise, I would have already shot him in the head.”

Lanok lit up a cigar. He then looked at the Russian. “We have to figure out how the Star of David got their hands on the nuclear warhead first, Vasili.”

*Click.*

Vasili roughly put down his tea cup. “Sergey knew that we were watching him. That was why we couldn’t get rid of the nuclear warhead.”

Yang Bum just listened to the conversation with unusually sharp eyes.

“Based on everything we’ve learned so far, the Star of David probably went to Gabriel and ordered him to smuggle the nuclear warhead from us under the condition that they’ll bring the Mermier family to prosperity again.”

“That must be why Gabriel got surgery to look like Gérard, came to South Korea, and smuggled Sharlan in,” Lanok commented.

“You can say that.”

Vasili looked at Yang Bum.

As if on cue, Yang Bum began, “We have thoroughly investigated the organization that was related to Sharlan when he was in South Korea. Everyone involved in that incident had already died.”

“I can’t believe they chose to die just to run away from the consequences,” Vasili said. He then smirked and burst into laughter.

Unbothered by his reaction, Yang Bum continued, “We have also discovered a huge army heading to Mongolia. They’re scattered, so it’ll be hard to catch all of them. However, if need be, we can at least kill some of them.”

“We’ll leave that for Monsieur Kang to handle. Let’s focus on finding the nuclear warhead. Use any means necessary,” Vasili suggested, then immediately shook his head. “Huhuhu! Those idiots! I can’t believe they’re actually heading to the DMZ King’s doorstep. Worse, they want to launch a surprise attack on him! Hmph! If they tried to launch a night raid, there’d be nothing more I could wish for!”

“Is the DMZ King really that skilled?” Yang Bum asked.

“The Spetsnaz used to tell our recruits two things,” Vasili answered. He then sighed loudly, seemingly remembering all the humiliation he had endured. “The first was that if they were at the DMZ, once night fell, the god of death would come for them.”

Vasili looked displeased by his own words. Yang Bum just stared at him, silently asking him to continue.

“The second was that if they ran into him alone, they should try their best to shoot him,” Vasili said.

Yang Bum cocked his head.

*Isn’t that the natural course of action for the Spetsnaz if they run into any enemy?*

“The problem is that none of the soldiers who had run into him alone managed to pull the trigger.”

*What?*

Surprised, Yang Bum turned his head toward Vasili again.

“If you’re so curious, you should visit the DMZ King at night,” Vasili grumbled.

\*\*\*

*Vroom! Rattle! Rattle!*

As the jeep drove across the rough terrain, the winds picked up the clouds of dust its wheels were creating. They then sent them back into the wilderness, making it look as if a clay-colored fog was forming.

*Vroom!*

Kang Chul-Gyu raised his hand and pointed to the low hill ahead of them.

*Screech!*

The jeep roughly pulled to a stop, causing everyone to lurch forward. Nam Il-Gyu and Yang Dong-Sik followed Kang Chul-Gyu out of the jeep.

“Huh? What?”

Once they were out, the jeep started to reverse on its own.

“Hey, you fu—!”

Nam Il-Gyu and Yang Dong-Sik quickly ran to the jeep. Yang Dong-Sik, who was on the side of the driver's seat, was a little bit quicker.

Screech.

Yang Dong-Sik got in and stepped on the brakes. He pressed down on the parking brake, which was next to the clutch, as hard as he could.

Nam Il-Gyu glanced at Kang Chul-Gyu, then growled at Yang Dong-Sik. “Get your act together!”

“You fu—! You think I did that on purpose? I mentioned this before, but the car that we used last time automatically engaged the parking brake whenever we parked!”

While arguing Yang Dong-Sik also kept glancing at Kang Chul-Gyu, who just kept sharply examining the wilderness that led to the low hill and the base.

Nam Il-Gyu and Yang Dong-Sik walked over to Kang Chul-Gyu. For a while, the three remained silent.

“Sunbae-nim, do you have a bad feeling about this?” Nam-Il-Gyu asked.

Kang Chul-Gyu glanced at him, then silently nodded.

“Do you really think the fight this time is going to be tough?” Yang Dong-Sik asked.

Smirking, Kang Chul-Gyu nodded again.

“About what happened in the past...”

At that moment, Kang Chul-Gyu and Yang Dong-Sik turned to Nam Il-Gyu.

“I mean the time you rescued Dong-Sik.”

“Why are you bringing that up?” Kang Chul-Gyu asked. “That’s already water under the bridge.”

“After leaving the military, I thought about it a lot. It made me realize that I didn't thank you for it.”

Yang Dong-Sik shifted his gaze between Kang Chul-Gyu and Nam Il-Gyu, examining the two.

“Thank you, sunbae-nim,” Nam Il-Gyu said.

Kang Chul-Gyu simply smiled in response.

“I won't ever forget that you're the reason I get to wear the Taegeukgi on my left arm again and join battles like this under our nation's orders.”

Kang Chul-Gyu looked away from Nam Il-Gyu. Yang Dong-Sik, who was next to him, looked touched.

#### Chapter 316: Burden of Determination (1)

Kang Chan had dinner with Seok Kang-Ho in the hospital. Gérard had also headed over in Michelle's car.

After Kang Chan told them about the situation, Gérard asked, "So I don't have to return to Africa?"

"Hey! Were you even listening? I said we might be in even more danger here than in the middle of combat in Africa."

"So I don't need to go anymore?"

*Does this guy seriously lack comprehension?*

Dumbfounded, Kang Chan stared at Gérard.

"Aren't you upset about decisions being made without your input?" Kang Chan asked.

"You're one to talk! You sent me away without even asking," Gérard replied, a satisfied look on his face.

"That guy's happy about this, isn't he?" Seok Kang-Ho interjected.

*Here they go again.*

Kang Chan confirmed it for them.

"Are you planning to properly step up now?"

"Well, even after the power plants have been built, some fool might still think of waging war. We can't just keep taking hits forever."

"That's true," Seok Kang-Ho agreed, yawning widely and then wiping his eyes. "What good is this bastard if he can't even communicate?"

"I'm thinking about having him guard the ambassador for now. I've filled out all the Foreign Legion's regulations, so even if Romain objects, it shouldn't be a big issue."

Seok Kang-Ho nodded silently.

"You should go to sleep."

"Sure. The meds I've taken are so strong I feel dizzy anyway. Oh! I'm being discharged next week."

"Got it."

Kang Chan left the room with Gérard.

"Captain, let's go have a cup of tea before we head home. It's frustrating how difficult it is to smoke at home."

"Shall we?"

They headed to a café in Misari as darkness settled around them.

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They ordered coffee and settled outside, warmed by a heater shaped like an umbrella.

Perhaps avoiding alcohol whenever he felt even slightly in danger had become a habit ingrained in his body.

Once the staff had served them their order, Gérard took out a cigarette.

"Can I meet Michelle every day starting tomorrow?"

Gérard offered Kang Chan a cigarette and picked up a lighter.

*Click.*

"Hoo. I'm thinking of learning some Korean."

"That's up to you, but I'd like you to start by guarding the ambassador."

"Yes, sir."

Visibly pleased by not having to return to Africa, Gérard took a deep drag of his cigarette and exhaled the smoke.

"Gérard," Kang Chan called.

Gérard turned his head toward him, pausing just before he could take a sip of his coffee.

"We're up against the DGSE and the British intelligence bureau. Stay sharp. Just like how they eliminated Gabriel, they can target you, Date, or even me anytime, anywhere."

"Yes, sir," Gérard responded softly.

Taking a deep breath, the cool evening air seemed to calm both his body and mind. Addressing the Star of David's threat might provide some answers. It could serve as a warning to some extent. However, it was still daunting.

Kang Chan had said that he would eliminate Romain, but it was hard to say how. Moreover, although he had seen Romain before, he had only ever heard of Josh.

*Click.*

The flame of the lighter illuminated Gérard's face. He clearly couldn't hide his joy.

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The next day, early in the morning, Kim Hyung-Jung called Kang Chan to inform him of his scheduled meeting time with Director Song Chang-Wook and Chairman Kim Gwan-Sik. They had decided to meet before meeting Abibu.

Upon reaching the office, Gérard went straight to Michelle. Meanwhile, as if having switched places with Kang Chan, Kim Hyung-Jung arrived and sat down at a table with Kang Chan. Choi Jong-Il served them tea.

"After your meeting with Director Song Chang-Wook and Chairman Kim Gwan-Sik at ten o'clock, you are scheduled to see the President and the Director immediately afterward," Kim Hyung-Jung stated.

He looked around once before continuing, "After receiving the report yesterday, they told me they wanted to meet you in person, Assistant Director."

Kang Chan nodded in agreement. "Sure."

This request would be difficult to accommodate under normal circumstances. Hence, he even considered creating an organization himself if things didn't work out as planned. For now, at the very least, he had received a direct invite to his answer.

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Nam Soon-Pyo entered with an agent, displeasure evident in his expression. He seemed irked that he was summoned to a hotel room rather than a lounge.

"So you move in very secretive ways given your high status, huh?" he remarked.

"Please have a seat. Would you like some tea?" Hwang Ki-Hyun coolly responded despite Nam Soon-Pyo's sharp greeting.

Nam Soon-Pyo directed his question at the agent instead. "Got any water?"

After the agent brought water and a cup, he left the room on his own.

"Now, what's this about? Summoning the head of the National Defense Committee to such an uncomfortable meeting could easily be seen as a political maneuver."

"Don't think too much of it. I just wanted to discuss something in private. Listen to what I have to say first, then judge for yourself."

Instead of responding, Nam Soon-Pyo looked at his watch.

Hwang Ki-Hyun continued, "I trust you're aware of the President's recent announcement."

He spoke as if he were talking to the wall.

"Following that announcement, we conducted an investigation into dual citizenships due to the medical benefits and educational support the president mentioned. It turns out both of your sons avoided military service by getting American citizenship."

Nam Soon-Pyo glared at Hwang Ki-Hyun.

"Are you suggesting that my sons committed a crime by acquiring American citizenship? Are you threatening me?"

"I apologize if it sounded that way. I am merely discussing how to handle the fact that an American citizen owns buildings here and operates three upscale restaurants under someone else's name."

"I am a member of the parliament, elected by the people. Do you really think I will bow to threats from the National Intelligence Service? I am not ashamed of

my children's actions. If you have evidence, then go ahead and release it!" Nam Soon-Pyo exclaimed. He then breathed heavily.

"Three members of the National Defense Committee, including their children, have been exempted from military service. Moreover, except for one person performing public service, everyone else has avoided it."

Hwang Ki-Hyun remained calm.

"I am simply informing you of what will be reported in tomorrow's newspapers and broadcasts. Unfortunately, we have to do this even though we have concluded that the members being needlessly talked about would not be of any help to the country."

Nam Soon-Pyo's heavy breathing filled the room.

Hwang Ki-Hyun continued, "If you can cover this up through your contacts, then go ahead. Either way, I would also like to point out that we have found evidence of said issues. There might also be reports about illegal sex work being conducted at a massage parlor in a building owned by your wife and that speculative buying and false registrations have occurred twice in redevelopment areas."

His breathing got rougher.

"That being said, the media have yet to pick up on the fact that your father-in-law has shares of the massage parlor and that the two houses in the US under your son's name were bought with illegal money transfers. Perhaps you can consider those as good news, at least."

Nam Soon-Pyo clenched his teeth.

"I have said all I needed to say. I expect you to make a wise decision and contribute to the nation's development."

"Haa."

A long sigh replaced Nam Soon-Pyo's rough breathing.

"Are you suggesting we cover up the overseas deployment?"

"Why would you think that?" Hwang Ki-Hyun questioned.

He stared right into Nam Soon-Pyo's eyes. "The National Defense Committee should rightfully uncover illegal overseas deployments—if there is one. I hope you don't connect that with today's matter."

Nam Soon-Pyo exhaled harshly.

"Do you really believe the National Intelligence Service would intervene just because your aides have begun investigating us?"

“You seem worried about recordings, so let me speak first. Please cover up this incident. The investigation by the Defense Committee hasn't been proposed yet. I'll handle the opposition myself. Can your side appease the ruling party?”

“The National Intelligence Service just hopes that the chairman of the Defense Committee doesn't end up in a scandal.”

Nam Soon-Pyo's cheeks twitched as he gritted his teeth.

\*\*\*

"Huff! Huff!"

Oh Gwang-Taek had never regretted smoking as much as he did now. He felt like his lungs refused to accept air—as if someone had plugged his nostrils with their index and middle fingers.

*Clunk! Clunk! Click!*

The rifle he was carrying, along with magazines strapped to his vest and thighs, clattered loudly.

"Huff! Huff!"

However, Oh Gwang-Taek couldn't stop running. If he hadn't experienced this in Libya, if he hadn't seen people dying, he might have already given up and collapsed.

It was a straight kilometer, but the path kept undulating like waves. The uphill parts made him feel like his thighs and knees were being ripped apart, while the downhill ones were perfect for a nasty fall if he wasn't careful.

Only fifty meters to go.

"Huff, huff!"

Kang Chul-Gyu had gathered everyone early in the morning and ordered training. This drill was part of it.

"President Oh," Kang Chul-Gyu called out to Oh Gwang-Taek as the latter entered the final stretch.

The gathering included the DMZ team, the Jeungpyeong special forces team, and Joo Chul-Bum, among his other younger colleagues.

"You're a decent special forces soldier now. I was hoping you could carry out the mission in this operation. Is that alright?"

*Shit!*

He wished he could have shown his daughter—who whined over the phone asking when daddy would come home—the looks he received from the DMZ and Jeungpyeong special forces teams, even if it meant he would have to record them.

Their expressions showed clear acknowledgment of his capabilities, not as the gangster Oh Gwang-Taek, but as a fellow special forces member.

"Huff, huff!"



Only thirty meters were left. His daughter's father was no longer a gangster. He was a man who fought for his country, bearing the Taegeukgi on his left arm.

Twenty meters.

Cha Dong-Gyun and Yoon Sang-Ki, camouflaged, watched the scene through their scopes.

"Huff! Huff!"

"Daddy? Banana!"

*Okay! I'll buy bananas! A mountain of them!*

The ground suddenly sank beneath him, nearly making him fall on the downhill slope.

Oh Gwang-Taek gritted his teeth and took a step forward.

Cha Dong-Gyun and Yoon Sang-Ki were right in front of him.

*Thud!*

Oh Gwang-Taek crashed into the ground next to the two men.

"Huff

! Huff!"

*Chk.*

- Group Two, start moving.

At the crackle of the radio, the earth in front of them burst upward, revealing DMZ team soldiers. These were no ordinary men. If not for the asphalt, paving stones, and concrete, Seoul would have been theirs.

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Kang Chan entered a building located a little past Yeoksam-dong toward Daechi-dong. The signposts indicated that floors ten and eleven housed the 'Fuel Resources Authority,' while floor nine had a grand sign for the 'Eurasia Rail Preparation Committee.'

Kim Hyung-Jung pressed the elevator button for the eleventh floor. People who appeared to be office workers joined him.

Kang Chan hadn't thought about it usually, probably because he saw him often, but he thought Kim Hyung-Jung's demeanor seemed incredibly formidable when he was outside. Especially when mixed among ordinary people, and now with Choi Jong-Il and Woo Hee-Seung silently standing by his side, the three undeniably had the air of fixers.

*What would these people think of him?*

In the silence-swathed elevator, Kang Chan glanced at the mirror. He couldn't tell.

*Ding.*

As if escaping, people quickly exited the elevator on every odd-numbered floor. By the time they had reached the eleventh floor, only Kang Chan's group remained. A female employee was waiting outside the office.

"This way, please."

Kang Chan wordlessly followed her lead. Passing desks separated by partitions, they went further inside until they came across another female employee, who was behind a long desk.

Their guide opened the door to the Director's office.

"Your guests have arrived," she announced, then stepped aside.

Only Kang Chan and Kim Hyung-Jung entered.

"Hello?"

Kang Chan already knew Director Song Chang-Wook and Kim Gwan-Sik, Kim Mi-Young's father. He greeted them politely, but his greeting felt so stiff it was as if he were in a chalk factory.

"Welcome."

Song Chang-Wook shook hands with Kang Chan and then extended his hand to Kim Hyung-Jung.

"Hello." Kim Gwan-Sik, surprisingly using honorifics, offered a handshake to Kang Chan.

"Please have a seat."

As they sat down, a female employee promptly served them tea that looked immensely healthful.

"It seems unnecessary to brief you on our work, Mr. Kang Chan. I'm sure you're more knowledgeable than we are. However, Mr. Kim Gwan-Sik and I want to make one thing very clear," Song Chang-Wook began. He then glanced at Kim Gwan-Sik before continuing, "There will absolutely be no obligations tied to personal relationships."

He had the same upright attitude that he had shown the first time Kang Chan had met him.

"Oh! I should have given you time to enjoy your tea, shouldn't I?"

Prompted by Song Chang-Wook's gesture, Kang Chan took a sip of his tea.

It smelled and tasted almost like it was distilled from herbal medicine.

"Mr. Kang Chan."

"Yes?"

"Do you truly love your country?"

Caught off-guard, Kang Chan felt as though he had been pierced through. He stared blankly at Song Chang-Wook.

"I started this because it was a request from those I care about. I mentioned before that I am not yet prepared to sacrifice my life for my country."

*Damn it!*

Educated people were clearly different. Song Chang-Wook remembered something that Kang Chan could barely recall himself.

"What is the situation now?" Kim Gwan-Sik asked with a serious expression.

*I haven't even seen Kim Mi-Young yet...*

"Director," Kang Chan began, making Song Chang-Wook fiercely gaze at him.

"I feel moved by the Republic of Korea whenever..." Kang Chan trailed off. It would be foolish to blurt out something inappropriate in front of Kim Gwan-Sik, who might not be aware of everything.

"Chairman Kim Gwan-Sik knows that you were the commander for the operations in Afghanistan and Africa," Song Chang-Wook revealed.

Kang Chan reflexively turned his head.

He was equally surprised by Song Chang-Wook's quick perception and Kim Gwan-Sik's decision to allow Kim Mi-Young to meet him despite knowing all his secrets.

Kang Chan felt like a fool.

"I apologize if that came across as disrespectful. However, when we accepted this task, Chairman Kim Gwan-Sik and I were warned of the risks. Currently, even our families are under protection."

Song Chang-Wook maintained his composed posture as he met Kang Chan's gaze.

"I asked Manager Kim Hyung-Jung to inform the chairman as well because I believe he has the right to know. This may sound harsh to you, Mr. Kang Chan, since you have faced life-threatening situations, but Chairman Kim Gwan-Sik and I have accepted this assignment fully prepared for the possibility of our families' deaths."

Compelling intensity enveloped the old man's eyes.

"Ordinary people like us hope to safely go to work each morning. We hope that neither we nor our families would die from traffic accidents or by means we've only heard of through hearsay."

Song Chang-Wook quickly glanced at Kim Gwan-Sik. He then returned his attention to Kang Chan.

"You're the person who will be ultimately leading this project, Mr. Kang Chan. Until then, Chairman Kim Gwan-Sik and I will risk our lives to hold the fort. That's why I want to know if you truly want the Republic of Korea to progress as much as we do."

Although Kang Chan couldn't understand everything Song Chang-Wook said, he certainly felt a profound impact. He could now finally express the thought that he had been holding back.

"The Republic of Korea moves me whenever our agents and troops fall bleeding. So far, not one of my men harbors resentment. At the very least, I refuse to let their sacrifices be in vain."

Song Chang-Wook smiled faintly.

"Mr. Kang Chan."

"Yes?"

"There's an upcoming international conference on the new energy."

Kang Chan had heard of it, but he still hadn't fully understood.

"Presidents and department heads from various countries will be visiting our country. Like the Eurasian Rail conference, there could be terrorist threats."

It wasn't something to discuss in front of Kang Chan, the head of the counter-terrorism team, and Kim Hyung-Jung, the head of the Samseong-dong branch.

"Could you make me one promise?"

The old man spoke with genuine earnestness.

"If either Chairman Kim Gwan-Sik or I were to sacrifice our lives, we would hold no grudges. However, I hope you will add the burden of our dedication to your commitment to the Republic of Korea."

Kang Chan quietly took a deep breath.

Chapter 317: Burden of Determination (2)

After his meeting with Song Chang-Wook, Kang Chan headed to the National Intelligence Service in Naegok-dong. As usual, he bypassed the elevator in front of the entrance and went down to the basement.

Moon Jae-Hyun and Hwang Ki-Hyun were waiting in the conference room. The two rose from their seats to greet Kang Chan.

"Hello, sir."

"Welcome, Assistant Director."

"Let's sit down," Moon Jae-Hyun offered.

'Is he unwell?' Kang Chan wondered.

Moon Jae-Hyun looked as if he had just been soaked in a jar full of fatigue.

Once everyone was seated, Moon Jae-Hyun began, "Assistant Director, I believe you are already aware of the situation. I have also heard about your request from Manager Kim. The reason I wanted to see you in person is to discuss one thing I'm curious about and another that concerns me."

He briefly paused to take a sip of the water in front of him.

"I've noticed the flow of the war. We are holding a next-generation energy conference next week and have joined hands with Japan to try to prevent the worst-case scenario. Unfortunately, the director and I are lacking in capability."

Kang Chan was surprised by how feeble the president sounded.

After glancing at Hwang Ki-Hyun, Moon Jae-Hyun continued, "It may seem irresponsible to say this since it would sound as if we've guaranteed the safety of the nation and its people, but I can't let go of this opportunity now that we've seized it."

Moon Jae-Hyun seemed to be granting Kang Chan the authority to declare war.

"Assistant Director," he called.

"Sir."

"What do you plan to do?"

Kang Chan hadn't even caught his breath when the question came flying at him.

"Mr. President, I..."

"Please feel free to speak your mind."

Hwang Ki-Hyun and Kim Hyung-Jung looked at Kang Chan with tense expressions.

"I met Ambassador Lanok yesterday. After careful consideration, I plan to gather the people I consider allies. To that end, I'll be setting up a meeting with Vasili, Yang Bum, Ludwig, and Vant to check if we're missing anything and to request their cooperation."

Hwang Ki-Hyun's eyes twitched. Kang Chan listed incredibly powerful figures as if they were friendly neighbors.

"There are currently two figures in the intelligence world who are definitely hostile to this matter. One is DGSE Director-General Romain. The other is Josh, the Deputy Director-Generals of the British intelligence bureau."

*So the bigwigs are the ones trying to start a war, after all! DGSE Director-General? Deputy Director-General of the British Intelligence Bureau?*

Moon Jae-Hyun and Hwang Ki-Hyun turned pale.

"I intend to eliminate them," Kang Chan firmly declared.

Hwang Ki-Hyun's face stiffened. As Moon Jae-Hyun leaned over, Kim Hyung-Jung turned to Hwang Ki-Hyun.

"I don't always have the time to report and get approvals. Security is also an issue. If you are not going to abandon the next-generation energy project, please grant me the authority I requested."

Moon Jae-Hyun exhaled a sigh-like breath. He then asked, "Have you received any hints or heard anything more?"

"I've heard that assassinations will soon become rampant in the world of intelligence."

Moon Jae-Hyun twiddled his fingers before taking another sip of water.

"Assistant Director, could you ask Director Yang Bum to arrange a meeting with North Korea's supreme leader? If that isn't possible, Director Hwang would just have to make a secret visit to North Korea."

*Right! That's definitely an option!*

"North Korea has been cutting off all its unofficial channels. We will try to adjust our differences with them ourselves."

Kang Chan nodded. There was nothing wrong with the parties meeting directly.

"Can I check now?" he asked.

Moon Jae-Hyun looked at Hwang Ki-Hyun with a startled expression.

"Of course. Please do," Hwang Ki-Hyun responded.

Kang Chan took out his phone and then looked at Kim Hyung-Jung. He had done this before. Kim Hyung-Jung pulled out a cable from the table and handed it over.

*Tring, tring, tring.*

After a brief silence, a skilled Korean greeting echoed from the conference room speaker.

- It's been a while, Mr. Kang Chan.

"How have you been?" Kang Chan replied.

- It seems neither of us are in the best circumstances.

A laugh tinged the reply.

- To what do I owe the pleasure? Is there something I can help you with?

Kim Hyung-Jung gulped dryly as Kang Chan said, "I apologize for the inconvenience, but could you arrange a meeting between our president and North Korea's supreme leader? If not, getting permission for NIS Director Hwang to secretly visit North Korea would suffice."

Sharp tension pressed down the conference room.

*What will it be?*

Hwang Ki-Hyun and Kim Hyung-Jung exchanged glances.

*Knowing that he would try his best would be enough...*

- When would be a good time?

Hwang Ki-Hyun tightly pressed his lips together. Arranging a flight to Mongolia was one thing and another for the head of China's intelligence bureau to promise to facilitate this mission.

*How much had South Korea wished for a person with such influence? How much had the National Intelligence Service hoped to be able to negotiate directly with major global powers?*

Every time they saw the nameless stars at the entrance of the National Intelligence Service, their determination rose again and again. Kim Hyung-Jung spread both his hands wide.

"Would ten days be possible?" Kang Chan asked.

- Hmmm...

Hwang Ki-Hyun and Kim Hyung-Jung looked stunned. Could they really get a leeway of ten days?

- Mr. Kang Chan, I will call you back immediately.

"Thank you. I'll wait."

As Kang Chan ended the call, quiet excitement swirled around the conference room.

After a moment, Moon Jae-Hyun brought up the concern that he had mentioned earlier.

"I'll be honest and straightforward, Assistant Director. The biggest concern with giving you an independent organization is that an innocent person could be sacrificed due to a wrong judgment. Moreover, if decisions were made based on personal intentions, the situation could spiral out of control."

*This man, Kang Chan, also wavers. I can see his nervousness and desperation.*

However, he certainly had to be credited for his ability to quickly regain composure and make unemotional judgments. He also had the passion and the poise to not be intimidated by major powers.

"Mr. President, I will provide interim reports as you wish. However, I will do so verbally to you, the director, and Manager Kim. More importantly, if you ever tell me to dismantle the organization, I will comply."

Moon Jae-Hyun was intensely looking at Kang Chan.

*Buzz, buzz, buzz.*

All four eyes darted to the phone.

'This is unexpected,' Kang Chan thought.

Just as Kang Chan, heart pounding with a warning, was about to hang up, he decided to answer.

"Hello?" Kang Chan said.

- Where are you?

There was no time to protest or respond.

- Let's have bossam for lunch.

*This guy is such a glutton!*

Moon Jae-Hyun and Hwang Ki-Hyun tried to hold back their laughter. Kim Hyung-Jung hung his head.

"I'll come by in the evening."

Kang Chan quickly hung up.

*Buzz, buzz, buzz.*

However, before he could put the phone down, it rang again. The three men looked at Kang Chan with curiosity and anticipation.

"Hello?"

- It's Yang Bum.

"Yes, sir."

- We have secured you an unofficial meeting with North Korea's supreme leader. In five days, the Director of the National Intelligence Service will travel through China by train, accompanied by no more than two attachés. In return, please transfer ten billion won to a secret account.

*This guy wants monetary payment? It's like we're going to a celebrity fan meeting or something.*

Hwang Ki-Hyun mouthed his reply to Kang Chan.

"Would you accept the payment in dollars?" Kang Chan asked.

Hwang Ki-Hyun then nodded as if to confirm that his message had been properly conveyed.

- Of course.

"Thank you for your help."

A light laugh came from the other end of the phone.

- What do you plan to do next?

"Pardon?"

- Your next plan, Mr. Kang Chan.

Kang Chan stared at the phone for a moment.

*Can I trust this person?*

"I'm planning to meet Vasili."

He didn't want to doubt someone Lanok had introduced.

- Excellent choice. Perhaps you could also stop by to see me on your way back from Russia?

"I'll do my best."

- I look forward to it. See you later, Mr. Kang Chan.

The call ended.

In a short period, the discussion about the organization, the call with Yang Bum, and the trip to North Korea were intertwined, creating a disorderly feeling.

"Assistant Director," Moon Jae-Hyun softly called.

"Sir," Kang Chan firmly responded.

"You gave us the opportunity, and you are the only person we can ask to help resolve this matter."

Moon Jae-Hyun's determination shone through his fatigue.

"I will put the National Intelligence Service's counter-terrorism team directly under my office. As the President of South Korea, I grant you the authority to conduct operations without prior reports."

"Thank you."

Kang Chan felt as though Moon Jae-Hyun had just given him everything he needed.

"For the sake of our nation, please do your best," Moon Jae-Hyun said as if to formally start the operation.

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After three rounds of training, everyone returned to base. Except for Kang Chul-Gyu, they all looked like they had been rolling in mud.

*Click-clack, click-clack.*

The fatigued soldiers sat down, their rifles and weapons clattering as they did. Every day, they conducted their deadly exhausting training twice in the morning and then once more right after lunch.

"Good work," Oh Gwang-Taek said.



Completely drained, he sat down on the ground and stretched out his legs. In total, they had sprinted three kilometers while carrying rifles, magazines, handguns, and knives.

"Yang Dong-Sik," Kang Chul-Gyu called.

Yang Dong-Sik stood up and loudly replied, "Sir!"

"We're laying an ambush tonight. Form a platoon, take command, and submit a list of the men you'd choose."

"Yes, sir!"

Kang Chul-Gyu had captivating charisma. His single command brought a sharp tension among the soldiers who were resting.

"Nam Il-Gyu."

"Sir!" Nam Il-Gyu firmly responded.

"Form a squad to support Dong-Sik. Prepare a list and pass it to Tae-Jin."

"Yes, sir."

Kang Chul-Gyu turned his head.

"Snipers! I want you to pair up. Change shifts every six hours."

"Yes, sir!" the four shouted in unison.

"Captain Cha."

"Sir!"

"Divide the rest of our men into three groups for support."

"Yes, sir!"

The dust made the soldiers' eyes look even more intense.

"President Oh."

"Sir."

*Clank.*

Oh Gwang-Taek stood up, leaving everyone wondering where he got such energy.

"I'd like you to join Captain Cha's team. Is that okay?"

"Yes, sir!"

Cha Dong-Gyun looked at him as if he were seeing a steadfast ally.

'Daddy? Banana!'

*Yes! I'll buy a bunch. A mountain of them.*

For some reason, the last thing his daughter had said kept echoing in Oh Gwang-Taek's ears.

'We have two bunches of bananas at home, but she says the ones you buy taste better.'

He didn't even know how to describe the emotion he felt whenever he was hugged tightly around the neck by those little fennel-like hands, so how could he possibly explain the exhilaration of seeing his daughter, perhaps initially shy after a long absence, racing toward him and diving into his arms while shouting, 'Daddy! Daddy!'

The surge of strength he felt as he sprinted with the national flag, giving it his all, stemmed from his desire and pride to become a father his daughter could look up to.

"We'll take a break to form the squads. Afterward, before dinner, we're running one more adaptation training."

*Damn it!*

Oh Gwang-Taek's emotions and gratitude shattered and scattered with the wind.

\*\*\*

Seok Kang-Ho shoved a fist-sized piece of meat topped with kimchi into his mouth.

"Hey! Slow down! It's just the two of us," Kang Chan said.

"I am eating slowly."

"Filthy bastard!"

As Kang Chan pulled out tissue paper from a box, Seok Kang-Ho wiped his mouth with his palm. After leaving the National Intelligence Service, Kang Chan had called Seok Kang-Ho only for the latter to continue ranting about bossam.

With the sick guy shouting about the same food over and over, what else could he do except go get it for him? In thirty minutes, they cleanly finished three servings of bossam, leaving not even a trace.

"Aaahh, I feel alive again!"

As Kang Chan was making coffee, Seok Kang-Ho swept the wrappers into a paper bag.

"Here! Careful; it's hot."

"Ah! Nice! A sugary or twisted donut would be perfect for dessert right about now."

Kang Chan exhaled softly as he drank his coffee. It was getting dark outside.

"Has Gerard eaten dinner yet?"

"He's with Michelle, no need to worry about him."

"Why is that kid fussing so much about learning Korean? It's not like he could learn it in a day."

*That's funny.*

Listening to Seok Kang-Ho grumbling, Kang Chan felt the day peacefully settling down. He told Seok Kang-Ho about his meeting with Song Chang-Wook and Kim Gwan-Sik and what transpired at the National Intelligence Service.

"What? So Mi-Young's father already knows about everything?"

"That's right."

"Wow! That man's got a scary side. Does that mean he approves of you becoming his son-in-law?"

With just one sentence, Seok Kang-Ho quickly undermined Kim Gwan-Sik's patriotism.

Darkness had fully enveloped the streets. The lights of cars, buildings, shops, and signs tried to resist, but it still perfectly coiled itself around them.

"What's wrong? Got a bad feeling or something?"

Seok Kang-Ho gave Kang Chan a serious look before turning his gaze back outside.

\*\*\*

The settling dusk had cast a solemn darkness over all of Mongolia. The stars in the sky blazed awake, and the moonlight faintly illuminated the ridges and the horizons. Dust whirled in the racing wind.

Atop the barracks stood Kang Chul-Gyu. Below him, Nam Il-Gyu and Yang Dong-Sik led their men out to prepare an ambush along with Oh Gwang-Taek and the special forces team from Jeungpyeong. This strategy was all too familiar, reminiscent of their operations in the DMZ.

There was still some time before the day Kang Chan was anticipating. Under normal circumstances, they would have focused on tightening their security and rotating their men for rest. However, Kang Chul-Gyu's instincts cautioned him against letting their guard down.

Surprisingly, Kang Chan also felt uneasy about the situation. Although Kang Chul-Gyu had casually responded back then, he had actually been taken aback.

He had been thinking of treating Kang Chan to some meat the next time they met. While it might not be as fancy as what Kang Chan had bought him, he was also considering buying him a cozy sweater or something similar.

Kang Chul-Gyu's lips curved into a faint smile. Was this what happiness felt like?

*Chk.*

A radio transmission cut through the silence.

"Armed hostiles on sight."

Kang Chul-Gyu turned to the side.

"There are... too many of them."

Nam Il-Gyu's voice, tinged with panic, crackled over the radio.

Chapter 318: Come At Us! (1)

Stars filled the night sky like lights decorating a Christmas tree.

With the darkness in the background, their enemies approached their location. Their silhouettes lined up on the horizon.

“Oooohhh booooyy...” Yoon Sang-Ki remarked, stretching out his amazement like a piece of taffy. “There’s a lot of them.”

Cha Dong-Gyun looked behind him and stared at Yoon Sang-Ki, seemingly finding Yoon Sang-Ki’s reaction absurd. The others’ expressions were no different.

*Chk.*

“Il-Gyu, Dong-Sik. Take your team to the second line of defense.”

They heard Kang Chul-Gyu’s orders on the radio.

*Chk.*

“Yes, sir,” Nam Il-Gyu answered.

‘Fuck!’

Oh Gwang-Taek was so nervous that he almost swore out loud.

Trying his best to pretend that nothing was wrong, Oh Gang-Taek looked away. However, he still couldn’t stop himself from feeling nervous.

*What’s wrong with me? I’m not some gangster underling doing my first task!*

He had participated in knife fights between gangster organizations dozens of times, and he could no longer count with his fingers and toes the number of times that he had been taken to the hospital due to weapon-related injuries.

Hence, Oh Gwang-Taek didn’t know why he was so fucking nervous. He really hoped that it would go away soon.

The soldiers from Jeungpyeong looked relaxed even as they watched their enemies filling the fields.

*How would they react if it was the opposite? What if those soldiers were watching gangsters rushing toward them with filet knives, iron pipes, and baseball bats?*

Oh Gwang-Taek shook his head.

He knew that it was shameful to compare gangsters to the enemies currently approaching them.

*Chk.*

“Captain Cha,” Kang Chul-Gyu radioed in. “Can you count how many enemies are approaching us?”

Cha Dong-Gyun quickly raised his hand to his helmet.

*Chk.*

“I’m trying, sir, but it’s proving difficult. I can’t tell which organization they belong to either since they’re still about two kilometers away from us. However, I estimate their numbers to be over two hundred.”

To Oh Gwang-Taek, Cha Dong-Gyun looked calm and collected. He just sounded as if he was ordering jjajangmyeon, jjampong, and tangsuyuk.

*Chk.*

“Take command until I get there.”

*Chk.*

“At their current speed, they’ll be upon us in about thirty minutes. I’ll try my best to command the soldiers.”

Their conversation sounded so mellow that they just seemed to be asking for free fried dumplings. Their radio frequency quieted down after.

Oh Gwang-Taek inhaled loudly.

*Click. Clank. Clank. Click. Click.*

Even though Cha Dong-Gyun or Yoon Sang-Ki hadn’t ordered it yet, he heard the soldiers carefully inspecting their magazines and pulling their guns’ breechblocks.

Once they were done, Cha Dong-Gyun began to speak so quietly that he sounded as if he was whispering.

“Our sunbaes have entrusted us to kill all hostiles invading our territory. Their survival depends on how many we can eliminate.”

With the darkness making it hard to focus, some found it difficult to understand what he was saying unless they listened more intently than others.

He continued, “Kill with precision and speed. Keep fighting until the enemy reaches the sunbaes who have retreated to our second line of defense.”

The soldiers’ eyes fiercely glinted as they looked at Cha Dong-Gyun.

“Put everything you’ve got into this battle. Show our sunbaes that they have juniors they can rely on—juniors capable of supporting the assistant director, who entrusted this mission to us.”

When it suddenly became quiet, Oh Gwang-Taek wondered, ‘Oh, is Cha Dong-Gyun done?’

“President Oh,” Cha Dong-Gyun called. “Can you say our motto for us? Quietly, please.”

Cha Dong-Gyun and everyone else turned to Oh Gwang-Taek. Their eyes showed that they were looking forward to hearing him saying their motto.

*Why is he asking me to do this? I'm not a member of the special forces team. Is this their way of saying that I'm one of them? Is that why they're looking at me like that?*

Oh Gwang-Taek felt warmth surging in his chest.

“If I can...”

*Why do I feel so suffocated?*

“Protect the country with my blood...”

*Your father's the kind of man who can yell this cool motto in front of such amazing special forces soldiers!*

“I am...”

‘Dad! You're the best!’

*That's right! Once we're done here, I'll buy bananas on the way home.*

“... happy.”

Cha Dong-Gyun smirked. The other soldiers smiled at him.

*Am I afraid?*

Oh Gwang-Taek glared at their enemies.

*What do you think you motherfuckers are doing?’*

\*\*\*

Nam Il-Gyu and Yang Dong-Sik's units retreated to the second line of defense.

In the DMZ, only a few special forces teams fought each other, and it was often to rob the other of their guard posts.

Hence, the DMZ team didn't have experience facing large armies. If they had fought against a unit this large in the DMZ, everything would have been destroyed, leaving nothing in the aftermath of war.

“Dong-Sik,” Nam Il-Gyu called.

Yang Dong-Sik looked away from the enemies.

“Look after Kang sunbae.”

Only his eyes were visible because of the dirt and the camo paint. Nevertheless, his gaze and voice were enough to make it clear that he was full of spite, perhaps because of the enemies' numbers.

Nam Il-Gyu continued, “I'll bring up the front and do whatever it takes to stop the enemies, so take care of Kang sunbae and our juniors.”

Yang Dong-Sik glanced at the enemies approaching them. “Hey! Let me take charge of the vanguard.”

He sounded soft, which was unlike him.

“I’m sure you know that I have trouble understanding the situation. I’m a bit better at offense, so you stay next to Kang sunbae and see how things play out. Don’t forget to help our juniors out as well.”

Nam Il-Gyu glared at Yang Dong-Sik. “Hey, motherfucker.”

In every battle they had been in, Yang Dong-Sik had always followed Nam Il-Gyu’s orders since he trusted his capabilities to calmly judge the situation. He even treated him like a sunbae because Nam Il-Gyu joined the team two months earlier than he did.

“Il-Gyu,” Yang Dong-Sik responded.

Today, however, he refused to abide by Nam Il-Gyu’s orders because this was their first time fighting against so many troops.

“Please. Let’s do as I say this time,” he pleaded.

Yang Dong-Sik had never asked Nam Il-Gyu for something so desperately before. Despite knowing those at the front would be in grave danger, he insisted on bringing up the vanguard.

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After issuing a couple of commands from above the barracks, Kang Chul-Gyu quickly climbed down.

*Clunk.*

He pushed his rifle, which he had slung around his shoulder to suspend it diagonally across his body, to his back.

He had a total of five bayonets—one on each thigh and ankle, and another on his left upper arm—a pistol strapped to the right side of his waist, a magazine at his back, and several grenades hanging on both sides of his chest.

Kim Tae-Jin, armed with the same loadout, approached Kang Chul-Gyu.

Four snipers, the soldier in charge of the Mistral, Joo Chul-Bum, and Oh Gwang-Taek’s other subordinates were tasked to protect the base.

“Let’s go,” Kang Chul-Gyu said.

“Yes, sir,” Kim Tae-Jin replied.

The two walked.

Considering the distance, their enemies would’ve already been at the base if they were in vehicles and were recklessly charging head-on. Since they were still over two kilometers away, they probably wanted to remain undetected for as long as possible.

Kang Chul-Gyu and Kim Tae-Jin quickly headed to their positions.

The stars illuminating the night sky looked as if they would fall in clumps if the soldiers could lift their rifles high into the air and poke the sky.

Kim Tae-Jin glanced down at his feet.

Kang Chul-Gyu made no noise as he walked. No matter how hard they tried, none of the soldiers could imitate him.

“Tae-Jin,” Kang Chul-Gyu called. They were only about three hundred meters away from the Jeungpyeong special forces team.

“Yes?”

“If you meet the assistant director later...”

*He’s being strange.*

Kim Tae-Jin discretely turned his head to Kang Chul-Gyu.

“Tell him that I was very happy to get to meet my son again.”

“What do you mean?” Kim Tae-Jin asked in surprise.

Staring ahead, Kang Chul-Gyu answered, “My son. The one who died in Africa, remember?”

Kim Tae-Jin knew that Kang Chul-Gyu was saying something like this because he was prepared to die. However, he couldn’t dare argue against him.

“You got what I said, right?” Kang Chul-Gyu asked.

“Huh? Ah, yes, I did.”

Their allies and the displeasing silhouettes moving on the horizon were now within sight.

*Could it be?*

Crouching, Kim Tae-Jin looked at Kang Chul-Gyu again.

*Does he want me to tell Kang Chan all that to stop him from being heartbroken if he dies? Is that why he wants me to tell Kang Chan that he was happy about getting to meet his dead son?*

Kim Tae-Jin quietly sighed.

He had never thought of Kang Chul-Gyu as someone so considerate.

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Kang Chan stood in front of and glared out the window of Seok Kang-Ho’s room.

His eyes were glinting with so much intensity that even Seok Kang-Ho couldn’t help but quietly examine his mood.

“Got any cigarettes?” Kang Chan asked.

“Yeah.”

Seok Kang-Ho lit up two cigarettes, then handed one to Kang Chan.

*Badum. Badum. Badum. Badum.*

Due to the darkness of the night outside, the window acted like a mirror, reflecting Kang Chan. It was also reflecting Seok Kang-Ho, who was sitting behind him.

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



Kang Chan took out his phone from his pants pocket and answered the call.

“Hello?”

- It's Kim Hyung-Jung. We have received intel that a huge group is approaching the base in Mongolia. We haven't figured out their size and affiliation yet, but we believe they are hostile.

“Got it,” Kang Chan answered calmly.

He had already expected this much. After all, this was why his heart was pounding and kicking up such a fuss.

- I'll update you as soon as we get more info.

“Please do.”

Kim Hyung-Jung hung up.

After returning his phone to his pocket, Kang Chan deeply exhaled the cigarette smoke. “Hoo.”

“I've just been informed that our enemies are already on their way to our base in Mongolia. However, we still haven't figured out who they are or how many bastards they'll send,” Kang Chan explained.

Seok Kang-Ho sighed, blowing out smoke in the process.

Considering Kang Chan's eyes had been glinting long before Kim Hyung-Jung had called them, the battle in Mongolia likely wouldn't be easy.

*Well, have battles ever been easy?*

*Chkk.*

Kang Chan dropped his half-finished cigarette into a paper cup and then slowly returned to the table.

Although it wasn't like him, Seok Kang-Ho tried to console Kang Chan. “They'll be fine.”

Kang Chan simply nodded.

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Kang Chul-Gyu's footsteps finally made noises only when he reached Cha Dong-Gyun.

Cha Dong-Gyun and the soldiers briefly greeted him with their gazes.

Kang Chul-Gyu quickly examined the horizon. Its line, which should've been straight, was being disrupted by multiple silhouettes.

Their enemies were stupid for being so reckless in the presence of the DMZ team and Jeungpyeong special forces team, which were South Korea's best.

“Sunbae-nim.”

Kang Chul-Gyu turned to Cha Dong-Gyun.

Their enemies were still about a kilometer away from them.

“What Nam Il-Gyu sunbae-nim said on the radio a moment ago got me thinking,” Cha Dong-Gyun said. He looked genuinely curious. “Have you and the DMZ team ever fought against an army this large?”

Kang Chul-Gyu nodded. “Our enemies back then were small special forces teams that had been sent to the DMZ. The unit we fought when I fell for the trap that ended my career was the largest we have ever faced. Even they were only composed of about a hundred soldiers.”

“I see.”

Cha Dong-Gyun and the other special forces soldiers looked like they finally understood why Nam Il-Gyu sounded so surprised on the radio.

“We’d still be confident fighting that many tangos if we were the ones on the offensive. Unfortunately, we simply do not specialize in defense. What about you, Captain Cha?” Kang Chul-Gyu asked.

“I’m already used to their numbers. In every battle we had been in with the assistant director, we were extremely outnumbered.”

Cha Dong-Gyun wasn’t bragging. He was just calmly voicing out what he was feeling.

“The largest we have ever fought was the one in Africa. There were only seventy of us against the Quds’ six hundred. I still vividly remember the assistant director taking command. Even the Foreign Legion, Spetsnaz, Green Berets, and SBS listened to him back then...” Cha Dong-Gyun trailed off.

Kang Chul-Gyu strangely looked even more touched and full of pride than Cha Dong-Gyun, who actually fought in that battle.

After a brief and quiet exhale, Kang Chul-Gyu examined their enemies and looked at Cha Dong-Gyun again.

“Captain Cha, I’m sure the joint training was enough for you to learn how we fight, so let me ask you this. What would you do in this situation?”

“Sunbae-nim, that’s...”

“What would the assistant director do if he was here? I initially planned on hiding Il-Gyu and Dong-Sik in the middle of the battlefield and attacking them both head-on and from within their ranks. However, there are so many of them that we’d likely be discovered before we can even launch an attack. That’s why I ordered them to move back instead.”

Kang Chul-Gyu glanced at Kim Tae-Jin. “Since you have experience fighting large units, I’d like to hear your opinion.”

Cha Dong-Gyun was so surprised that he got a lump in his throat. The DMZ King, of all people, was asking him for his opinion.

Kang Chul-Gyu was a legend in South Korea's special forces team. In terms of achievements alone, he should've been a full general by now.

That same man had chosen to abandon his pride and ask his very young junior how he thought they should handle this battle, evidencing how badly he wanted to protect the base.

Could anyone show their determination as clearly as he did? Was there any other commander out there who could relay their desire to save people so openly?

Their enemies were now only about six hundred meters away. Nam Il-Gyu and Yang Dong-Sik, who had retreated to the second line of defense, were about four hundred meters away from the vanguard.

“We estimate the enemies to number around three hundred, sunbae-nim. Assuming they're all special forces soldiers on par with the Spetsnaz, how many do you think you and the DMZ team can take down?” Cha Dong-Gyun asked.

With glinting eyes, Kang Chul-Gyu examined their opponents.

“Il-Gyu and Dong-Sik's units should be able to take down at least a hundred before they're wiped out.” Kang Chul-Gyu then turned his head to Kim Tae-Jin. “You and I should be able to eliminate another hundred, shouldn't we, Tae-Jin?”

*Wait, is the DMZ King bluffing right now?*

Startled, Cha Dong-Gyun turned to Kim Tae-Jin, only for his surprise to deepen. Kim Tae-Jin, who was looking at Kang Chul-Gyu, had a prideful expression.

If Cha Dong-Gyun hadn't learned how prudent Kim Tae-Jin was from everything he had heard about him and during the live ammo training, he would've wondered if Kang Chul-Gyu bluffed a lot.

“Sunbae-nim, if we don't send the two units to their deaths, are you still confident that you can eliminate at least half of our enemies?” Cha Dong-Gyun asked.

It was an absurd question. Combat-related questions couldn't just be answered as easily as using a calculator for a mathematical problem.

Perhaps that was why Kang Chul-Gyu failed to give an immediate answer.

Amid the silence, Cha Dong-Gyun began to lay out his plan. “Sunbae-nim, if it's okay with you, I would like to...”

With his eyes staring at their opponents, he told his two seniors every detail of the operation that he had in mind. The stars in the sky tried their best to eavesdrop, but their efforts ended in futility.

Kang Chul-Gyu silently listened. Meanwhile, Kim Tae-Jin kept shifting his gaze between the two.

“I believe this plan has the highest chance of success,” Cha Dong-Gyun concluded.

Kang Chul-Gyu smiled in approval. He then slowly looked away from Cha Dong-Gyun and turned to Kim Tae-Jin.

Acting as if he were Kang Chul-Gyu's aide, Kim Tae-Jin said, "I agree with Captain Cha's plan as well."

"I see. That concludes this meeting, then. I entrust the command to you, Captain," Kang Chul-Gyu said.

"Understood," Cha Dong-Gyun replied.

Kang Chul-Gyu raised his hand to his helmet.

*Chk.*

"DMZ team," he radioed in. Everyone at the base in Mongolia could hear him right now.

"I am transferring command to Captain Cha Dong-Gyun. Il-Gyu and Dong-Sik, I want your units on standby. On the captain's order, you are to infiltrate enemy ranks."

*Chk.*

After a brief pause, Nam Il-Gyu answered, "Yes, sir."

The DMZ team and the Jeungpyeong special forces team quickly executed Cha Dong-Gyun's orders, finishing their preparations in no time at all.

Kang Chul-Gyu and Kim Tae-Jin had also headed to their designated positions. The other soldiers, with their rifles pointed to the front, remained silent.

Their enemies moved so slowly that from far away, they just looked like rock formations that had always been there.

The wind swept past Kang Chul-Gyu's glinting eyes amid the suffocating silence and nervousness. It then comforted Cha Dong-Gyun, who was gritting his teeth due to the weight of the responsibilities on his shoulders. Finally, it brushed past Oh Gwang-Taek, whose blood was boiling, as if it felt bad for him.

Yang Dong-Sik and Nam Il-Gyu glared at their enemies so fiercely that their eyes seemed to scream that they were going to skin them alive.

*Come at us! I don't care who you motherfuckers are! I'll fucking kill anyone who targets South Korea and its bases!*

The soldiers, including Kim Tae-Jin, had been rational all this time. Now, however, instead of looking like they were prepared to die, they looked as if they had abandoned all intentions to live.

Chapter 319: Come At Us! (2)

The enemies' black silhouettes slowly closed in on their location, eventually covering enough distance for the South Koreans to check their clothes.

The South Korean team had Oh Gwang-Taek, ten soldiers from the Jeungpyeong special forces team, and twenty-six soldiers from the DMZ team. Meanwhile, their opponents numbered three hundred, just like Cha Dong-Gyun had estimated.

When their enemies went past him, Yang Dong-Sik began to salivate. Anyone who had reached this level of nervousness would make a noise loud enough to startle those around them if they swallowed their saliva. That was why they'd much rather keep it in their mouth for now.

*Rustle. Rustle. Rustle.*

Amid the darkness of this Mongolian wilderness, their opponents carefully walked along the low and high ridges.

Cha Dong-Gyun's plan was simple.

Once the fight started, like slicing a cake into three large pieces, Kang Chul-Gyu, Nam Il-Gyu, and Yang Dong-Sik would split the enemies into groups and cut into their ranks. They would then lure them into the sunken area in the middle of where they had initially set up their ambush and attack them head-on and from within, killing them one at a time.

The Jeungpyeong special forces team and the DMZ team had paired their members together.

Oh Gwang-Taek and a soldier from the special forces team were behind Kang Chul-Gyu and Kim Tae-Jin, and Yoon Sang-Ki and another soldier were behind Nam Il-Gyu. Two other members of the Jeungpyeong special forces team were with Yang Dong-Sik.

Cha Dong-Gyun had been clenching his jaws ever since he was given command.

They were executing an operation that required his sunbaes—including Kang Chul-Gyu—to infiltrate their opponents' ranks even though hadn't even identified them yet.

Kang Chul-Gyu soon informed Cha Dong-Gyun, who was feeling very anxious because he made the plan, how many enemies they would be able to handle.

*Rustle. Clatter.*

With each step their opponents took, Cha Dong-Gyun could feel the hair on his entire body standing on end.

Soon, however, he began to feel as if he was watching a neverending advertisement at a movie theater. After a terribly boring period, their enemies finally arrived at the spot they had hoped for.

If he hadn't fought with Kang Chan before, he wouldn't have been able to stay calm right now.

Cha Dong-Gyun took a deep breath. He then slowly moved his index finger. Once he pulled the trigger, the door to hell would burst open.

Everyone assumed a similar stance, waiting for Cha Dong-Gyun to open fire.

*BANG!*

Cha Dong-Gyun pulled the trigger, sending a bullet flying through the air.

*Bang! Bang bang bang! BANG! Bang bang bang! Bang bang! Bang bang bang!*

The terrifying gunshot reverberated throughout their surroundings, the echo lasting for a few moments. Unfortunately, the wilderness prevented them from seeing who or what the bullet hit.

One after another, their opponents fell backward like a stack of straws. However, they soon retaliated.

*Du du du! Du du! Du du du du! Du du!*

The hostiles quickly got into position and started to return fire. Among them, their experienced commander stood out.

If they decided to hold out here, then this battle would be determined by numbers alone.

*Chk.*

“Cut through their ranks!” Cha Dong-Gyun ordered through the radio.

*Whoosh! Whish! Whoosh!*

Kang Chul-Gyu and Kim Tae-Jin ran toward the enemy forces. Nam Il-Gyu and Yang Dong-Sik led their teams out as well.

*Bang bang bang! Bang bang! Bang bang! BANG! Bang bang bang!*

The rest provided those charging in with cover fire from behind, taking down one opponent after another.

The muzzles of their M16s and the K2s[1] kept spouting out flames.

Loud gunshots rang out from the opposing forces' AK-47s as well.

*BANG! Pew! Bang bang bang! PEW!*

*Du du du! Pew! Du du! Du du du du! Pew!*

Gunshots ceaselessly pierced through the winds and echoed throughout the wilderness, the trees unable to completely silence them. Oh Gwang-Taek just kept firing.

*Bang! Bang! Bang! Bang! Bang!*

The recoil of his K2 assault rifle made his shoulders shake. The unpleasant smell of gunpowder rushed up his nostrils.

*Du du du! Pow pow pow! Du du! Pow pow! Du du du! Pow pow pow!*

Although bullets kept whizzing past them and piercing into their surroundings, Oh Gwang-Taek remained unfazed. He just kept gunning down those who were aiming at Kang Chul-Gyu and Kim Tae-Jin, riddling them with bullets.

He had to stop their enemies from attacking the DMZ team members no matter what. That was the only way he could protect his brothers-in-arms.

Oh Gwang-Taek didn't even have time to observe them or feel sympathy for them.

*Crunch!*

Meanwhile, Kang Chul-Gyu grotesquely twisted their opponents' necks. They couldn't even resist.

*Stab! Splatter!*

Every time his right hand moved, blood gushed out from their necks.

Kang Chul-Gyu ran even deeper into their ranks.

In response, the enemies swiftly aimed at Kang Chul-Gyu. However, witnessing one of their own being killed made them hesitate, giving him enough time to either break their necks or slit their throats.

Kim Tae-Jin had never fought so closely with Kang Chul-Gyu before. Running and covering him made him feel as if he would soon go insane.

Their enemies were all around them now. If just one of them managed to hit him and Kang Chul-Gyu, they would definitely die.

*Du du du! Du du! Du du du!*

Intuitively feeling the same way, their enemies blindly shot at them. Nevertheless, Kang Chul-Gyu didn't stop. Once he had sent his target sinking to the ground, he immediately rushed past them.

He was moving so fast that Kim Tae-Jin was eventually forced to stop covering him just to keep up with him, but even that alone proved too difficult to accomplish.

Both sides continued to shoot at each other.

Along with another soldier, Oh Gwang-Taek covered Kang Chul-Gyu and Kim Tae-Jin. He looked willing to lay down his life to complete his duty.

They were still twenty meters away from their target location.

*Thump! Thud!*

Kang Chul-Gyu and Kim Tae-Jin reached the middle of their enemies' position in no time at all. As they did, Kang Chul-Gyu brought the rifle on his back to his front.

In the meantime, Kim Tae-Jin dragged and built a wall using corpses.

*Bang! Pow! Bang! Pow! Bang! Pow! Bang! Pow!*

With every pull of the trigger, Kang Chul-Gyu took down an enemy.

In the past, the Spetsnaz, the Baekrang team, and North Korea's Airborne Corps of the People's Liberation Army Air Force shuddered whenever they saw the DMZ King in battle. That same beast was coming back to life right now.

*Bang bang bang! Du du du! Du du! Bang! Bang bang bang! Du du du!*

*Pow pow pow! Pow pow!*

Soon, however, a soldier who respected Nam Il-Gyu sank to the ground, shaking as if he was having a seizure. Even though Kang Chul-Gyu was covering fire with his superhuman shooting skills, he was still shot.

*Bam! Crack! Pew! Pew! Splatter!*

Nam Il-Gyu relentlessly twisted their enemies' necks and swung his bayonet. Not long after, they finally succeeded in splitting them into three groups.

From deep in the sunken area, they gunned down their opponents. However, since Kang Chul-Gyu and Kim Tae-Jin were crouching close to each other like a coiled snake, their shots were ineffective.

As Yang Dong-Sik had his team cover for him, he made his way through their enemies like a madman.

They were tackling this battle in a completely different way from how they normally fought at the DMZ. Nevertheless, they had no intentions to withdraw. They had to win this fight.

*Stab! Splatter!*

Yang Dong-Sik stabbed an enemy in the neck, then roughly pulled the bayonet out of them.

*Bang! Bang! Bang! Bang! Bang!*

At the same time, Kang Chul-Gyu embedded bullets right between his targets' eyes. The scene made Kim Tae-Jin conclude that the first phase of Cha Dong-Gyun's plan was a success.

He couldn't believe that Cha Dong-Gyun thought that they should occupy the middle of the battlefield despite facing three hundred hostiles. Still, his clever strategy proved effective.

*Bang! Pow! Bang! Pow! Bang! Pow!*

Positioning Kang Chul-Gyu in the middle of the warzone only made this operation even more perfect. Every time he opened fire, anyone who had raised their heads or targeted his allies helplessly collapsed.

They had killed close to half of their enemies. It seemed their combat capabilities weren't as strong as they had feared.

The pace of the battle momentarily slowed down as the enemies adjusted the formation of their three groups, which were in different locations.

Both sides dragged and piled corpses in front of them.

*Rustle. Rustle.*

Nam Il-Gyu and Yang Dong-Sik, who had been put in charge of different areas, crawled their way to Kang Chul-Gyu.

Their foreheads, arms, and at least two other areas of their upper bodies were soaked in blood.

"Are you hurt?" Kang Chul-Gyu asked Kim Tae-Jin, his rifle still pointed toward their enemies.

"I'm okay, sunbae-nim," Kim Tae-Jin replied. He then looked down at Kang Chul-Gyu's waist. Much to his surprise, blood was seeping out of it. "Let me patch you up."

"It's fine. The bullet only grazed it," Kang Chul-Gyu replied, acting as if it wasn't a big deal.

Kim Tae-Jin couldn't raise his head. He felt bad—not only did he stop covering Kang Chul-Gyu, but he didn't even notice that the man was injured.

*Chk.*



Cha Dong-Gyun radioed in, "Since our base is directly behind us, we'll take down the group to our twelve first. Kang sunbae-nim, please let me know once everyone in your area has finished preparations."

*Chk.*

"Copy that. I'll let you know as soon as we're ready," Kang Chul-Gyu answered.

"Looks like our opponents right now don't even belong to a regular army," Yang Dong-Sik commented as he finished bandaging himself.

He then examined Kang Chul-Gyu's mood with perplexity.

"Choose six soldiers who'll be coming with us," Kang Chul-Gyu commanded.

"Yes sir," Nam Il-Gyu answered. He had also been watching Kang Chul-Gyu, who exuded charisma that was difficult for anyone to disobey. He was known to do this every now and then.

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After his call with Kim Hyung-Jung, Kang Chan put his phone down.

"I've just been informed that the one invading our base in Mongolia is the UIS militia of Libya. Their military might has apparently increased a lot recently because retired special forces soldiers have joined them as commanders."

"How many of them are attacking the base?" Seok Kang-Ho asked.

"They still haven't figured that out."

Seok Kang-Ho softly exhaled. "Considering they're only a militia, they're better than expected. Few retired soldiers would've joined them even if they were a special forces team."

Kang Chan looked outside the window.

There was only a week left until Abibu arrived in South Korea. He wanted to finish everything he could before meeting that fucker.

He picked up his phone and called someone. The call rang three times before it was answered.

- How can I help our main character?

Sarcasm was evident in Vasili's voice.

"Why don't I just kill Romain and Josh?"

- Hmph!

The way Vasili responded made Kang Chan feel as if Vasili was looking down on him.

- I'll kill as many bastards like Josh as you want me to for as long as you can figure out where the nuclear warhead is.

*Damn it!*

The UIS militia's invasion of the South Korean base in Mongolia was already making things crazy for Kang Chan. Now, Vasili also wanted him to find the nuclear warhead.

- You won't gain anything in North Korea no matter how many times you go there. For someone in the world of intelligence, your way of thinking is too bland.

Kang Chan sighed. Vasili seemed to think that Moon Jae-Hyun and Hwang Ki-Hyun's desperate wish was too simple.

- The Star of David is just using North Korea as an excuse. They're planning to launch a nuclear missile from somewhere. They may launch it from North Korea, but if they do, that would mean North Korea accepted the payment and lent their country to them without even knowing that the missiles would fall in Seoul and that one of the missiles would be fitted with the nuclear warhead.

Kang Chan laughed, finding the situation absurd.

- If North Korea really wants to discuss the war with South Korea, they'll probably request about five hundred billion won. To the commander of North Korea, this matter is more or less just a way to hit an unexpected jackpot without even having to do anything.

"Why is the United States pretending to be oblivious about South Korea sending money to North Korea, then?"

Kang Chan heard Vasili sighing, seemingly to get rid of his frustration.

- Because they will definitely profit if a war breaks out in the Korean Peninsula. Not only will it allow them to steal conventional weapons by using the money that South Korea will send to North Korea, but it will also give them a chance to get a stake in the next-generation energy facility again. They just won't be able to actively go for it because of Russia and China.

"This is so fucking complicated."

- South Korea has always been this way. If your president and government had been a little foolish, we would be discussing what to do about South Korea without you right about now.

"Let me ask an honest question—what should I do?"

A moment of silence passed before Vasili answered.

- Come up with a condition that would make Josh hand over the nuclear warhead. Lanok, Yang Bum, and I will eventually find it, but he might launch it before we do. Presenting an offer that he would be tempted by is the fastest way to stop this.

"What's Josh's number?"

- I'm not a telephone operator.

Finding Vasili's response funny, Kang Chan couldn't help but smirk and laugh.

- The great DGSE will tell you right away if you contact them.

Vasili sounded a lot sterner now, perhaps offended by Kang Chan's laughter.

"Thanks, Vasili."

- Stay on your toes when you're dealing with Josh. He's not the type to miss an opportunity.

*Beep.*

Vasil was still the same as how Kang Chan remembered him.

Kang Chan put his phone down on the table, then told Seok Kang-Ho, who looked curious, about the call.

“Are you thinking of meeting this Josh guy?” Seok Kang-Ho asked afterward.

“Wouldn't it be better to meet someone I know first?”

“Someone you know?”

Kang Chan nodded.

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There were about forty hostiles positioned in front of them.

Their enemies had poor military strength that did not do their superior numbers justice.

Their commanders and a few others had remarkable skills, but unfortunately for them, South Korea had Kang Chul-Gyu. Those who acted out when the fight started quickly turned into corpses, mostly because of his rifle.

Gunshots still rang out from time to time.

“We've finished all preparations,” Nam Il-Gyu reported.

Kang Chul-Gyu raised his hand to his helmet.

*Chk.*

“Captain Cha, we're ready.”

*Chk.*

“Understood,” Cha Dong-Gyun answered.

*Chk.*

Cha Dong-Gyun continued, “On my command, President Oh and Yoon Sang-Ki, cover Kang sunbae-nim's team. Kim Tae-Jin sunbae-nim, please support the soldiers at the center.”

Nam Il-Gyu, Yang Dong-Sik, and three other soldiers unsheathed the bayonets attached to their upper left arms.

*Click! Clank! Click! Click!*

As Kang Chul-Gyu checked how many bullets he had left in his magazine, Kim Tae-Jin and the others inspected their rifles.

Oh Gwang-Taek, who was quite far away from them, swallowed dryly. His boiling blood was urging him to charge toward their opponents with Kang Chul-Gyu.

He didn't expect that this was how soldiers felt in moments like this. The battle he experienced in Libya was just outright horrible. However, watching Kang Chul-Gyu and Kim Tae-Jin running into their enemies' ranks a moment ago made him feel emotions that he couldn't put into words.

These people are just... Fuck! This is why everyone should experience the hardships they go through! Oh Gwang-Taek wanted to fight and even die in their stead.

*Is this why these soldiers argue against each other about who gets to join a mission even though they know they could be heading to their deaths?*

Now, a new battle was about to start.

Kang Chul-Gyu, Nam Il-Gyu, Yang Dong-Sik, and three others would run toward their enemies again. They would have to make their way through a rain of bullets, then position themselves in the middle of enemy ranks.

Oh Gwang-Taek pulled his rifle very close to him, then pressed its stock against his shoulder.

*I'm going to protect them.*

Oh Gwang-Taek's eyes glinted.

*Chk.*

"We're executing the next phase of our operation now," Cha Dong-Gyun ordered.

Yang Dong-Sik was about to run out when Nam Il-Gyu grabbed him by the nape.

"Hey! Focus, you fucking idiot!" Nam Il-Gyu exclaimed.

'Why did he stop me? What's going on?'

Confused, Yang Dong-Sik glanced at the others.

*Chk.*

"Three, two..."

Cha Dong-Gyun started to count down.

"Go go go!"

*Bang bang bang! Bang bang! Bang bang bang bang! Bang bang bang!*

*Du du! Du du du! Du du du! Du du! Du du du!*

The South Korean team simultaneously began opening fire, and their enemies immediately retaliated.

With Kang Chul-Gyu in the lead, Nam Il-Gyu, Yang Dong-Sik, and the others sprinted into their enemies' position.

*Bang! Bang! Bang! Bang! Bang! Bang! Bang!*

Amid the firefight, everyone watched Kang Chul-Gyu running and shooting at the same time. He was truly worthy of being called the DMZ King, a legend feared and respected by military figures.

The Jeungpyeong special forces team had assumed that he was simply better than others. In Libya, they thought he was just good at being in command. However, those who could see him fight right now felt as if they finally understood why he was known as the DMZ King.

Watching him made them feel so reassured it was almost as if Kang Chan—whom not even six hundred Quds could overpower—was the one charging ahead.

*Bang bang bang! Bang bang! Bang bang bang!*

Watching Kang Chul-Gyu fight made the soldiers' blood boil.

Even though he was running, he immobilized one enemy after another, requiring only one bullet for each target.

So much adrenaline surged within his men that it seemed as if they had taken drugs. Their enemies were so afraid that they couldn't even aim at him anymore.

*Whoosh! Whish! Whoosh!*

As loud gunshots rang, Nam Il-Gyu and Yang Dong-Sik ran even deeper into their enemies' position.

*Bang! Bang! Bang! Bang! Bang! Bang!*

As they did, Kang Chul-Gyu knelt down and provided them with cover fire. The others did the same for him.

“Fuck!” Oh Gwang-Taek suddenly swore, feeling a strange rush in his heart.

Chapter 320: I'm Sorry (1)

Kang Chan picked up his phone and dialed a number.

- It's Hugo.

“Hugo, it's been over twenty-four hours. Why didn't I get an answer to my request?”

- The approval has been deferred.

Kang Chan smirked. “Can you tell Director-General Romain that I request a private meeting with him?”

After a brief pause, Hugo finally gave him an answer.

- Yes, sir.

“Hugo.”

- Yes, Deputy Director-General?

“I apologize if I'm putting you in a predicament.”

- Not at all. Thank you for looking out for me.

Kang Chan hung up.

*Rattle.*

Not long after, Gérard entered the room with a yellow shopping bag.

“How did you get here by yourself? You can’t speak Korean,” Kang Chan asked.

“What’s going on?” Gérard responded. After sitting at the table, he prodded, “What’s with that expression?”

*Rustle.*

Waiting for Kang Chan to answer, Gérard took out three small paper packages from the shopping bag.

“I bought some late-night snacks for Daye,” Gérard explained.

Kang Chan relayed what Gérard said to Seok Kang-Ho.

“This fucker doesn’t look like it, but he actually cares about other people,” Seok Kang-Ho commented.

Gérard then walked to one side of the room to make coffee.

Making coffee, he called Kang Chan and pressed him for the third time. “Captain?”

Kang Chan told Gérard what was happening in Mongolia and what he had talked about with Vasili and Hugo in order.

“We should hurry, then,” Gérard suggested. He put three paper cups on the table. “Let’s finish this food quickly and go.”

“Go where?”

“Aren’t we here because of some bastard named Abibu? Considering the UIS militia ambushed the base so early, they’re likely not limited by time, which means they might start doing some other shit. Let’s finish this quickly and go to Mongolia already.”

*Huh? No, wait, he’s got a point! Is this fucker even smarter than Daye?*

*Rustle. Rustle.*

Gérard removed the paper packaging, took out a hamburger that was as big as Seok Kang-Ho’s face, and put it on the table.

“Come, eat,” Gérard told Kang Chan.

“Is this bastard boasting that the hamburger is expensive?” Seok Kang-Ho asked, attempting to interpret Gérard’s suggestion.

Kang Chan’s phone, which was between the hamburgers on the table, began to ring.

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

He quickly answered it, since his phone showed that Kim Tae-Jin was calling him.

“Mr. President! It’s Kang Chan.”

- Assistant Director.

It was Kang Chul-Gyu who answered.

- Two hundred sixty of our enemies were Arabic, and forty-one were European. We’ve got one dead, twenty-two slightly injured, and four critically wounded. President Oh is one of them.

Unable to answer, Kang Chan just listened instead.

- We killed two hundred forty-nine and caught the other fifty-two. Six of the captives are in critical condition.

“Who died from our side?”

- He was from Nam Il-Gyu’s unit. Could you have the National Intelligence Service take care of him as a soldier who died in service?

“Sure. Are you hurt anywhere?”

- I’m okay.

“Are you hurt anywhere?” Kang Chan repeated.

Kang Chul-Gyu laughed a little, seemingly feeling awkward.

- I got a scratch on my waist, but you shouldn’t worry about it. Anyway, Tae-Jin has talked to Kim Hyung-Jung. We’ll be sending our critically wounded back to South Korea.

“Alright.”

*Was this how it felt?*

Whenever Kang Chan returned from an operation, Hwang Ki-Hyun, Jeon Dae-Geuk, and Kim Hyung-Jung always had the same expressions on their faces. Did they look like that because talking to soldiers who risked their lives for the country made them feel the same way?

- Can we handle the captives our way?

Kang Chan felt that saying yes would mean allowing them to hang the enemies upside down in the base until they died.

“You should discuss that with manager Kim Hyung-Jung.”

- Alright. We’ll keep them until he answers, then.

Noticing Kang Chan’s expression, Seok Kang-Ho glanced at Gérard. Their eyes met.

“Thanks.”

Their call ended with Kang Chul-Gyu’s laughter.

“What’s going on?” Seok Kang-Ho asked.

“I’ve just been informed that we have won the battle in Mongolia. One of our men died, and Oh Gwang-Taek and three others were severely injured. Of the three hundred enemies they faced, they captured around fifty alive.”

“Woah!” Seok Kang-Ho exclaimed in amazement. He then looked at Kang Chan, surprise evident in his eyes. “Did you just say that Oh Gwang-Taek is severely injured?”

“Yeah. Let’s wait and see. They’ll be sending them back to Seoul soon.”

Afterward, Kang Chan told Gérard the same thing.

“Has South Korea’s special forces team always been this strong?” Gérard asked afterward.

Unable to answer, Kang Chan took a sip of his coffee instead. A complex mix of emotions whirled inside him.

“Eating a hamburger doesn’t feel right with Gwang-Taek injured,” Seok Kang-Ho said while glaring at the hamburger. He didn’t seem to mean it.

“Why should we feel that way? Just eat already. Gérard bought that for you. We’ve always lived like this in Africa anyway.”

“Eating while he’s injured just feels so wrong.”

Contradicting his words, Seok Kang-Ho held up a hamburger and offered it to Kang Chan.

“Go ahead. I’ll eat later,” Kang Chan said.

“What are you saying?! Gérard might get upset because we refuse to eat what he bought! That’s the only reason I’m eating!” Seok Kang-Ho exclaimed, then took a big bite of his hamburger. The taste of lettuce and meat greeted him.

While chewing, he asked, “Why did they take captives, though? That must’ve been a hassle. Those fuckers—”

“Hey! Don’t talk while your mouth is full!”

“It’s alright! Anyway, those fuckers—the captives, I mean.”

“What about them?” Kang Chan asked.

“How about we use them to build a factory in Mongolia? We don’t need to pay them, and we can drag the ones who refuse to listen somewhere nearby, and...” Seok Kang-Ho trailed off and examined Kang Chan’s mood.

Pretending as if nothing was wrong, he took another bite of the hamburger.

Kang Chan couldn’t blame Seok Kang-Ho for making that suggestion. However, this wasn’t a war between African tribes.



*I still think we'll be able to use them somewhere.*

He felt as if something was tickling him.

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After making what looked like a large boxing ring with ropes, the South Korean team led all of their captives inside it. In truth, they had just made them kneel outside the base but right in front of the barracks overlooking their perimeter.

“You motherfuckers!” Yang Dong-Sik yelled.

“Hey!”

If Nam Il-Gyu hadn't called him, Yang Dong-Sik would've unsheathed the bayonet attached to his upper arm again.

Yang Dong-Sik had already beaten up two of the captives and hung them upside down.

Nam Il-Gyu didn't stop him back then since the captives kept blatantly defying them. Now, however, the captives only seemed to be insulting them.

One of the captives whispering something got so startled by their shouts that he lowered his head. They all looked pale with fright.

Who could blame them? Near their location was a machine gun, a Mistral, and sentries standing guard on top of the barracks with a fierce look in their eyes. Nam Il-Gyu, Yang Dong-Sik, and four other soldiers from the DMZ team also had them surrounded, their rifles pointed upward.

The South Korean team had tied their captives' wrists behind them with cable ties. Although the captives looked like they were in pain, they didn't say anything, perhaps because they had just witnessed one of their comrades almost being dragged away by Yong Dong-Sik simply because he asked in Arabic if they should request their captors to untie their wrists.

Even if they hadn't experienced it, some things only had to be seen for them to completely understand. That was how they knew that sore arms were much less painful than getting beaten up to the brink of death and then being hung upside down.

Soon, they heard someone walking toward them.

Kang Chul-Gyu and Kim Tae-Jin had left the base to check on the captives.

The captives urgently lowered their heads to the ground. They moved so quickly that the others wondered if their necks were going to break.

Kang Chul-Gyu looked at the two people hanging upside down in the barracks.

“They kept resisting, so we hung them upside down to teach them a lesson. We'll untie them,” Yang Dong-Sik explained.

Kang Chul-Gyu nodded.

Two soldiers headed toward the people they had suspended in the air.

Kang Chul-Gyu had a bayonet attached to his upper left arm, thighs, and ankles. He also had a rifle hanging behind him, a pistol on the right side of his waist, and several magazines on his back.

Due to his appearance, whenever he looked at the captives, they shuddered and lowered their heads. If he extended his left hand, they knew their necks would end up broken. If he extended his right, then their throats would be slit.

Kang Chul-Gyu did things that were difficult to even imagine, all while running at full speed.

Moreover, with his rifle, he could easily send a bullet right into their foreheads, possibly even making their heads explode.

He already had a notorious reputation among their prisoners. Nam Il-Gyu and Yang Dong-Sik—who were no different from monsters—treating him with respect only made it worse.

*Vroom. Vroom.*

In the distance, they could see two trucks driving over to them.

“Looks like they’re already done,” Kim Tae-Jin commented.

Kang Chul-Gyu nodded.

The ones in the trucks had been tasked to collect their enemies’ weapons and equipment.

Kang Chul-Gyu looked into the distance, then back at Kim Tae-Jin.

“We have six of our sunbaes guarding the perimeter. Since they’re a kilometer away from each other, the area within a six-kilometer radius around us should be safe,” Kim Tae-Jin said.

Kang Chul-Gyu just nodded in response.

It was a dark night.

The only sources of light they had were the surveillance lights that were looming over their captives.

Kim Tae-Jin felt as if he had gone back in time and was in the DMZ again. This was exactly what it was like back there.

Whenever Kang Chul-Gyu looked around, the rookies, Kim Tae-Jin included, instinctively froze up.

“How long have these people been kneeling?” Kang Chul-Gyu asked.

“About two hours,” Nam Il-Gyu answered.

“Untie their wrists and let them straighten their legs as well.”

“Yes, sir.”

Kang Chul-Gyu looked at Yang Dong-Sik next. Even though he was clearly walking over to him, the captives still looked terrified.

Kang Chul-Gyu patted Yang Dong-Sik’s forearm two or so times, then headed back into the base.

Only then did the captives finally look relieved. However, upon noticing the look in Yang Dong-Sik’s eyes, they lowered their heads again.

Yang Dong-Sik looked deeply touched that Kang Chul-Gyu did that. To the captives, however, he just looked like a murderer exploding with joy.

He unsheathed the bayonet strapped to his left upper arm. One after another, the other soldiers did as well. “Alla-ah!” one of the captives wailed towards the sky, looking terrified.

“What are you saying, you motherfucker!” Yang Dong-Sik yelled.

*Snip!*

Looking very displeased, he cut the cable ties binding captives’ hands.

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Every day, Hwang Ki-Hyun tirelessly worked without ever showing his emotions.

He couldn’t do anything about incompetence right now, but he could at least prevent others from reading the emotions of the person in command of South Korea’s National Intelligence Service.

His meeting with the other leaders had taught him that. Lanok, Vasili, and Yang Bum never showed what they were thinking except on purpose.

Hwang Ki-Hyun tried his best to hide his emotions even as he left the National Intelligence Service’s building in Naegok-dong late at night.

The news about their victory in Mongolia made him so happy that he wanted to scream. He even had this absurd idea to go into a secret empty room and pump his fists into the air.

They were going to start building a factory in Mongolia soon, which was why they had to do whatever it took to protect the base in the first place. Nevertheless, despite only having fifty men, they had achieved an almost perfect victory.

It was a shame that one of them died, but Hwang Ki-Hyun was still happy about the result.

The nameless heroes who had been ousted from South Korea in the past had just accomplished this splendid feat as a part of the National Intelligence Service.

An agent opened the van door for him. Hwang Ki-Hyun then got in the backseat and headed toward the National Intelligence Service’s Samseong-dong branch.

*Vroom.*

The car his security detail took followed the roundabout that went around the garden in front of the main entrance. It took a wide turn, and the van that Hwang Ki-Hyun was in followed closely behind.

They soon entered the road.

It was already one in the morning, yet there was still traffic on the first lane because of the people walking onto the road to hail a taxi.

Loud car horns echoed around them.

*Chk.*

“Grab that drunk person! Run, run!” someone urgently radioed in.

Looking out the window, Hwang Ki-Hyun found two drunk people approaching him. The sight gave him an ominous feeling.

They were drunk but were wearing thick jackets that were zipped up to their necks. Moreover, they were looking straight at the van.

Two agents got out of the car in front of the van and quickly rushed toward the drunk people.

*Vroom!*

The van that Hwang Ki-Hyun was in crossed the centerline.

The cars across from them honked and flashed high beams at them.

*Whoosh! Swish!*

Soon, the two drunk people broke into a run, charging toward the van. Soon after, the agents grabbed onto them.

Along with a flash, a glaring beam of light quickly approached Hwang Ki-Hyun.

\*\*\*

Song Chang-Wook usually left work late in the day. He was doing everything for South Korea.

His grandfather dedicated his entire fortune to the independence of South Korea, then died in prison because he couldn't endure the atrocious torture of the Japanese soldiers. Because of that, his father lived a poor life in his later years[1].

Even though his father was born with a golden spoon in his mouth thanks to his grandfather, he refused to study abroad in Japan—which was common for the wealthy at the time. Instead, he ran errands for the Korean Independence Corps, which left him severely disabled.

‘You shouldn't resent your grandfather.’

Those were his last words to Song Chang-Wook, who was still just in middle school back then. His late father looked as if he felt so bad for him that he didn't know what to do.

Despite being severely disabled, he had used his money to maintain his late grandfather's birth home.

Eventually, the government designated it as the birth home of Baekesan, a person of distinguished service to independence[2], and set the cost of its maintenance absurdly low, allowing his father to protect it when he normally wouldn't have been physically fit enough to.

Song Chang-Wook inherited the old Taegukgi hanging in the middle of the wall of his office from his late grandfather.

He had already chosen and purchased a site in Goseong for the next-generation energy facility. He even planned to build a road there that would connect it to the Eurasian Rail.

“Phew.”

Almost an hour past midnight, he finally put his documents away and stood up.

He had to prepare for the next day, but more importantly, he had to go home. He felt bad for the agents standing guard and waiting for him outside.

Song Chan-Wook firmly pressed the bridge of his nose with his thumb and index fingers, then put on his jacket.

*Click.*

Upon opening the door and walking out of his office, he saw two agents standing in front of the door with their feet wide apart and hands clasped together in front of them.

“I’m leaving too late, aren’t I?” Song Chang-Wook asked.

“Not at all, sir,” one of the agents responded.

This was refreshing.

Seeing the smiles of the young people working for South Korea always energized him.

The three got in the elevator. While waiting, he watched one of the agents order the others on the radio to prepare the car.

Those in their early thirties were going to be hungry at this hour.

“Why don’t we have Janchi-guksu[3] before we head home?” Song Chang-Wook asked.

“Are you hungry, sir?”

Song Chang-Wook couldn’t answer right away. He thought he would have a stomachache all night if he had Janchi-guksu right now.

At his age, his digestive system no longer worked as well as it used to.

“Mr. Director, we eat snacks when we’re hungry,” the agent reassured.

*Could there be an answer that’s more praiseworthy than this?*

If his youngest daughter was a little younger, Song Chang-Wook would’ve introduced her to him so that he could be his son-in-law.

*Ding.*

When the elevator opened, an agent quickly went to the hallway.

*Chk.*

“Hallway is clear.”

The agent who stayed behind stood closer to Song Chang-Wook. They then walked out of the elevator together.

The agents had a pistol strapped to their waists. Rather than pulling the gun up, they took it out by pulling the gun downward.

Song Chang-Wook had just recently heard that a few days ago, they’d had to fight off some drunk person who tried to get into the building.

Song Chang-Wook got in the backseat of the car that was parked as close as possible to the entrance. The agent accompanying him then hopped in the passenger seat.

*Chk.*

“Go,” the same agent said.

The car in front, which had two agents inside, left first. Song Chang-Wook’s vehicle followed closely behind.

Song Chang-Wook felt bad for making four precious young people work so late into the night just because of one old person.

Looking outside the window, he saw drunk people walking onto the road to hail a taxi. They were starting to make a scene.

Cha Dong-Wook was grateful even for these alcohol-intoxicated people—even they were doing their best to live with what they had been dealt with.

The young agents working hard to protect South Korea and those working hard in their own ways were the reasons their nation could prosper.

*How happy would my late grandfather and father have been if they had seen this?*

Song Chang-Wook smiled to himself.

*Screech!*

The car urgently crossed the centerline.

Song Chang-Wook swayed and lost his balance, causing him to crash into the car door to his right.

Flinching, he looked up. A man was reaching for the back door handle on the right side of the car.

*Why is he doing that? Does he think this car is a taxi?*

Soon after, a glaring light flashed across Song Chang-Wook’s surprised expression.