

## **Blackfield 331**

Chapter 331: Things Had Escalated (2)

The situation was becoming increasingly difficult.

*Chk.*

"Fourth-floor basement cleared!"

It had been over an hour, but they had only just cleared down to the fifth basement floor. The team assigned to the floors aboveground was currently on the fiftieth floor, having started from the top of the building. The people holding out in the building were also a problem.

*Chk.*

"We're in one of the offices on the fiftieth floor. There are about seventy people in here."

Kim Hyung-Jung let out a long sigh.

Overtime was understandable. He could fully empathize with the mindset of employees assigned to night duty. However, the soldiers and agents risking their lives for this search didn't have the time to play hide and seek in different offices.

*What if someone suddenly pops out and our men shoot out of instinct?*

Kim Hyung-Jung shook his head at the chilling thought. Right after, his phone rang.

*Rrrring. Rrrring. Rrrring.*

"Kim Hyung-Jung speaking."

- Manager Kim, this is Jeon Sang-Woo.

"How may I help you, Director?"

Jeon Sang-Woo was the director of the National Intelligence Service's Foreign Affairs division.

- Let's send the employees of the International Building back to the offices we've already cleared.

Feeling as if his chest would ignite at the slightest spark, Kim Hyung-Jung silently exhaled hot steam to the side.

- We've already inspected them, so it shouldn't be a problem, right? Although it's been delayed, we still have to prepare for the International Energy Conference and finalize the trade symposium, which we'll need in two days. We have to be reasonable.

"Director, it's dangerous to be in the International Building right now. You know how risky it is to send people into places we've only just inspected," Kim Hyung-Jung responded as calmly as possible.

- Manager Kim, we're all one family here! I know it's tough, but we all work for the nation's progress! I'm dying here with calls coming in from all sides.

"Our agents are literally risking their lives in these searches."

- Manager Kim!

Kim Hyung-Jung didn't respond. If he did, he felt as if he would shout in anger.

- Hello? Manager Kim!

"Yes, Director," Kim Hyung-Jung forced himself to reply.

Jeon Sang-Woo's heated breath crossed through the call.

- I'm dealing with ministers, deputy ministers, and members of parliament calling at this hour. I know the counter-terrorism team is on edge, but you can't vent your frustrations like this! Do you understand how much damage it would do to the nation if our preparations fail?

"I'm sorry, Director. If it's necessary, please speak with the director and issue an order."

- Manager Kim!

"Yes! Director!"

Enough was enough. Kim Hyung-Jung growled back his reply and looked away, wishing he could curse out loud at the end of the dark lobby.

- Hey! Kim Hyung-Jung! You...! Don't you recognize the seniority here even though you're on the counter-terrorism team? Are you so blind that you always need the assistant director to speak for you, you greenhorn?

"Director! Our agents and officers are risking their lives right now. I wish you would show the assistant director some respect, too!"

*Why am I acting like this? Why am I so angry?*

Kim Hyung-Jung immediately regretted his response.

Such reactions could negatively influence Go Gun-Woo and Kang Chan. He knew that better than anyone else.

"I'm sorry. I'm just a bit tense..."

- You! I'll be watching you! Counter-terrorism team? You've already lost a director and a chairman, so what exactly have you accomplished? If today's event causes any disruption, it won't just be overlooked.

"I'll take responsibility, sir."

- You better.

The call abruptly ended. Kim Hyung-Jung rubbed his face with one hand and looked at the armed agents.

*Rrrring. Rrrring. Rrrring.*

*This son of a bitch...!*

Kim Hyung-Jung barely managed to swallow the curse that was about to explode.

*This day is just too much! We're just trying to combat terrorism! The agents and soldiers are out here risking their lives to protect the safety and lives of the citizens!*

Even if it was unavoidable to spectate and broadcast, it was still wrong for others to incessantly call them and tell them what not to do.

Out of consideration for the morale of the counter-terrorism team agents around him, Kim Hyung-Jung swallowed the rising curses and irritation.

*Rrrring. Rrrring. Rrrring.*

Surprised, Kim Hyung-Jung picked up the phone and pressed the answer button.

"This is Kim Hyung-Jung!"

- Why do you sound like that? Did something happen?

"It's nothing—no, I mean, how did your trip go?"

- We grabbed a bag from the ship, but we haven't gotten any results yet. I'll open it when we land. Can you send a helicopter to the Seongnam Air Base?

"Weren't you just at Vladivostok? Have you already returned to South Korea?"

The nearby agents were clearly trying to listen in on their conversation. He was certain enough to bet his entire fortune on it.

- I couldn't contact you immediately because I was coordinating with the satellite surveillance team, the Russian intelligence bureau, and the Chinese intelligence bureau. According to the pilot, we should arrive in about thirty minutes.

"Got it. I'll arrange for a helicopter right away."

- Please send military uniforms and weapons for four people as well. Note that one of us has really long legs.

"Will do, sir."

Kim Hyung-Jung momentarily thought of Gérard, whom Kang Chan had departed with.

*Is it really alright for someone not affiliated with the National Intelligence Service to be involved in matters like this?*

- Manager Kim.

"Yes, Assistant Director."

The way Kim Hyung-Jung responded made him feel an unusual emotion. He turned his gaze out the window.

- Are you really okay?

"I might just be tired. Perhaps I should prepare some coffee before you arrive."

Kang Chan chuckled in response.

- I'll see you in a bit.

"Yes, sir."

After hanging up the phone, Kim Hyung-Jung turned away and held back a smile.

"The assistant director is on his way here," he said.

A nearby agent's eyes, which were the only part that wasn't covered by his helmet and mask, briefly flickered. He seemed to be holding back a smile too.

*Oh, I almost forgot!*

Kim Hyung-Jung picked up the phone to arrange for a helicopter.

*What about Gérard?*

The dial tone began to ring.

*For now, just think of it as a joint operation with the French Foreign Legion. I'll worry about the rest later!*

Kim Hyung-Jung suddenly felt so at ease that he chuckled.

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*Click.*

With an impassive expression, Abibu picked up a neatly folded handkerchief and dabbed it against his mouth.

It was truly splendid. The International Building looked as though it stood at the center of a festival, illuminated by the lights from news broadcast crews and the neighboring buildings. It seemed to vividly showcase the growth of Korea.

From the brightly lit upper floors, he could see a considerably large group of men in white shirts and women in uniforms and suits.

Despite the traffic police's constant directions, people and vehicles continued to crowd the roads. Spectators from nearby buildings also gazed out from their illuminated windows with curious eyes. Abibu still had not turned on his lights.

As his eyes glistened in the window reflection, he ordered, "Get ready."

"Yes, sir," his attendant responded.

The attendant placed two black electronic devices the size of lunch boxes next to Abibu. He then moved what looked like a music stand next to him and set three tablets on it. Afterward, he turned on the devices.

*Chk.*

"Basement level three cleared."

*Chk.*

"Got it. Keep up the good work."

The reports from 606's Special Operations Unit and Kim Hyung-Jung's responses came through clearly from the first device.

"Search of basement level three is complete," the attendant explained in Arabic, and Abibu nodded.

*Chk.*

“We’ve moved the staff down to the forty-ninth floor.”

*Chk.*

“Understood.”

The attendant relayed the communications between the Jeongpyeong special forces team and Kim Hyung-Jung in Arabic.

The far left tablet was tuned in to a Korean news broadcast. Surprisingly, the middle and rightmost tablets displayed CCTV footage of the International Building and the surrounding roads, with the tablet in the middle showing a split-screen view and the rightmost tablet zoomed in on the selected footage.

Abibu reached for the last electronic device and pressed a button.

*Rring.*

“Warriors, prepare for the holy battle.”

*Rring.*

“We await your command, sir!”

As the soft Arabic conversation continued, Abibu began to look satisfied.

*Rring.*

He pressed a button on the device again.

“Today, Korea will feel great terror through our holy battle. Warriors, proceed with honor! Show our greatness to all nations of the world. Let the building before us symbolize Korea’s downfall.”

Abibu, as if delivering a speech, raised his left hand and thrust it forward twice.

*Rring.*

“Allahu Akbar!”

*Rring.*

“Takbīr[1].”

After removing his hand from the device, Abibu picked up the neatly folded handkerchief and wiped his hands.

“We shall broadcast the humiliation we endured in Afghanistan on their own channels.”

With a flick, the used handkerchief joined the others in a wooden box beneath his feet.

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*Click.*

Sharlan put the blood-streaked knife on the dining table and turned off the stove.

“Mmmph! Mmmph!”

He had set two dining chairs facing each other between the living room and the kitchen, and Smithen was tied to one of them, shaking his head as if to say something. His shirt was in tatters, revealing knife wounds, and clumps of blood were oozing from his thighs.

*Screech.*

Sharlan placed a boiling kettle on the table.

“You know how this goes. It’s now time to stop the bleeding, right?”

“Mmmph! Mmmph!”

“What’s that?”

“Mmmph! Mmmmmph! Mmmph!”

Sharlan’s lips curved into a long smile.

“Smithen, I already know everything about where Kang Chan’s parents are, their security systems, and personnel. Troops are boringly waiting for me outside, too. If you thought that kind of information would entice me, I’m profoundly disappointed.”

“Hnngh! Mmmph!”

Sharlan lifted the kettle’s handle with the tips of his fingers.

*Drip, drip.*

Due to his awkward grip, the kettle tilted, and boiling water spilled onto the floor.

“Oh! Should I clean this up?”

“Mmmph! Hnnnngh!”

Smithen quickly nodded, then violently shook his head with a shocked expression when Sharlan’s expression suddenly changed.

“I’ve taken drugs to keep me awake just so I can kill Kang Chan, the man who ruined my life, yet after barely returning from hell, a crazed womanizer is already telling me to clean the floor?”

“Hnngh! Mmppphh!”

*Drip, drip!*

Sharlan poured water from the kettle toward Smithen’s thighs.

“Grrrr—mmmph! Grrr!”

*Drip, drip, drip.*

Smithen, burying his head and crying out, prompted Sharlan to slowly tilt the kettle even further.

"Think, Smithen. You need to think of a way to bring his parents out tomorrow morning. I need to be able to slash that bastard's heart and ribs, so you better figure out a way for us to meet!"

*Drip, drip, drip.*

"Grrr! Grrrr! Grrrr—Hnnngh!"

"Don't miss this golden opportunity when his attention is elsewhere, Smithen. Think. Think of a way to call out those two moles, who have turned off their phones."

Sharlan gradually moved the kettle toward Smithen's groin.

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*Chk.*

"Forty-eighth floor cleared. Should we continue to send civilians down?"

*Chk.*

"Proceed as we are for now. Control room, block the lights and fire barrier on the forty-eighth floor."

An agent relayed the situation over the radio to Abibu.

"This is taking so long," Abibu said.

Even he could clearly see what was happening. Descending the stairs of the towering International Building, which was illuminated only by the lights, were people casually chatting with their hands in their pockets.

"Move out."

Abibu rubbed his thumb, index, and middle finger together as he eyed the International Building.

The moment the civilians reached the forty-fifth floor, the bravery of the Islamic warriors would be broadcast from South Korea's International Building to the world.

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By the time Kang Chan arrived in South Korea, he was already feeling both physically and mentally numb. Fortunately, the night air coming in through the open door instantly cleared his senses.

After opening the cockpit door, he said, "Thank you for your hard work."

The pilot and co-pilot now looked so haggard that Kang Chan wondered if they were the same people he saw in the morning.

Both men stood up and saluted him.

"I used to be a combat pilot, yet I've never freely flown over Russia and China like this before and treated as well as they did at both airports," the pilot said. "As a National Intelligence Service pilot, I greatly appreciate how you have elevated our country's status, assistant director!"

Kang Chan chuckled. "See you around."

"I'll be eagerly stocking up on stamina until then," the pilot replied.

They shared a laugh. With a nod of gratitude, Kang Chan then disembarked from the plane.

*Thud thud thud thud.*

*Flying is exhausting.*

Kang Chan, Seok Kang-Ho, Gérard, and Choi Jong-Il quickly headed toward the helicopter. A counter-terrorism team member stood in front of it, holding a rifle with its muzzle pointed to the ground. After receiving a salute, they boarded immediately.

*Thud thud thud thud.*

"What's the situation!" asked Kang Chan.

"Still searching!" the agent answered.

Kang Chan nodded. The agent then brought two bags from the back.

*No words need to be said in this situation.*

Opening the bags revealed black military uniforms, masks, helmets, and other equipment, including K7 submachine guns with a thirty-round magazine, two Colt pistols, large knives, radios, and spare magazines.

Upon getting dressed, he felt as if he had finally returned home after a long and distant journey. As Gérard curiously looked at the Taegukgi patch on his left forearm, the city lights below shone along the road.

*Thud thud thud thud.*

Kang Chan's eyes, reflected in the helicopter window, glinted sharply.

*Why do I feel this way? Is it because I'm dressed and armed?*

His heart, which had been unfazed until now, was heavily pounding against his chest.

*Thump, thump. Thump, thump.*

Kang Chan turned to Seok Kang-Ho. The three men knew what his gaze implied.

Seok Kang-Ho smiled, his eyes glinting. The scar on Gérard's cheek stretched as he smiled.

*Click-clack!*

Choi Jong-Il, with a determined expression, pulled the bolt of his gun.

Chapter 332: No Escaping The Attacks (1)

"Please go down to the forty-sixth floor," Cha Dong-Gyun commanded.

"That's enough!" one of the men yelled as he stomped on the ground.

These civilians were initially surprised to see the black military uniforms and rifles. However, the further they descended, the more they relaxed. By the forty-seventy floor, they were already defiant.

"Isn't everything okay up there? Why aren't you letting us go back?"

The man looked around for support. He was in his mid-thirties and had a large physique.

"No one is allowed to enter the existing checkpoints until the entire building has been inspected, so please either leave or go back downstairs."



“Argh, damn it! You...” the man trailed off, but he definitely planned to say, “You motherfucker.”

The mood instantly turned stiff.

He seemed flustered by what he said yet also looked like he didn’t want to back down because of the people looking at him.

The man frowned and glared at Cha Dong-Gyun.

At that moment, an unexpected voice reached the ears of Cha Dong-Gyun, Kwak Cheol-Ho, and the rest of the men.

*Chk.*

“This is Kang Chan. Arriving at the rooftop.”

*Chk.*

“Understood. Command, raise the fire barrier to the forty-eighth floor.”

*Chk.*

“Raising the fire barrier!”

Cha Dong-Gyun felt like a weight had been lifted off his shoulders.

*Chk.*

“Captain, why haven’t the people upstairs been evacuated? Turn off the lights up there first.”

*Chk.*

“There are still people from Kotra and other affiliated organizations. We still can’t get them out because the Foreign Affairs division/Directorate of Public Affairs of the National Intelligence Service insists that they’re preparing for an event in two days.”

After a brief pause, they saw flashing lights and heard a helicopter’s blades rotating outside.

*Chk.*

“I’ll talk to their director/directorate. You’re in a dangerous situation, so please turn down the lights first.”

*Chk.*

“Understood. Command, turn the lights of the forty-seventh floor off.”

*Chk.*

“We’ll turn the lights off once the firewall has been activated.”

Sensing that something was amiss, the men followed Cha Dong-Gyun and his crew to the window and looked at the helicopter.

With the rhythmic sound of the machine, the firewall began to go up.

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Abibu looked at the helicopter wistfully.

“That little punk...!”

Abibu had been waiting for Kang Chan all this time, but he had not expected him to arrive now of all times.

He only had to wait for the soldiers to go down two more floors.

It would have been nice if Kang Chan arrived after Abibu finished the big picture.

Abibu glared at the International Building with a dark expression. The helicopter had circled around and was now landing on the roof.

*What would that little punk do?*

He had access to the operation’s radio frequencies, but it was still hard to expect what Kang Chan would do.

After all, terrorism was only as successful as the number of civilian casualties it took. Hence, they would definitely try toIt was better to try to rescue even one person before the power went out.

Abibu reached out and pressed a button on the device.

*Beep.*

“Soldiers, begin.”

*Beep.*

“Allhu Hu Akbar!”

*Beep.*

“Tagbir.”

They exchanged words with a sense of finality.

The International Building would soon fall under Abibu’s control. The longer it stayed his, the more the country’s credibility would sink to the bottom.

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Everyone’s eyes, including the man who had been cursing, all turned to the rising firewall.

“You’ve been contacted, right? Can we go up now?” the man asked Cha Dong-Gyuun.

At that moment, they heard a circuit breaker fall. At the same time, all the lights on the forty-seventh floor went out.

The men glanced around, and some women screamed. It was dark enough on the stairs that they had to rely on the emergency exit lights at the bottom of the stairs and lights from the neighboring buildings.

“What are you doing?!” the man yelled.

“Let’s just go down,” one of the men’s colleagues urged.

“Let go of me! What the hell? Are we criminals? Terrorists? Fuck, you weren’t doing anything when a bomb went off in the middle of Seoul and killed the head of the National Intelligence Service!” the man shouted so loudly that the building rang. “I’m not going down! Call the head of the search!”

The man flung off his colleague’s arm and stepped in front of Cha Dong-Gyun.

“What are you glaring at me for? I didn’t say anything wrong!”

The man’s face was red.

“Please cooperate,” Cha Dong-Gyun quietly repeated.

“I told you to call your boss!”

Cha Dong-Gyun sighed quietly. If he got mad here, it would be funny. He wished he could spend even just twenty seconds alone with this guy someplace else.

“Stop it! What are you doing?”

His colleagues tried to stop him.

“Let go! I said let go! We haven’t done anything wrong!”

A commotion erupted for a while.

*Click. Click. Click. Click.*

Just then, they heard someone moving above them.

Everyone’s gazes turned, and Cha Dong-Gyun stepped back to look up.

“What are you doing?”

It was Kang Chan.

Seok Kang-Ho, Gérard, Choi Jong-Il, and Kang Chan were coming down the stairs together.

*Click, click.*

As Kang Chan walked over, the shouting man gulped.

It was understandable. Even Seok Kang-Ho and Gérard would feel nervous whenever Kang Chan was flushed because it always made their gut warn them of danger.

Kang Chan sharply looked at the people.

“Is there a problem?”

The man quickly looked away. “N-No, sir.”

Kang Chan was one thing, but when he saw Seok Kang-Ho’s and Gérard’s terrifying glares, he finally felt completely intimidated.

“Hurry and send those people out.”

Kang Chan turned toward Cha Dong-Gyun.

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In a room at the International Hotel.

AK rifles, pistols, magazines, grenades, and even an RPG had been stacked on the bed.

People wearing baggy yellow military uniforms wrapped cloth around their forearms and shins and covered their faces with black bandanas.

*Clank. Clank. Clank.*

The man with a crescent-shaped magazine looked around the room, his rifle at his right. He then pressed the button on his radio.

Beep.

“We are out to right a wrong, to proclaim our great freedom and peace. With the blood shed in the temple today, we will be forgiven of all our sins, spared from hell, dwell in heaven, wear carnelian crowns on our heads, and marry seventy-two virgins!”

The eyes of the men listening flashed through their bandana.

“Dahana ruchibu [1]!”

The moment the masked men ran out, similarly dressed people came running from a room on the same floor.

“Aaaaah!” a female guest screamed. It almost sounded like a signal.

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*Beep.*

“The warriors have left.”

*Beep.*

“We must take over the first floor to win. While the hostages are being brought out, protect them.”

*Beep.*

“Understood.”

The moment Abibu straightened, a loud explosion burst out, followed by a dazzling light emanating from the lobby and the forty-fifth floor of the International Building.

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*Boom! Boooooom! Boom! Boom!*

A huge amount of debris flew from the escalators and emergency stairs leading to the basement.

The ear-splitting explosion threw Kim Hyung-Jung into the air.

*Thud! Thud! Thud! Thud!*

All three armed agents with him were also thrown back as if they had been hurled toward the entrance.

\*\*\*

*Rumble! Rumble! Rumble! Rumble!*

The onlookers covered their heads and ran toward the road.

*Chk.*

“Return fire!”

It was hard to tell who gave the order, but they had definitely just been given permission to shoot.

*Chk.*

“Hold the perimeter. Don’t let them get out!”

They understood now.

It was the command of the head of the NIS counter-terrorism team.

*Bang bang bang! Bang bang bang bang! Bang bang! Bang bang bang!*

The enemies came right up through the connecting shaft into the lobby of the International Building. They were about to leave through the front entrance but went right back in.

*Du du du! Thud! Du du du du! Thud!*

*Bang bang bang! Thud! Du du du du! Thud!*

Soldiers fell to the ground.

The engagement kept the enemy from exiting the front door.

If it hadn’t been for the men of the 35th Brigade, if they hadn’t held the perimeter as they were trained to do with their lives, none of the bystanders and the people on the ground now would have survived.

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The people looked completely stunned.

“Get inside!”

Kang Chan cursed and Seok Kang-Ho glared. Only then did they move the shaking civilians inside the office on the forty-seventh floor.

“I need one man to stay here. Everyone else, secure a way to the floors below,” Kang Chan commanded.

Cha Dong-Gyun and the soldiers rushed down.

*Chk.*

“Command, give me a report!”

*Chk.*

“There’s been an explosion in the basement and on the forty-fifth floor!”

It was a frantic radio call.

*Chk.*

“Masked gunmen have taken over the ground floor lobby. There are approximately fifty of them!”

*Damn it!*

He had wasted too much time getting a status report from above.

*Chk.*

“They’ve taken the International Hotel staff and guests as hostages. We’re getting a number!”

Kang Chan gritted his teeth.

*Chk.*

“The passage to the forty-fifth floor has been secured,” Cha Dong-Gyun radioed in.

Kang Chan dashed forward, and Seok Kang-Ho, Gérard, and Choi Jong-Il followed after him.

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*Du du du du! Du du! Du du du du! Du du du!*

*Pew! Peew! Pew! Pew!*

The agents of the counter-terrorism team moved the fallen Kim Hyung-Jung and three others to a more secure location. They then held the stairs of the second floor.

*Pew! Pew! Peew!*

Seeing a shadow moving, two of the agents pulled the trigger.

*Peeeeew!*

White smoke billowed up the stairs.

“Missile incoming! Take cover!”

*Craaash!*

The two agents who had been shooting at them were blasted into the air and tumbled down the stairs.

AK rifles were then aimed at them.

*Du du du! Du du! Du du du! Du du du du! Du du du du!*

\*\*\*

*Chk.*

“The enemy has shoulder-fired missiles! I repeat! The enemy has shoulder-fired missiles!” Kim Hyung-Jung reported. A series of rifle shots echoed behind him.

*Chk.*

“606! Situation report!”

*Chk.*

“We’re at the entrance to the first basement floor! There appears to be an explosion from four vans!” Jeong Won-Min quickly reported.

*Chk.*

“Two of the agents standing guard are down. Three are wounded.”

Five men lay covered in blood against the wall inside the underground parking garage.

*Chk.*

“The enemy has taken the first floor.”

Even if Kang Chan didn’t tell him about the situation, Jeong Won-Min had heard everything that had happened over the radio.

*Chk.*

“Secure the underground passage and stand by!”

*Chk.*

“Understood!”

Jeong Won-Min straightened his index and middle fingers and pointed ahead. He and four others then dashed up the stairs.

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The attendant relayed the instructions and responses to Abibu.

Abibu extended his hand.

*Beep.*

“Looks like they’re trying to secure the stairs to the basement. Strike at the first opportunity you see.”

*Beep.*

“Understood.”

Abibu looked ahead with a satisfied expression.

\*\*\*

Kang Chan headed down so quickly he looked as if he was flying.

To make up for the time it took to climb down broken stairs using ropes, he and the other soldiers ran down three or four flights of stairs at a time.

Even so, they still had about fifteen floors to go.

*Chk.*

“This is Kim Hyung-Jung. I’m on the second floor with the agents,” Kim Hyung-Jung reported. He sounded like he was talking through pain.

*Chk.*

“We’ll be there in a minute.”

They ran down the stairs using the emergency lights.

The footsteps, the clanking rifles, and the sound of heavy breathing were all they could hear.

*Dash! Dash! Dash!*

*Booom! Boom!*

As they descended from the seventh floor to the sixth floor, Kang Chan was slammed hard into the wall, and a terrible pain shot straight through him. It was as if his ears had been ripped out.

Soon after, they received a radio transmission from the situation room.

*Chk.*

“This is the first basement floor! The enemy threw a bag, and it exploded! The cameras are out, so we can’t check the basement!”

Kang Chan gritted his teeth and ran down.

*Chk.*

“This is 606! We saw an explosion on the stairs!” Jeong Won-Min radioed in.

*Du du du! Du du! Du du du!*

*Pew! Pew! Peeew! Pew!*

Over the radio and down the stairs, they could hear alternating gunfires.

*Chk.*

“606! Prepare for small missiles and secure the basement!”

*Chk.*

“Understood.”

They spoke as they ran.

“Haah! Haah!”



After two more flights, they finally saw the counter-terrorism team below.

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*Du du du du du du du du!*

A military helicopter hovered over the International Building.

They didn't know when they appeared, but there were reporters from different countries reporting on the situation with the International Building in the background.

Kim Gwan-Sik was sitting on the sofa watching TV. Next to him, Kim Mi-Young and his wife were also watching.

[The explosion occurred shortly after a helicopter landed on the roof of the International Building. I repeat. The first floor of the International Building has been occupied by masked forces.]

The news reporter quickly gave the viewers a timeline of what happened at the building today.

[Currently, about ten hostages are being held in the lobby on the ground floor, and we know that there are about seventy employees of Kotra and related organizations on the forty-fifth floor, where the explosion is believed to have occurred. According to those who have contacted family members by phone, they appear to have suffered no casualties.]

At that moment, an explosion burst out, causing the camera to shake. The reporter bent over.

[Oh!]

The reporter's startled yelp and all the screams that erupted around him echoed through the TV.

[It's an explosion! There's just been another huge explosion!]

The camera panned to the building, zooming in as much as it could to show the lobby.

[Gunfire seems to have been exchanged.]

The scene changed dramatically as the camera turned to a group of soldiers aiming their guns at the building.

[The soldiers you're looking at are from the 35th Brigade. The 606's Special Operations Unit and the NIS counter-terrorism team appear to be inside. There are reports that the man who went down in the helicopter is the head of the team, but we don't know for sure yet.]

Kim Gwan-Sik pursed his lips. 'Kang Chan!'

He looked at Kim Mi-Young as the feed transitioned to the newscaster who was in the studio.

[We've panned the camera to the studio for a moment. Al Zazirah is now reporting an announcement from UIS, who says they claim responsibility for the attack. Let's watch the live broadcast.]

A grainy screen popped up, showing a man wearing a black mask sitting at a desk and glaring at the camera.

When the man began speaking, a Korean interpreter relayed his words in a dry tone.

[We warn South Korea for insulting us.]

The top and bottom corners of the screen were filled with indecipherable Arabic.

[South Korea has insulted us in Afghanistan, Africa, and Libya. Until the country admits its sins and apologizes, South Korea will not be able to escape our attacks.]

The man nodded, and the screen cut off.

Chapter 333: No Escaping The Attacks (2)

*Click, click!*

Kang Chan ran to Kim Hyung-Jung, who was leaning against the middle of the stairs.

“Are you okay?”

“Yes. Just shocked by the explosion, but it’s bearable.”

Kim Hyung-Jung’s clothes were a mess, but he didn’t seem to be seriously injured.

“What floor is the situation room on?”

“Fourth floor.”

“You should head there. I’ll take command from here.”

Their eyes met.

Kim Hyung-Jung gritted his teeth and stood up.

“Kwak Cheol-Ho, Take one of your men and head to the situation room. Get the floor plans of the second and third floors if you can.”

“Yes, sir.”

Kwak Cheol-Ho left with one of the agents.

There was a hole from the lobby to the ceiling of the third floor, giving the second and third floors an overlooking view of the lobby like the VIP seats of an opera.

\*\*\*

The screen moved back to the studio.

[We have footage of the masked gunmen coming out of their hotel rooms. These fifty people had been staying at the International Hotel as tourists.]

The camera footage showed the perpetrators running out of the rooms and toward the stairs.

[They kidnapped the female staff and guests on the first floor and ran toward a walkway that connects to the International Building. We understand that the guests were staying individually, not as part of a tour group, and are of various nationalities, including Indian, Pakistani, Chinese, and Egyptian.]

The screen showed the gunmen heading toward the International Building.

[The explosion occurred at this time, resulting in multiple casualties in the hotel. Judging from their attacks, it seems their plan from the beginning was to take over the first floor of the International Building.]

A part of the screen now showed the newscaster.

[The military has announced that armored vehicles have been deployed and that an emergency order has been issued to the airborne forces. The head of the NIS's counter-terrorism team is now in charge of suppressing the terrorist attack on the International Building, and it has been confirmed that he has already entered the building through a helicopter.]

Kim Gwan-Sik watched the TV nervously. Two hours had already passed since midnight.

\*\*\*

The gunfight had momentarily stopped.

Kang Chan looked at the floor plan that Kwak Cheol-Ho had brought with him.

It showed the items installed in the lobby and the tenants on the second and third floors, making it easier to understand the situation.

According to it, there was an entrance to the staircase that led to the third floor.

Seok Kang-Ho, Gérard, Cha Dong-Gyun, Kwak Cheol-Ho, and the a leader of the counter-terrorism team, were with Kang Chan.

Kang Chan checked the layout and the actual situation three or four times.

“Can you see the enemies from the railings of the second or third floor?”

“Yes,” Cha Dong-Gyun answered.

The enemies hadn't moved one bit. They were glued to the entrance of the building like honey.

“I want snipers here, then.”

“Understood.”

Upon receiving Cha Dong-Gyun's gaze, Kwak Cheol-Ho quickly took action.

*Chk.*

“We'll have a helicopter evacuate the officer workers on the forty-seventh floor,” Kim Hyung-Jung radioed in.

*Chk.*

“Roger that.”

*Chk.*

“Got it. The UIS has announced on the air that it was them. They want us to apologize for what happened in Afghanistan, Africa, and Libya.”

That was ridiculous. Kang Chan counterpunched because they had provoked them first, and now they wanted an apology for it?

*Chk.*

“Is that it?”

*Chk.*

“Yes. It was a very short announcement.”

Kang Chan tilted his head.

They hadn’t demanded the release of the prisoners held in Mongolia?

*Chk.*

“Manager Kim, what about the CCTV on the first floor?”

*Chk.*

“The only ones that show any enemies are two that are far away. The ones that work are at a bad angle, so they don’t show the situation properly.”

*Chk.*

“I see. Please proceed with the helicopter extraction as you see fit.”

*Chk.*

“Understood.”

Kang Chan looked at the map again. He was missing something.

Seok Kang-Ho, Gérard, Cha Dong-Gyun, counter-terrorism team commander Kang Myung-Gu, and even Kwak Cheol-Ho, who had assigned the snipers and returned, looked at Kang Chan curiously. They had never seen him so long in thought in the middle of an operation.

“There has to be an answer,” Kang Chan mumbled as he pointed at the map. “They should have attacked this hotel, but they came all the way to the lobby with the hostages instead, where it would be hard to hide.”

With his index finger, Kang Chan pointed to the front of the lobby, where he assumed the enemies would be.

“A building this big wouldn’t collapse even if the bastards were wrapped in C-4s. What the hell do they want? They didn’t ask to release the prisoners. This can’t just be a show of force by the UIS.”

Kang Chan spoke as if he was talking to himself rather than giving an explanation.

“If that’s the case, shooting someone in the hotel and throwing a bomb would have been far more devastating and effective, so why did those bastards take over the first floor of the International Hotel?”

“Can’t we just worry about this after dealing with those idiots?” Seok Kang-Ho asked.

Kang Chan turned to him.

It sounded simple, but that was true. This asshole and Gérard were definitely starting to use their heads.

After a moment of studying the layout, Kang Chan asked, “Daye, do you remember Operation Mangala?”

Seok Kang-Ho smirked.

“Gérard, we’ll do the same thing we did in that operation.”

“You’re one hell of a captain,” Gérard said in French.

“Look here.”

Kang Chan stamped his index finger on the map and explained the plan.

\*\*\*

Abibu rubbed his fingers together and glared at the International Building.

‘Why is there no radio?’

He expected it to be buzzing with radio activity right now, but the International Building was strangely silent.

‘Are they aware that we’ve been eavesdropping...?’

Abibu glared at the device. The power and status lights were back on.

‘What are you scheming?’

He sharply glared at the building.

\*\*\*

The hostages, who were mostly women in their twenties and a few in their thirties, had been herded against the wall at the far end of the lobby.

“Aaah!”

“Shut up!”

Three of the enemies moved and strapped bombs on the women’s backs. They then tied their arms and both shoulders with industrial ties.

“Aaah! Aaah!”

Although they were angered by the screams, the men seemed to be taking pleasure in strapping the bombs to the hostages.

As they strapped each of the five hostages in turn, a cacophony of screams echoed through the dark lobby.

\*\*\*

Jeong Won-Min surrounded the entrance to the basement with his men and waited for the situation to develop.

Kang Chan was here, and he had radioed them. Within moments, the International Building fell had fallen silent. Only the occasional horrific scream from the hostages echoed down the downstairs.

He had never expected something like this to happen in Seoul, especially not in the middle of Samseong-Dong.

What in the world was Kang Chan doing?

Kang Chan hadn't said anything in nearly twenty minutes already.

"Are we still waiting?" one of the soldiers asked.

"Ten more minutes!" Jeong Won-Min briefly replied.

In an operation like this, silence meant a counterattack.

'What are you doing?'

Calculating the condition of the wounded, Won-Min pursed his lips and looked up. He remembered Kang Chan's face at the embassy when he had mercilessly given him the order to kill.

*Chk.*

"606! All units, stand by!"

Jeong Won-Min couldn't be happier to hear Kang Chan's voice through the radio.

*Chk.*

"606, stand by!"

There was no order on what to do or how to do it.

However, the 606 would stand by. Even if the next command would make them put their lives on the line, they would wait and carry out the order.

That was the 606 Special Operations Unit.

\*\*\*

Abibu jerked up.

However, only a few words for the 606 were transmitted through the radio.

'This crazy bastard!'

He couldn't get a grasp of Kang Chan. The stupid guy didn't know the basics of counter-terrorism!

Now that the UIS had shown their face on the air to take revenge, Kang Chan should have at least had the decency to ask for their demands.

*Beep.*

"We've set all the bombs on the hostages."

Right after, the radio crackled.

Abibu was still sharply glaring at the International Building.

Did Kang Chan need an example?

Click.

Abibu pressed a button on the device.

*Beep.*

“Pick a hostage.”

*Beep.*

“Yes, sir.”

\*\*\*

Right after the enemy spat Arabic over the hostages' choked cries, Seok Kang-Ho moved like a cat on the railing of the second floor and gently tapped Kang Chan on the shoulder.

Kang Chan quickly turned to him.

‘What?’

‘The radio. It’s a radio,’ Seok Kang-Ho mouthed.

‘Those bastards! They’re contacting someone using a radio.’

Kang Chan’s eyes glinted. There was no reason for him not to believe Seok Kang-Ho, especially since the man understood Arabic.

Kang Chan pointed his index and middle fingers at Gérard, Seok Kang-Ho, and Cha Dong-Gyun, then to three different spots.

They had all improved. At the very least, Cha Dong-Gyun and Kwak Cheol-Ho were now good enough to lead any special forces team in the world. That much was evident in how they moved right now.

While the enemy’s nerves were on edge, the two were moving close against the second-floor railing without making a sound. Such a feat required complete control of their boots, strapped-on gear, magazines, and rifles.

If they improved any further, they wouldn’t make noise even if they moved at an even faster pace. At that point, they would have already reached Seok Kang-Ho and Gérard’s level.

Kang Chan stepped back in the hallway and entered the stairs.

*Chk.*

“Manager Kim, the enemies are contacting someone. Can you pick up their frequency?”

*Chk.*

“We’ll check it out. However, the PRC-110 we’re using is almost impossible to eavesdrop on. With the police, helicopters, and the airborne units’ radios overlapping each other, it won’t be easy to find our frequencies.”

*Chk.*

“I understand, but please check anyway, sir.”

*Chk.*

“I will.”

\*\*\*

Abibu quickly stood up as his attendant interpreted the conversation for him.

How? All Kang Chan had done after such a long time of dead silence was order the 606. How did he find out Abibu’s men were communicating with him?

That meant Kang Chan was near the soldiers, watching them. However, that was all Abibu could figure out.

Abibu was reaching for the device when he paused. The NIS was obviously searching for a radio frequency. It would be unwise to tip them off now.

On top of that, there was no need to give a hint to his enemies when they already believed that they couldn’t be eavesdropped on.

There was no way they could get caught, but it was better to be careful.

Abibu gazed at his attendant, finding him also looking quite puzzled.

\*\*\*

Kim Hyung-Jung trusted Kang Chan completely.

Calls poured into the situation room and his phone, but carrying out Kang Chan’s orders was more important than those.

Kim Hyung-Jung held the phone to his ear and turned around in panic.

“The PRC-110 is being bugged?”

- We’ve picked up the signal of a bug nearby from the kind of equipment that only the top five countries’ intelligence bureaus would have.

“Are you sure?”

Kim Hyung-Jung had given orders to find the radio frequencies of the enemy but learned of something more shocking.

- It’s a method of scanning all the surrounding frequencies to chase down a targeted frequency. It first came to light late last year, and all we know is that it’s been used by the DIA and the DGSE. The downside is that it creates a peculiar signal that chases the frequency.

“How do we stop that?”

- You can simultaneously change all of the radio frequencies being used to the UHF channel. They’ll be less accurate then.

“They won’t be able to eavesdrop on that?”



- If we follow their signal, we'll be able to locate them. These kinds of bugs have to be within a three-kilometer radius. Beyond that, the signal becomes so loud that it would immediately give away their location.

“Got it.”

After hanging up the phone, Kim Hyung-Jung quickly rushed outside.

*Oh, right!*

If he just ran down the stairs like this, he could be shot by friendly fire. However, sneaking up on them would be even more dangerous.

He had no other choice.

Kim Hyung-Jung pressed the button on his radio.

*Chk.*

“This is Command. Coming down.”

The reply came a moment later.

*Chk.*

“Please move along the staircase.”

Kim Hyung-Jung quickly scrambled down against the wall of stairs.

*Tap, tap, tap. Tap, tap, tap.*

The soldiers heard his footsteps coming down the stairs.

*Click, click!*

Kang Chan and Choi Jong-Il immediately pointed their rifles at Kim Hyung-Jung but relaxed upon realizing who was approaching them.

“What is it?”

“They're most likely eavesdropping on our radios. We've detected a bug.”

A special forces team's communication devices were being tapped?

A thought suddenly occurred to Kang Chan.

“Can we locate where it's coming from?”

“It should be within a three-kilometer radius. They said we should change the channel to UHF even if it's less accurate. If we track them on that channel, we'll be able to figure out where they are.”

Kang Chan glanced down and then back up.

Was this what was bothering him? That motherfucker was pulling this stunt?

“This place goes live in five minutes. Manager Kim, please send the agents to Park Hotel and break into the room Abibu is in. I’ll stall him so he can’t get rid of the equipment.”

Kim Hyung-Jung looked at Kang Chan in surprise.

“Maybe someone still at the hotel can help, no? Abibu has a press conference scheduled for tomorrow. If nothing comes out from him, we’ll be accused of treating an important Saudi official like a terrorist because of the UIS.”

“Sir.”

They were speaking in whispers halfway up the stairs.

“This attack is certainly not the Sunni or Shia way. The fact that they didn’t take any victims from the hote and that they didn’t demand the release of the prisoners we caught in Mongolia means they’re clearly targeting something. They know the International Building inside and out, and they’re moving according to plan.”

A terrorist attack like this had never happened in South Korea. Hence, Kim Hyung-Jung couldn’t make this kind of judgment.

Without Kang Chan, he would have just kept following the standard counter-terrorism protocol, which would have put him a step behind the enemies.

“We’ve lost nearly a dozen soldiers. We can’t be passive about this attack just because we’re afraid of criticism. If you’re worried about taking responsibility, I’ll take all the blame.”

Kang Chan’s eyes relayed more determination than his words.

“I’ll head up and give the command by phone,” Kim Hyung-Jung replied.

Kang Chan was leading this operation with the information that Hwang Ki-Hyun had left behind. If there was anyone who had to take responsibility, Kim Hyung-Jung was set on being the one.

“Make sure the agents don’t see you, and break in if you have to. Until the situation there is taken care of, I’ll stall for time over the radio.”

Kim Hyung-Jung nodded and ran up.

*Tap, tap, tap, tap. Tap, tap, tap, tap.*

Once the footsteps had become distant, Kang Chan pressed the radio button.

*Chk.*

“Initiate the counter-terrorism operation.”

\*\*\*

Receiving Abibu’s gaze, his attendant interpreted Kang Chan’s orders into Arabic.

- 606, once shots have been fired from the lobby, prevent the enemies from going into the basement.

They would be firing even though there were hostages.

Abibu glanced at the International Hotel.

- We'll begin the operation in three minutes.

Kang Chan continued issuing orders over the radio.

Abibu's lips curved into a victorious smile.

Although they seemed to have realized that the masked gunmen were talking to someone through the radio, they wouldn't be able to find this place. Even if they had a hunch, that wouldn't be enough to make them rush into his room.

Abibu felt like he could finally grasp what he wanted.

The moment the operation began, the explosion would go off.

All the hostages would die, and the more South Korean special forces soldiers died, the more his big picture would be complete.

Then at the press conference tomorrow morning, Abibu would step up and say that he would mediate between the UIS and South Korea. He was certain that South Korea would not be able to disclose its activities in Africa and Libya now.

After a moment of lull, he heard someone radioing in from the situation room.

*Chk.*

"Everything is ready."

Stupid kid! The moment Kang Chan ordered the operation to begin, he would lose everything.

Abibu reached out for the device to give his warriors a final command. However, before he could, the radio crackled again.

"Abibu," Kang Chan called.

Abibu was so surprised that he felt as if his heart dropped to his feet.

"You think you're all that, don't you?"

The attendant cautiously glanced at Abibu and then relayed Kang Chan's words.

"You motherfucker."

The attendant hesitated to interpret that transmission.

"Take good care of your neck."

Kang Chan then said something Abibu couldn't understand. What happened next unfolded in the blink of an eye.

*Boom! Boom!*

*Dash! Dash! Dash!*

*Click! Click! Click!*

The doors burst open, almost causing it to crash onto the floor, and fully armed agents burst in. Abibu couldn't even do anything.

Chapter 334: I'll Kill All of You Guys! (1)

Everyone heard what Kang Chan said on the radio.

Jeong Won-Min and the other soldiers found it very absurd, but they didn't have the time to argue against it right now.

Right after, they heard Kim Hyung-Jung's long-awaited answer.

*Chk.*

“We have arrested Abibu and found a wireless wiretapping device and a communication device, which he was using to talk to the terrorists. It seems they also have access to the CCTVs of that room, the area around it, the lobby, and even the roads around the International Building.”

Kang Chan immediately pressed the button on his radio.

*Chk.*

“Just like everyone heard, we have caught the bastard that had bugged our radios in the Park Hotel. We will now begin suppressing the rest of our enemies.”

The emergency lights barely gave them enough visibility in the completely dark International Building.

Kang Chan continued, “I want the Jeungpyeong special forces soldiers standing by on the third floor to take charge of rescuing the hostages.”

Standing near the railings of the third floor, Cha Dong-Gyun and Kwak Cheol-Ho's eyes met in the darkness. They then braced themselves for the fight.

“In the best-case scenario, we'll only have to deal with thirty enemies. 606, status,” Kang Chan called.

*Chk.*

“606 is on standby.”

*Chk.*

“As I and the counter-terrorism team make our way down from the second floor, I need you to come up from the basement. Together, we'll make our way through our enemies. We have to eliminate all hostiles in a short period so that the Jeungpyeong special forces team can rescue the hostages.”

*Chk.*

“Yes, sir.”

*Chk.*

Kang Chan added, “There’s only one reason the UIS would like this when they have hostages—they’re waiting for us to attack them. The moment we do, they’ll most likely detonate the bombs strapped to the hostages in hopes of killing everyone.”

After Kang Chan delivered his orders, a few seconds of silence passed. Since he was still holding the button on his radio, everyone just nervously looked around their surroundings as they waited.

“Our enemies will shoot at us the moment we rush toward the lobby. That’s why we have to deal with the twenty tangos in the staircase. However, killing them when they have RPGs will be extremely difficult.”

*So that's why he was silent!*

“Our operation can’t exceed two minutes. If we can’t clear them out within that time, all teams—including the Jeungpyeong special forces team—are to simultaneously attack our enemies. This contingency plan requires sacrifices on our part, but it’s the only way to rescue our hostages. I apologize for assigning you to the most dangerous role, 606.”

Once Kang Chan was done issuing orders, the eyes of every Jeungpyeong special forces soldier glinted. They looked like they would rather change roles with the 606’s Special Operations Unit.

*Chk.*

“This is the 606,” Jeong Won-Min radioed in.

“We have been taught that when our country assigns us a mission, our military uniform could very well be the last thing we’d wear. Thank you for assigning us a duty befitting the 606. We’ll make sure to eliminate all tangos on sight.”

There were times when men’s passionate determination could make people’s blood boil.

As soon as Jeong Won-Min delivered his resolve through the radio, the agents and soldiers who were about to charge toward their enemies gritted their teeth. Kim Hyung-Jung, the agents in the situation room, and even the 35th brigade, which was protecting the perimeter of the building, all did as well.

*Chk.*

“Situation room, prepare to turn on the lights in the lobby right before we rescue the hostages,” Kang Chan said.

*Chk.*

“Yes, sir.”

*Chk.*

“35th brigade. Prepare for bomb explosions once we’ve rescued the hostages.”

*Chk.*

“Leave it to us,” the commander of the 35th brigade determinedly answered, his blood boiling.

*Chk.*

“All teams, stand by,” Kang Chan ordered.

They were now going to begin their operation to rescue ten hostages from fifty terrorists.

*Chk.*

“Jeungpyeong special forces team is on standby,” a soldier reported. The other teams followed his lead.

*Chk.*

“The 606 is on standby.”

*Chk.*

“The situation room is on standby.”

*Chk.*

“The 35th brigade is on standby.”

Instead of reporting on the radio, Kang Myung-Gu of the counter-terrorism team tapped Kang Chan’s shoulder twice from behind him.

*Chk.*

“Move out,” Kang Chan ordered, then took his hand off the radio button and grabbed his rifle.

*Haah. Haah.*

Kang Chan’s senses sharpened.

As if time was moving slowly, he saw Kang Myung-Gu from the counter-terrorism team checking on the agents to his left and right, Seok Kang-Ho’s eyes glinting, and Gérard glancing behind him.

Their plan was simple. They would kill the twenty enemies on the staircase, leaving them with only the thirty tangos left to deal with. That would match the number of Jeungpyeong special forces soldiers, who would rush into the lobby from the second and third floors.

They would be rappelling upside down, so they would have to hold their weapon in their right hand.

Those on the second floor would have to rappel seven meters down to the lobby, and those on the third floor would have to go down eleven meters. Even though they had to descend almost instantaneously, they had to stop right before their heads touched the ground. They would also have to use the momentum they had built to stand upright while shooting at their enemies.

If the Jeungpyeong special forces team hesitated during their descent, they would most certainly get shot at, and if they failed to get back to their feet immediately, a bomb would likely be thrown at them.

There were thirty-three men in the Jeungpyeong special forces team. Hence, for this operation to succeed, they each had a second to kill one enemy.

They also had to hit their targets right in their foreheads to guarantee that they wouldn't be able to move. Shooting them in the chest could give them a chance to press the detonation switch of the bombs.

*We don't even have the option of increasing the number of soldiers on the second and third floors.*

*Haah. Haah.*

Kang Chan slowly went down the stairs.

Thirty-three soldiers were already a lot of people rappelling downward. Any more than that and they would risk their lines getting tangled and their movements hindered.

They trusted each other because they were all in the Jeungpyeong special forces team, which was now one of the most famous special forces in the world. If they had to execute this operation in the past, they would've already shaken their heads in refusal.

Kang Chan went down the stairs from the second floor and headed toward the lobby. He could see the soldiers from the 606 climbing up the stairwell from below.

He pressed the stock of his rifle against his shoulder.

The plan they were using right now was the same as the one that they had used in Mangala. Back then, they had picked a fight to rescue their allies, who had been captured by the enemy. Soldiers then rappelled downward and eliminated their opponents on sight.

Kang Chan could remember Daye almost dying then because he had foolishly run toward their enemies all by himself.

Just like that time, to ensure that this plan would work, they had to drag their enemies as close to the stairs as possible.

*Haah. Haah.*

Kang Chan looked at Seok Kang-Ho, who was positioned to his right.

'I'll make the first move.'

'Alright.'

The moment Kang Chan pulled the trigger, they would no longer have the option to go back on this decision.

People who hadn't experienced a terrorist attack would never be able to objectively accept that ten female hostages disappeared without a trace because the bombs strapped to them exploded in the process of suppressing the terrorists.

Hence, if they failed to rescue the hostages, all of the hard work that they had done in this operation would be completely erased, leaving them with nothing but a horrible aftermath.

Their enemies had to run up the stairs for their plan to work. However, if they pressed the bomb switch just as Kang Chan and his team were shooting at them, that would spell the end of this operation.

Abibu would've ordered his warriors to attack them. That was probably why they obediently ran here from the hotel.

Kang Chan solidified his resolve.

*Haah. Haah.*

He aimed at the silhouette of an enemy's head.

Their opponents were wearing black bandanas at night, and there weren't any lights. Hence, it was difficult to see the outline of their heads. Special forces soldiers wore jungle hats for the same reason. The circular brim, which would be as close to their face as possible, would hide the outline of their heads when hiding in the overgrowth of jungles.

The moment Kang Chan pulled the trigger...

*Pew! Pow!*

Although he could barely see the enemy's head, he clearly saw it explode into pieces like a watermelon.

The hostages shrieked. "Kyaaa!"

At the same time, they heard their enemies yelling and moving.

*Whoosh! Whish!*

AK-47s sparked awake, sending bullets flying toward the stairs.

*Du du du! Du du! Du du du du du!*

The sparks lingered in the air for a moment before disappearing. The bullets that hit the marble floor ricocheted elsewhere.

*Du du! Ping! Pow pow! Du du du! Pow pow pow! Ping! Pow pow!*

*Pow! Pow!*

Shot in the leg, two of the counter-terrorism team's agents collapsed. Meanwhile, members of the 606 dragged their fallen comrades away from their enemies.

The enemies hadn't entered the staircase yet. They only fired indiscriminately toward the floors above and below them from the lobby.

Amid the gunfire, one of their opponents stood right in front of the entrance to the staircase, an RPG on their shoulder.

*Pew! Pow!*

However, Kang Chan's bullet quickly made their head explode, causing them to fall backward.

\*\*\*

[It looks like a battle has started!]



The cameras zoomed in toward the lobby of the International Building, which was being enveloped by flashes.

At the same time, the newscaster stopped speaking. Instead, a banner appeared at the bottom of the screen. It said “Lobby of the International Building” and “The South Korean soldiers have engaged the terrorists. According to speculations, this is a part of a suppression tactic.”

\*\*\*

*Pew! Pow! Pew! Pow!*

The counter-terrorism team followed right behind Kang Chan, who was going down the stairs. Meanwhile, the 606 were making their way up from the basement and were now almost at the entrance.

In this situation, Kang Chan knew that they’d suffer more than ten casualties if they were hit by an RPG or even just a grenade.

*Pew! Pew! Shatter! PEW! PEW! Shatter!*

One of the soldiers fired from the staircase and shattered the glass on the entrance of the International Building. Meanwhile, a bullet from their enemies hit the marble floor and ricocheted toward the Korean soldiers.

*Du du du! Pew! Pew! Du du du! Pew! PEW!*

They could hear their enemies shouting above the gunshots.

Gritting his teeth, Seok Kang-Ho told Kang Chan what one of the opponents had said. “The enemies are telling their men to hold their ground!”

*Pew! Pow! PEW! Pow! Du du du! Du du!*

Their enemies were clearly looking for an opportunity to blow up the bombs.

However, since Kang Chan and the Korean soldiers had been stalling for so long already, their enemies had resorted to shouting to suppress the urge to detonate the bombs.

*How long will they last without Abibu’s orders?*

The longer they had to wait, the more likely they were to press the switch to blow up the bombs.

*Du du du! Du du! Ping! Pow! Du du du! Pew! Pow!*

Two more soldiers fell. Their enemies were purposely shooting at the marble floor now.

*Chk.*

“Jeungpyeong special forces team! Situation room! Stand by!” Kang Chan radioed.

“Fuck!” Seok Kang-Ho swore. He already knew what Kang Chan would say next.

“On my signal, we will all advance toward our enemies!” Kang Chan commanded. They couldn’t stall any longer. “Make sure you’re positioned lower than the hostages!”

*Du du du! Du du du! Du du! PEW! Pew! Pew!*

*Chk.*

“Go go go!” Kang Chan shouted.

As ordered, Cha Dong-Gyun and the other Jeungpyeong special forces soldiers jumped down from the railings of the second and third floors and freefell toward the dark floor of the lobby.

*Swish!*

They had to descend eleven meters and depend on their senses to know when to slow down. After all, they couldn’t take their time rappelling. If they pulled the rope right now out of fear, they, the hostages, and their comrades would die.

*Swoosh!*

Just before his head touched the floor of the lobby, Cha Dong-Gyun pulled on the rope and stopped his descent.

*Bang! Swoosh!*

At the same time, the lights were turned on, brightly illuminating the lobby.

*Click!*

Cha Dong-Gyun held up his rifle and pressed its stock against his shoulder.

*Swoosh! Whish! Swoosh!*

The moment the Jeungpyeong special forces soldiers pulled the rope and stopped descending, the soldiers from the 606, who were in black military uniforms, charged into the lobby. They then dropped down onto the floor with a plop, took aim, and sent bullets flying toward the enemies on the staircase.

They couldn’t stand up and position themselves higher than the hostages, who were crouching on the floor. If they did, they would be blocking the Jeungpyeong special forces team’s line of fire.

*Pew! Pew! Pew! Pew! PEW! Pew! PEW!*

*Du du du! Pow pow pow! Du du! Pow pow! Du du du! Pow pow pow!*

Only those who had experienced something like this knew that they would blank out if their surroundings suddenly brightened.

Terrible things also transpired.

Some threw themselves right in front of the enemies’ muzzles. Some also felt as if they would go crazy when they saw their enemies aim at their comrades instead of themselves.

‘Did that exchange last about two seconds or was it quicker?’ Kang Chan wondered.

Their enemies were now grotesquely crumpled on the floor, and the counter-terrorism team agents and the 606 soldiers, who had rushed toward their enemies, had been shot were now covered in blood.

*Whish! Swoosh!*

The hostages were shrieking again. “Kyaaaaa!”

The soldiers from Jeungpyeong’s special forces team rushed toward them. They lifted the hostages who weren’t strapped with bombs onto their shoulders, then ran outside.

“Daye! Gérard!” Kang Chan called.

*Swish!*

Kang Chan unsheathed his bayonet. His shin stung, but it wasn’t painful enough to immobilize him.

*Pew! PEW! Pew! Pew! PEW!*

Everything would end if their enemies managed to discretely press the detonation button right now. Hence, the Jeungpyeong special forces soldiers shot their enemies in the forehead even though they had already collapsed.

The hostages continued to scream. “Aaah! Arrrgh!”

After examining the bombs, he yelled, “It’s safe to cut the straps! Free the hostages!”

He then immediately used his bayonet to cut the straps keeping the bombs attached to the hostages.

*Snip! Snip! Snip! Snip!*

Seok Kang-Ho and Gérard swiftly did as instructed.

Meanwhile, the other soldiers carried the wounded out of the building.

“Hurry!” Kang Chan yelled.

*Whish! Swoosh!*

The Jeungpyeong special forces soldiers rushed toward them and carried the remaining hostages over their shoulders.

*Chk.*

“Permission to have the 35th brigade enter the building, sir!” a soldier yelled, his blood boiling. He was so loud and desperate that he sounded as if his voice would pierce their eardrums.

However, it wasn't time yet.

“Run!” Cha Dong-Gyun yelled. Carrying a hostage on his shoulder, he rushed out of the entrance.

*Whoosh! Swish!*

Right after, they heard a loud shout. They wondered what it was about since it sounded as if it could sweep the International Building away, but they didn't have the time to care about it.

Kang Chan raised his hand to his radio.

*Chk.*

“35th brigade, enter the building! Take care of the bombs in the lobby and rescue the wounded in the basement!”

*Chk.*

“Copy! 35th brigade, entering now!” one of the soldiers responded to Kang Chan.

*Crash! Crash!*

Soldiers with bloodshot eyes rushed into the lobby of the International Building. They were dragging a deep blue explosion-proof mat with them. It was made out of iron plates and had layers of sand in between.

*Hissss!*

The soldiers put the mat in layers on top of the bombs.

*Click. Clank. Click.*

The soldiers of the 35th brigade occupied the lobby, and some ran down to the lobby.

*Haah. Haah.*

Kang Chan looked at where the 606 and the counter-terrorism team had been. Pools of blood were all over the area. He was frustrated, but he still had things to do.

*Chk.*

“Situation room,” he radioed. “we have suppressed the terrorists and rescued the hostages. The operation is now over. Please collect the bombs and take care of the wounded and the deceased.”

*Chk.*

“Understood,” Kim Hyung-Jung responded, then sighed heavily.

*I should've told him about the satellite coordinates a bit earlier.*

*Click. Click. Click. Click.*

The wounded 606 soldiers in the basement were carried up on stretchers. At the same time, the explosives disposal unit, wearing bomb suits, walked in through the front door.

Meanwhile, Kang Chan looked for the commander of the 35th brigade. He then asked, “Can I leave the clean-up to you?”

“Leave it to us. I'll contact the situation room and wrap up accordingly,” the commander answered.

Kang Chan then raised his hand to his radio.

*Chk.*

“Manager Kim, I’m leaving the 35th brigade in charge of the post-op process. I’m heading outside now,” Kang Chan said.

*Chk.*

“Copy. Be aware that there are cars on the road in front of the International Building.”

That was inevitable. After all, they had restricted access to all the roads in the area.

*Chk.*

“Alright. I’ll head to Samseong-dong for now. Oh, right! Don’t announce that we arrested Abibu.”

*Chk.*

“Yes, sir.”

After talking to Kim Hyung-Jung through the radio, Kang Chan looked back at Seok Kang-Ho and Gérard.

Their eyes were still glinting with ferocity, but they didn’t appear to be heavily wounded.

“Let’s go,” Kang Chan said.

“Sure,” Seok Kang-Ho responded.

Past the entrance, Kang Chan saw ambulances, armored vehicles, and soldiers from the 35th brigade, who had mounted guard. He also saw soldiers from the Airborne Forces.

Kang Chan went outside the International Building with Seok Kang-Ho and Gérard.

“Woohoo!”

A roar erupted from the onlookers, much to Kang Chan’s confusion.

When Kang Chan stopped walking, an agent from the counter-terrorism team quickly approached him.

“The news has identified you as the person responsible for suppressing the terrorist attack and the commander of the rescue operation in Afghanistan,” the agent explained.

*How do they know about that?*

That wasn’t important right now, though.

People beyond the roadblocks, inside buildings, and even on top of the roadside trees applauded and shouted at Kang Chan.

*Damn it! I can’t turn around and go back into the building now.*

Kang Chan followed the agent's directions and walked toward the main road.

The onlookers began shouting at him.

"Wow!"

"You're amazing!"

"We're proud of you!"

"Thank you for your hard work!"

"Long live the Republic of Korea!"

\*\*\*

[The person you're watching withdraw right now is the head of the National Intelligence Service's counter-terrorism team and the one who commanded the most recent rescue operation in Afghanistan. He is also the one responsible for eliminating the over fifty armed terrorists that had occupied the International Building, rescuing all ten hostages unscathed, and suppressing this terrorist attack in a minute and twenty seconds!]

With the newscasters' excited voice in the background, Kang Chan's face, which he had covered with his bandana, filled the TV screens.

Startled, Kim Mi-Young slowly turned toward Kim Kwan-Sik.

Chapter 335: I'll Kill All of You Guys! (2)

The road was quite far away from the International Building.

Fortunately, they at least had police lines.

After making their way through the photographers's camera flashes, the bright lights from the broadcast cameras, and the cheers of the onlookers, Kang Chan, Seok Kang-Ho, and Gérard finally got into the van of the special forces team.

*Weeeooo. Weeeooo. Weeeooo. Weeeooo.*

Only when the van had left, its sirens wailing, did they take off their helmets.

"Where are the soldiers?" Kang Chan asked.

"They're at the special forces training center in Hanam," the agent in the passenger seat answered.

They couldn't take off their bandanas yet since a lot of people were at the roadside.

*Rattle. Rattle.*

The van drove into a back alley and then followed the one-way street, which barely had enough room for even one car to pass through. Once the van was out of it, another car immediately followed it and blocked the alley, preventing other vehicles from using it. Its objective was to ensure that other people wouldn't be able to see the van go into the basement parking lot of the National Intelligence Service's Samseong-Dong branch.

The access road to the parking lot was in between two buildings and couldn't even be seen from the buildings next to those two.

When the van entered the basement parking lot, Kang Chan finally took off his bandana. He then got into the elevator and went up to Kim Hyung-Jung's office on the fifth floor.

"Would you like some coffee?" an employee asked Kang Chan.

"Yes. I'd like a cold drink as well."

"Noted, sir."

A moment later, the employee served him a cup filled with ice, a big bottle of a sports drink, and coffee.

*Gulp. Gulp. Gulp.*

Kang Chan felt a bit refreshed now.

Seok Kang-Ho dragged the cigarettes, lighter, and ashtray on one side of the table toward them.

*Chk chk.*

"Hoo."

Exhaling the cigarette smoke made Kang Chan feel even better.

"Where did Jong-Il go? He wasn't wounded during the operation," Kang Chan said.

"That's true. He ran out from the International Building earlier, carrying a hostage on his shoulder. Maybe he's in Hanam?" Seok Kang-Ho answered while chewing ice.

"What time is it?" Kang Chan asked.

"It's already two hours and thirty minutes past midnight."

Both Seok Kang-Ho—who was talking to Kang Chan—and Gérard—who was only staring at them—looked tired. The entire journey of boarding a plane and a couple of helicopters to go to different places in such a short period would've already been enough to make some people collapse due to fatigue.

"Captain, instead of staying here, let's go to the office instead," Seok Kang-Ho suggested. When Kang Chan looked at him, he added, "Wrapping up the operation will probably take a while, so why don't we go to the office and get some sleep instead of waiting here? You look like a mess too, you know."

While Kang Chan thought about it, an agent brought over his phone and the clothes that he had taken off in the helicopter.

"We're going down to the lobby. Prepare a car for us," he told the agent.

"Yes, sir."

Kang Chan then began changing into his clothes.

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Sitting on her bed, Kim Mi-Young lowered her head. Her hands were hanging limply between her legs.

Kim Kwan-Sik found it abnormally painful to see his daughter acting like this.

“Dad. That was Channy, wasn't it?” Kim Mi-Young asked.

The moment she looked up at him with her big eyes, Kim Kwan-Sik inhaled softly.

Kim Mi-Young added, “Those were Channy's eyes. I know his eyes.”

Her eyes were turning red.

Kim Kwan-Sik couldn't understand why his daughter was crying.

“I tried my best to avoid contacting Channy because you told me that he's busy serving the country so I shouldn't bother him. Is that what he has been doing?”

Kim Mi-Young prodded as she wiped her tears away with the back of her hand.

“He almost died, didn't he?”

Like Kang Chan, Kim Kwan-Sik also had a dangerous role. After momentarily feeling upset, he smiled bitterly.

His naive daughter wouldn't be able to handle Kang Chan's life.

\*\*\*

It took more time for them to reach the office than they had expected.

“I'll go sleep now,” Seok Kang-Ho told Kang Chan.

“Sure.”

Taking off his jacket and throwing it somewhere, Seok Kang-Ho lay down on a temporary bed.

Kang Chan went into the shower room, brushed his teeth, and washed his face before going outside.

“Why are you still awake?” Kang Chan asked Gérard.

“I'm going to check on the agents monitoring the satellites before I do.”

“You've gone through a lot today.”

Gérard smirked.

“Why are you smirking?” Kang Chan asked.

“I've always felt this way, but you're at your coolest when you're out there commanding soldiers.”

“Do you want to get hit or are you going to stop spouting bullshit?”

Amid their nonsensical conversation, they suddenly heard Seok Kang-Ho snoring.



Gérard took out cigarettes and offered one to Kang Chan.

*Chk chk.*

“Hoo. Shouldn’t you go home?” Gérard asked. After exhaling the cigarette smoke, he continued, “You’ve been staying here for the past few days already.”

Kang Chan nodded.

Since they had dimmed the lights, the office was fairly dark. In the distance, past the window, he could see sparkling lights.

“With so many things happening and the situation becoming so hectic, I couldn’t risk not being around. I’d just worry them even more if I went home and suddenly rushed outside.”

Sitting, Gérard turned toward the window. He then blew out cigarette smoke. His side profile made his eyes, nose, and the curve of his forehead look really cool.

“We won’t ever be able to have a normal family, will we?” Gérard wondered.

Kang Chan glanced at Gérard, who was looking into the distance.

*A normal family?*

Kang Chan smirked. They didn’t have to look that far. Wasn’t Kang Chul-Gyu the perfect answer to Gérard’s question?

“I’ll go check on the agents,” Gérard said afterward.

He extinguished his cigarette and then headed to the room the foreign agents were in.

*There’s no way that fucker is dating a woman. Did he fall in love with someone in Africa?*

While Kang Chan was blankly staring outside the window, the door opened, and Choi Jong-II entered the office.

“Thank you for your hard work,” Choi Jong-II told Kang Chan.

“Where have you been?”

“After helping the hostages outside the International Building, I helped the counter-terrorism team secure the perimeter.”

Choi Jong-II approached the table. He looked as tired as Seok Kang-Ho and Gérard.

“Where’s Manager Kim?”

“He’ll probably have to work until later this morning,” Choi Jong-II answered.

“I see. Well, go get some sleep. We probably have a busy day ahead of us.”

“Yes, sir.” Choi Jong-II stood up from the table. “What about you?”

“I’ll get some shuteye too.”

Kang Chan stood up and headed to the sofa in the meeting room.

*Plop.*

The moment he lay down, he immediately fell asleep. It was as if his body had been waiting for him to sleep.

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The office looked just like a military camp.

They woke up in the morning, washed up, and then ate the food that they had ordered with the others. Since they had foreign agents with them, they ordered a variety of dishes so they'd have options.

Turning on the TV, they discovered that the news channels were still covering the terrorist attacks. To close it off, they showed three people who clearly looked like Kang Chan, Seok Kang-Ho, and Gérard.

After eating breakfast, they had coffee.

Around that time, Kim Hyung-Jung entered the office, holding a metal briefcase.

Seok Kang-Ho signed. "You definitely haven't gotten any sleep yet!"

Kim Hyung-Jung just smiled bitterly.

"You should eat first," Kang Chan offered.

"I already had breakfast."

Woo Hee-Seung brought over coffee.

"Anyway, the explosives disposal unit has opened the metal briefcase that you brought from the ship," Kim Hyung-Jung told Kang Chan. He placed the metal briefcase he was carrying on the table.

*Click. Click.*

After pressing the buttons on both sides of it, he lifted its top half.

"What's this?" Seok Kang-Ho asked, suddenly leaning toward it.

There was a big red button on the right and a long screen on the left.

"It requires a One-Time Password, like the ones used in banks. It's even more secure, though, since it uses not only numbers but letters as well," Kim Hyung-Jung explained.

Kang Chan raised his gaze from the metal briefcase to look at Kim Hyung-Jung.

Kim Hyung-Jung continued, "The explosives disposal unit believes the OTP this requires is a missile launch code."

When he pressed the red button, the screen showed complicated numbers and letters all over it.

“The missile launcher will only be operable if the OTP is entered. Considering the password is this complex, it likely corresponds to a long-range missile or even a nuclear missile.”

“Wouldn’t they change the system of the password if they lost something like this?” Kang Chan asked.

“Of course, they would. However, there’s a high possibility of this metal briefcase being a replica. Someone likely tried to activate the missile launcher at their own discretion.”

*Would you look at that?*

Kang Chan felt as if he had found a clue. What they had to do now was to find the guy who was supposed to receive this metal briefcase.

“Where’s Abibu?” he asked.

“He’s in Naegok-dong,” Kim Hyung-Jung answered.

“Can I go there and see him right now?”

“Yes.”

Kang Chan looked at Kim Hyung-Jung. He looked very tired, his face drooping like lettuce.

Seemingly reading his mind, Kim Hyung-Jung said, “I’m fine.”

“Go sleep for an hour, at least. We’ll leave once you wake up,” Kang Chan suggested. “I’ve got a favor to ask of you after meeting Abibu anyway.”

“Yeah, let’s get some more sleep before we leave!” Seok Kang-Ho exclaimed.

Nobody in the office would have faulted Kim Hyung-Jung if he had said that he would just stay here. Due to Kang Chan and Seok Kang-Ho’s insistence, Kim Hyung-Jung finally went into the meeting room.

\*\*\*

Inside the National Intelligence Service’s main building in Naegok-dong.

Go Gun-Woo felt as if he was lost.

They had arrested Abibu and locked him up in this building.

Go Gun-Woo didn’t know how they found out, but since then, they had received a surge of enormous pressure from every direction.

The intel that they had received was unusual as well. Some of the various information they got included plans to blow up the South Korean diplomatic offices located overseas and the people’s resolve to launch terrorist attacks against Koreans.

That wasn’t all.

All of the oil-producing countries, including Saudi Arabia, were blatantly requesting them to release Abibu as well.

*Knock knock.*

His secretary approached Go Gun-Woo, who was exhausted.

“The Assistant Director and Manager Kim Hyung-Jung are here,” his secretary said.

“Tell them to come in.”

As Go Gun-Woo stood up, Kang Chan and Kim Hyung-Jung entered.

“Long time no see,” Go Gun-Woo greeted.

After shaking hands with Kang Chan, Go Gun-Woo pointed at the sofa.

“Good work out there, Assistant Director,” he said.

“We couldn’t have succeeded in this operation without the agents and soldiers’ sacrifices.”

Go Gun-Woo nodded as he discretely examined Kang Chan.

Even though it hadn’t even been a year since the last time he had seen him, Kang Chan seemed to have suddenly grown older by about ten years.

“Director, I want to meet Abibu,” Kang Chan said.

Go Gun-Woo exhaled softly. Abibu had restricted people from meeting him, so no one could meet with him unless they had Go Gun-Woo’s approval.

“Can you tell me why you want to meet him?” Go Gun-Woo asked.

“I want to ask him about the terrorist attacks that he had executed against Director Hwang Ki-Hyun, Director Song Chang-Wook, and the International Building. I also want to ask him about the reason he killed our agents in Libya.”

“Abibu is obstinately denying those suspicions.”

“I’d like to meet and ask him about all of those myself.”

Looking at Kang Chan, Go Gun-Woo thought, ‘Could it be?’

Even though Kang Chan never hesitated, he wouldn’t just beat up Abibu out of nowhere.

“We’ve been receiving intel about plots to blow up the South Korean diplomatic offices in other countries and executing terrorist attacks against Koreans. Oil-producing companies are also pressuring us to release Abibu...” Go Gun-Woo trailed off, then sighed softly. “It’s not easy. I’ll give you my permission since you want to meet Abibu, but I trust that you’ll make wise decisions.”

“Understood,” Kang Chan firmly answered.

A moment later, the three left the office and went to the basement.

Kang Chan silently followed Kim Hyung-Jung, who was guiding them.

They walked across the hallway and past the armed agents guarding the area.

Kim Hyung-Jung opened the door for them. Kang Chan went inside, finding that half of the wall facing the door was made out of glass. He could only see a table and four chairs.

Two agents in suits stood up.

“Everything that happens here will be recorded. These agents are in charge of interpreting Arabic for us,” Kim Hyung-Jung explained.

The two agents bowed and greeted Kang Chan.

The door beyond the glass opened, and two armed agents and two agents in suits brought Abibu and his attendant over.

Abibu arrogantly walked in, his expression showing that he wasn't dispirited at all. He then smiled at the glass. Although he couldn't see Kang Chan and the others on the other side of the glass wall, he just kept acting relaxed, making it seem as if he could see everything that was happening.

“Why did the agents bring the attendant?” Kang Chan asked.

“Abibu requested that he go with his interpreter,” Go Gun-Woo answered.

“How do we go into that room?”

“That way,” Kim Hyung-Jung pointed at the entrance on the left wall.

“Assistant Director,” Go Gun-Woo called. However, when their eyes met, he couldn't bring himself to say anything.

Kang Chan had risked his life to stop the terrorist attack. How could he tell him not to treat Abibu rashly just because of what other people would think?

People's eyes could portray emotions and thoughts instead of talking. That was evident in Kang Chan's slight bow, which seemed to signify that he understood Go Gun-Woo's concerns.

Kang Chan walked past the door on the left and went out to the hallway again. He then turned to the right two times. They were clearly turning toward the room Abibu was in, waiting for him.

Two agents were guarding the door to the room Abibu was in. Once they opened the door and went inside, Abibu—who was sitting at the table—looked toward them.

The attendant looked somewhat intimidated. However, Abibu remained arrogant.

“Abibu,” Kang Chan called.

Frowning, Abibu looked back at Kang Chan.

“You should obediently answer what I ask you.”

Abibu looked at his attendant, then slowly looked back at Kang Chan.

Their eyes met.

“I’ll call this whole incident off if you release me in the next six hours. If you don’t, then...”

While the attendant was speaking in Korean with a strange accent, Kang Chan kept his gaze on Abibu.

Abibu’s attendant continued, “South Korea will become the target of our warriors.”

Smirking, Kang Chan nodded.

Abibu was still acting like a fucking son of a bitch. If he didn’t like how things were going, he would still satisfy his greed even if it meant having to order his men to execute a terrorist attack. He couldn’t even give a damn about other people dying.

When Kang Chan tilted his head from side to side, Kim Hyung-Jung examined his mood.

Kang Chan walked toward Abibu.

The attendant flinched and turned their upper body to the side.

*Pow! Crash!*

Kang Chan suddenly pushed Abibu, who was sitting on a chair, by the chest.

*Pow! Pow! Pow! Pow!*

When Abibu fell to the floor, Kang Chan kicked him as hard as he could.

There were four armed agents and four agents in suits inside the room. Kim Hyung-Jung was also next to them. Nevertheless, none of them could stop Kang Chan.

“Why are you crying, you motherfucker?” Kang Chan asked.

He then grabbed Abibu’s head with his left hand.

“Ugh.”

Everyone grabbed and lifted by their head would be in incredible pain. Abibu—the same person behind all of the recent terrorist attacks that South Korea had just suffered—and the men who had joined the terrorist attacks should all feel this much pain.

*Pow! Pow! Pow! Pow! Pow! Pow!*

With the blade of his right hand, Kang Chan struck Abibu’s face upward.

Blood splattered on his white one-piece outfit, Kang Chan’s suit, the floor, and the wall.

*You son of a bitch! The blood spilled by Hwang Ki-Hyun, Song Chang-Wook, and the agents and soldiers in Libya and South Korea is much more valuable than the blood that you’re spilling right now!*

*Pow! Pow! Pow! Pow! Pow!*

Abibu had never been beaten up in his life. In this situation, his kind would resort to one of two things. They would either keep their pride even if it meant death or simply panic.

*Bam!*

Kang Chan violently kned Abibu's head.

*Crash! Thud!*

Abibu crashed into the corner, covered in blood. Kang Chan then sharply glared at his attendant.

*Why is this fucker so afraid when I haven't even beaten him up yet?*

"I'll come back in twenty minutes," Kang Chan said.

"Huh? Oh, yes, sir!" the attendant quickly answered.

Once Kang Chan left the room, Kim Hyung-Jung wordlessly followed him.

In the hallway, they turned left twice and opened the door to Go Gun-Woo's office. He wasn't inside.

"The director said that Abibu has suffered severe wounds," Kim Hyung-Jung said.

Kang Chan cocked his head.

He continued, "Apparently, during the operation, the agents had a hard time arresting him because he kept resisting. He sustained a couple of injuries as a result."

Kang Chan wiped his hands with the tissue that Kim Hyung-Jung had handed to him.

"What are you going to do now?" Kim Hyung-Jung asked afterward.

Even the two agents were examining Kang Chan's mood.

"I'll beat Abibu up again in twenty minutes," Kang Chan answered.

"Pardon?"

"After I ask a question, I'm going to beat him up until he finally looks like he's going to answer. Got any cigarettes?"

Kim Hyung-Jung took out a cigarette from his pocket and handed it over. "Here you go."

It was hard to tell whether he was smiling or crying.

Chapter 336: Messing With Me? (1)

One should always keep their promises. However, life wasn't always so straightforward. Sometimes, promises inevitably had to be broken, just like when Kang Chan saw Abibu looking his way as he extinguished his cigarette.

"That son of a bitch!" shouted Abibu.

Even with tears streaming down his face, Abibu clearly harbored resentment.

*Twenty minutes? Just forget it ever happened!*

Kang Chan immediately left the room. Kim Hyung-Jung hurriedly followed but didn't dare speak. He judged that he couldn't interfere with Kang Chan's actions here.

*Click.*

Kang Chan opened the door and entered. He then immediately approached Abibu, who, along with his attendant, was already startled and chilled by their previous encounter.

*Thump! Crash!*

*Thump! Thump! Thump! Thump! Thump!*

*Where does this bastard get off looking so dissatisfied? Did you just block that? How dare you!*

Abibu rolled on the floor and curled up with all his might, clutching his head and chest.

*Crack! Crack! Crack!*

Kang Chan fiercely stomped on Abibu's head, chest, and thighs.

"Ugh! Ughh! Ughhh!"

Tears ran down Abibu's bloodied face. He could vividly feel pain and humiliation.

*Crash. Bang!*

Kang Chan grabbed his neck, lifted him, and slammed him against the wall.

"Ugh! Ugh! Ugh!"

Sometimes in life, one could simply have bad luck.

Blood splattered from Abibu's nose as he gasped for air. Since his head was tilted backward, it unfortunately splashed onto Kang Chan's cheek.

"Son of a bitch!" shouted Kang Chan.

As Kang Chan wiped the blood off with the back of his right hand, Abibu desperately shook his head.

His eyes seemed to be saying, "It's not my fault!"

*If only he hadn't killed Hwang Ki-Hyun or Song Chang-Wook! No, he shouldn't have messed with our agents in Libya in the first place!*

*Thump! Thump! Thump! Thump! Thump! Thump!*

Kang Chan mercilessly gouged the corners of Abibu's eyes with the heel of his right hand.

"Ugh! Ugh! Ugh! Ugh...!"

Abibu slumped, his head drooping powerlessly to one side.

*Thump! Thump! Thump! Thump!*

"Assistant Director!"

Kim Hyung-Jung rushed in. The two agents in suits clung to Kang Chan.

"Fucking bastard!" Kang Chan growled.

Only then did he stop the beating. Both his hands and the chest area of his shirt had been smeared with the blood from Abibu's face.



“See you in twenty minutes! You have better pulled yourself together by then!” he warned the unconscious man.

*Thud!*

Upon being released from his grasp, Abibu collapsed onto the floor.

Kang Chan turned to the attendant, startling him and making him straighten up.

“Have them sit quietly in place until I return,” he ordered.

“Yes, sir,” the man answered with a nod.

Always the one giving orders, and always the one who lived off the sweet fruits under the one giving the orders—but now both just looked frightened.

*These bastards born with silver spoons in their mouths lower the value of others even though they've never done anything substantial themselves!*

Kang Chan left the room and returned to his original position. He wondered why he had come and gone like this.

The interpreter quickly stood up, offering tissues and wet wipes to Kang Chan. “Want me to wipe those for you?”

Kang Chan shook his head firmly. “Leave it.”

After a brief pause, he said, “That bastard definitely has information. It might even be about the nuclear warhead or those planning a war.”

Another agent walked over from the corner, a paper cup of instant coffee.

Kang Chan continued, “If I could have prevented the directors’ deaths by killing that bastard, I would have done it. Now, we’re in this fight that would determine whether a war breaks out or a nuclear bomb drops on South Korea.”

Kim Hyung-Jung clenched his teeth, causing his cheeks to twitch slightly.

“Sir, the war has already started. We can't shrink back just because we fear terrorist attacks, the eyes of those around us, or not knowing how many might die as a result.”

The two agents swallowed dryly as they looked at Kang Chan.

An agent solemnly added, “We don't know how many of our agents will have to lay down their lives to stop this. I can't forget the blood that soaked the lobby floor last night.”

“Understood.”

The atmosphere had become heavy.

*Buzz. Buzz. Buzz.*

As if finding the ambiance too burdensome, Kang Chan's phone rang. Kim Tae-Jin was calling.

“Hello?”

- It's Kang Chul-Gyu.

Kang Chan glanced past the glass. He didn't expect to hear from him.

- I just saw the broadcast. Is it okay to talk?

"Yes."

This was the first time Kang Chul-Gyu had initiated a call.

- If we have to retaliate or perform a dangerous operation because of this incident, I want you to send me and my people. I know you'll be able to handle it well yourself, but...

"Understood."

- Just to be clear, I'm not saying your agents are incompetent.

*Is this man seriously concerned about others' feelings right now?*

It seemed Kang Chul-Gyu was trying to overcome his own awkwardness to maintain good relationships.

"I'll call if needed," Kang Chan said. After a beat, he added, "Thanks."

He heard a chuckle from the other end.

- Got it. I'll hang up now.

The call was dropped shortly after.

*What? Why did he laugh?*

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After the call, Kang Chul-Gyu handed the phone back to Kim Tae-Jin.

"How is he, sir?"

"He seems to be handling the situation well," said Kang Chul-Gyu.

"Is that what he said?"

Kang Chul-Gyu chuckled again, which seemed to explain everything. In the background, they could hear, equipment moving and a couple of curses.

"Let's go," he said.

"Would you like to take a look around?" Kim Tae-Jin asked.

Kang Chul-Gyu nodded.

Kim Tae-Jin left the barracks first. Kang Chul-Gyu sneaked into his room and opened the door of his wardrobe. A suit hung on the door, and shoes were placed inside.

*Clatter. Clatter.*

Yang Dong-Sik looked like a bandit roaming the wilderness.

Bypassing the foreman of the construction site, he had climbed to the very top without any safety gear. He then swung around, attaching 'asiba'[1] to 'dabble',[2] using 'Tarraegi'[3].

The foreman was horrified, but how could he stop Yang Dong-Sik?

“You fucking idiot! The assistant director is watching this construction with interest! If it gets delayed for even a day, I'll kill all of you and throw you to the wolves!” Yang Dong-Sik shouted at the foreman.

Was it on the third day of construction? After dinner, the foreman, having complained about the working conditions and treatment, had the gall to declare a day off.

He had expected that construction work in this desolate place would be filled with the thrill of making some money on the side. After all, it should have been easy to overlook some materials not meeting regulations.

However, Kim Tae-Jin and Nam Il-gyu were so strict that the construction manager couldn't dare act tough.

“Were you not aware of the weather out here, huh? Didn't you take that into consideration when calculating your payment?! How can you call yourself a foreman when you can't even handle construction?!” Yang Dong-Sik shouted.

His eyes gleaming, he drew the knife that he had slung over his shoulder.

Surprisingly, Kang Chul-Gyu simply crossed his arms and watched. If one couldn't recognize what that meant, he wouldn't be part of the DMZ team.

*Creak. Creak. Creak.*

One after another, members of the DMZ team began to rise from their seats.

“We've got a staff shortage! Our most crucial member, who'd be climbing to high places, is missing!” the foreman said, unaware that he had just made the most regrettable excuse he would ever make in his entire career in construction.

“Is that so? I'll take care of it myself, then! How about that?”

The foreman hadn't expected to be rushed like that.

The next day, the construction site turned into hell.

Through a process known as 'asiba,' pipes up to ten meters long were connected to create stairs along the exterior walls of the factory building. Two lines of pipes were intertwined, and steel plates perforated with holes were used as steps, known as 'dabble.'

Yang Dong-Sik was like a monkey that had found water or, more accurately, scaffolding. He ran around the scaffolding, making the eleven-meter-high platform sway from a height feared by most people. If anyone grabbed the scaffolding to steady themselves, they immediately received a harsh scolding.

“You stupid motherfucking imbecile! Do you only have one arm, huh? If you use one arm like that, how are you supposed to work with the other?!” yelled Yang Dong-Sik.

Uniquely, Yang Dong-Sik had set up a ten-meter pipe on the outside of the scaffolding. The employees wondered what he was doing until they saw him sliding down its length like a firefighter during a rescue operation.

*Who would dare slack off in this situation?*

Kang Chul-Gyu stood beside Kim Tae-Jin, who was waiting at the site.

"You're finally here."

The foreman approached Kang Chul-Gyu, whom he felt most comfortable around. After all, Kang Chul-Gyu had never raised his voice, and his eyes had never glinted around him.

'Perhaps he's also oppressed by these barbaric men.'

Unbeknownst to him, he had simply misunderstood Kang Chul-Gyu's silent observation.

"Managing them must be tough."

Once the foreman's words had been interpreted in Korean, Kang Chul-Gyu responded with a wry smile.

"Be careful when hiring people. You have no idea when men like them will cause you trouble."

Kang Chul-Gyu only nodded this time.

Nam Il-Gyu was far away, and Kim Tae-Jin had always been a gentle person, so the foreman gradually felt more at ease. Hence, while looking at Yang Dong-Sik, who was hanging from a dangerous height, he chattered away.

"He might even talk back to you someday, Director Kang."

Kang Chul-Gyu smirked. "If that ever happens, I can just cut off his head."

The foreman coughed. He had never seen eyes as menacing as Kang Chul-Gyu's.

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If one had broken their promise once, they should at least have the will to keep the next one. Hence, Kang Chan now patiently observed through the glass.

Abibu's attendant helped him to his seat and wiped his face with his sleeve. Even from across the glass, he looked pitiful.

His face was covered in small cuts that looked as if they had been done with a razor, and blood kept flowing from them. Moreover, his left eye was now swollen like a boiled egg. Tears, blood, and thick pus from it ran down his swollen cheek, making it hard to look at him.

His stylishly grown beard and hair played a significant role in making his appearance even more miserable. The wheezing and grimacing that accompanied his every breath suggested that his ribs might be cracked or broken. He also had swollen lips and a bent and broken nose.

The door soon opened, and Kang Chan entered. As if on cue, surprise enveloped the faces of the two people inside at the same time.

The moment Abibu was about to say something...

*Thump! Crash!*

*Crack! Crack! Crack! Crack!*

All his attendant could do was burst into pitiful cries.

\*\*\*

Assistant Manager Kim brought the phone.

“The head of Gong Te’s South Korean branch is calling. He called the office, and they gave him my number. Would you like to speak with him?”

Kang Dae-Kyung looked at Yoo Hye-Sook before saying, “Sure. Thank you.”

He then took the phone and brought it to his ears.

“Hello?”

- Director! It’s Smithen.

“Mr. Branch Manager. My phone is off right now. Sorry for the inconvenience.”

- Where are you now? I was hoping we could have a brief meeting.

“Right now?”

- Yes, I really hope to see you soon.

His Korean was now quite fluent, but he was still pronouncing the words a bit too fast.

“What’s the matter? I’ve already informed you about the company handover. I’ve notified the headquarters too...”

- I was just feeling a bit upset and thought we should have dinner.

Kang Dae-Kyung glanced at Yoo Hye-Sook.

It was too late for breakfast and too early for lunch.

"Branch Manager, my wife and I are departing for Europe today. We've just arrived at the airport and finished ticketing, so let's have dinner when I return."

- W-what?

"Sorry, it's just that we've been so busy with life that we've never had the chance to go abroad together before..."

- Where to? Where are you headed?

Kang Dae-Kyung tilted his head.

This was a bit excessive. Normally, Kang Dae-Kyung would have mentioned the destination. However, after seeing Assistant Manager Kim and Cha Min-Jeong, the warning that they had given him came clearly to mind.

‘Never reveal your destination to anyone other than your son.’

"We plan to tour various places in Europe, so we haven't set a specific destination. I'll call you as soon as I get back."

Kang Dae-Kyung ended the call.

"What's the matter?"

"Well, he said he was upset and suggested having dinner, but he sounded like he was in a rush."

After getting his phone back from Kang Dae-Kyung, Assistant Manager Kim glanced at Cha Min-Jeong.

"Did he ask about your destination?"

"Yes, he did."

Assistant Manager Kim looked over at Yoo Hye-Sook and then forced a smile. Knowing full well that she was easily frightened, he didn't want to cause her any unnecessary anxiety.

"To think he wants to meet you even though you've already left the company. He really admires you, doesn't he, director?" Cha Min-Jyeong commented.

"It would be strange if I said yes," Kang Dae-Kyung replied, making everyone burst into laughter.

"Shouldn't we contact Channy before we go?" Yoo Hye-Sook asked.

"It's fine." Kang Dae-Kyung stretched out his arm and gently patted Yoo Hye-Sook's back. "I always told you not to worry about home affairs when I was busy with national duties, didn't I? Let's just have Assistant Manager Kim contact us as we planned. You understand, right?"

"Of course," Yoo Hye-Sook responded energetically.

\*\*\*

*Click.*

When Kang Chan entered the room again, Abibu and his attendants' reactions showed subtle differences. Abibu now looked as if he had lost his soul.

"He's got something to say!" his attendant quickly said.

"What?" Kang Chan replied.

"W-what?"

"Are you bastards messing with me?"

The attendant turned his head toward Abibu.

*Thump! Crash!*

"Ugh! Ughh! Ughhh!"

*Crack! Thump! Crack! Crack! Crack!*

When Kang Chan started beating Abibu up again, the attendant burst into pitiful cries.

Kim Hyung-Jung and the agents just watched in silence.

Kang Chan was the assistant director of the National Intelligence Service. Despite his young age, a word from him could motivate agents to risk their lives. The same applied to the Jeungpyeong special forces team, the 606's Special Operations Unit, and the 35th Brigade.

Moreover, the moment he called, Seok Kang-Ho, Gérard, and even Kang Chul-Gyu and the rest of the DMZ team would come to his aid.

That same man now relentlessly beat up Abibu, who was already covered in blood.

This wasn't just about avenging Hwang Ki-Hyun, Song Chang-Wook, the agents, and his team members anymore. Kim Hyung-Jung and the agents vividly felt that Kang Chan was doing his best to prevent a war from happening and a nuclear missile from dropping right on top of their nation.

With a simple motion, Kang Chan could easily snap Abibu's neck. His skills in close-quarters combat meant he could easily kill his target with a flick of his wrist or a kick.

Why would he bother doing this with twenty-minute intervals? He could have just ordered Seok Kang-Ho, Gérard, the agents, or the special forces soldiers to do it for him. If he had done that, all he would have had to do was sit back and enjoy the spectacle with a cup of coffee and a cigarette.

*Thump! Thump! Crack! Crack! Crack!*

*Isn't this wrong?*

"Assistant director!"

Kim Hyung-Jung and the agents clung to Kang Chan again.

*Is he trying to kill him in the most painful and cruel way possible?*

For now, Kim Hyung-Jung focused on pulling Kang Chan away.

Chapter 337: Messing With Me? (2)

Kang Chan crossed the room and wiped his hands. He then lit a cigarette.

Meanwhile, Kim Hyung-Jung answered his phone.

"What? Why are you only reporting this now?" he cried. He then checked on Kang Chan's reaction.

Lowering his voice, he said, "Yesterday? Didn't you know it would be hard to contact us yesterday? Okay. Keep this number reachable. What? How long?"

Kim Hyung-Jung swallowed a groan.

"Contact me as soon as you arrive. Make sure to thoroughly coordinate with the agents in the area!"

Abibu, who was on the other side of the glass, was now leaning against the wall. He looked too weary to even sit on a chair.

"Sir, your parents have just left for Europe," reported Kim Hyung-Jung.

*Did he seriously just tell me that in this tense situation?*

Kang Chan looked at Kim Hyung-Jung, unable to comprehend what he just said.

Kim Hyung-Jung added, "They have decided to take the trip all over Europe that they've been planning. Their phones are off, but you can contact them through Assistant Manager Kim's number."

Kang Chan found it hard to say anything. He could have made a quick call to them but he hadn't. He really couldn't blame anyone for this but himself.

*This is definitely my fault.*

Kang Dae-Kyung had likely been harboring deep pain, and Yoo Hye-Sook had undoubtedly been holding back her tears...

Kang Chan was sorry. His heart ached. He could make the excuse that he hadn't wanted to worry them or even the excuse that he had been too busy, but the fact he felt guilty and apologetic remained the same.

*Waiting for me to come home without knowing exactly when that would be must have been so tough and painful. No wonder they suddenly went to Europe.*

Kang Chan blamed himself for being negligent and complacent. He had almost lost the two of the people he cherished the most because of Abibu.

His eyes filled with murderous intent as he gazed at the bastard.

"I'm sorry. It seems they tried to call me yesterday, but I was so busy that I couldn't answer."

"Can we call them right now?" asked Kang Chan.

"Unfortunately, they're already boarding their flight. They'll be reachable again in approximately two hours."

"What about their security?"

"I heard Assistant Manager Kim and Agent Cha Min-Jeong left with them. They're supposed to get support from the agents in Europe, but I'll be sure to double-check."

Kang Chan extinguished his cigarette in the ashtray.

Seeing his intense glare, Kim Hyung-Jung apologized again. "I'm sorry."

"It's not your fault," Kang Chan replied, "I was the one who was negligent. Please make sure to double-check their itinerary and security."

"I will," Kim Hyung-Jung answered.

Kang Chan then looked past the glass. Just two more hits and Abibu would surely die.

Kim Hyung-Jung watched him with concern.

"Manager Kim," Kang Chan softly called. "There's something you need to know."

Kim Hyung-Jung and the agents with them focused on what he was about to say.

"I thought you knew, but from what I've seen, it seems I was wrong."

"What is it?"

"Abibu is a member of the Saudi Arabian royal family."



"We already knew that."

It had also been reported in the newspapers and broadcasts before they arrived.

"The Islamic society is unimaginably loyal to the royal family. Although Saudi Arabia will respect our announcement on the surface because we have solid evidence, if they learn that we've beaten Abibu up, not only the UIS but the entire Islamic extremist community would take it as an insult. If we're not careful, they might throw caution to the wind."

Kim Hyung-Jung looked at the interpreter. His flustered face seemed to be asking him, "Why didn't you tell me that?"

"He probably didn't think of that because he hasn't fought them himself," Kang Chan answered in the interpreter's stead. "Abibu's initial warning wasn't just talk. The UIS and the Islamic extremists now see South Korea and the counter-terrorism team as a common enemy to unite against."

Kim Hyung-Jung looked at Kang Chan. His expression was grim, but it harbored a faint hope.

'You didn't beat him up without a plan, did you?'

However, based on how Kang Chan had been behaving so far, Kim Hyung-Jung realized that Kang Chan could have attacked Abibu out of impulse.

"Please make sure that what happened here doesn't leak out. Otherwise, our citizens abroad and embassies could become targets of terrorism."

Suddenly stricken with realization, Kim Hyung-Jung replied, "Yes, sir."

Fortunately, in this critical moment, when the UIS and Islamic extremists could target South Korea and its people, Kang Dae-Kyung and Yoo Hye-Sook had left for Europe.

Kim Hyung-Jung now fully understood why Abibu had been so confident and why Kang Chan's eyes had been so fierce. He also realized just how serious the events today and yesterday were.

*Click.*

As Kang Chan opened the door and stepped out, Kim Hyung-Jung quickly stood up.

*Click.*

Kang Chan entered the room where Abibu was. However, before he could beat him up again, the attendant clung to Kang Chan.

"I will answer whatever you ask to the best of my abilities."

Kang Chan silently observed Abibu, who was leaning against the wall, half unconscious and gasping for breath. Abibu couldn't even consider resisting anymore. Once someone's will had been completely broken by violence, all they'd ever feel was fear.

The problem was Abibu's position.

If the attendant were in his position, terror would have filled him every time he saw Kang Chan. However, it was different for Abibu. If his mind cleared, the eyes watching him could compel him to stand up and fight even if it meant death.

*Should I just kill him?*

While Kang Chan was pondering what to do with Abibu, the attendant exclaimed, "Huuuuuh! I'll tell you everything! Please! The prince has said that he would confess! He'll answer anything you ask, so please...!"

*Why is he crying? I haven't even hit him once.*

"Are you sure?" Kang Chan asked.

"Huh?"

"Bastard!"

"Y-yes! Yes! I'm sure!"

With the attendant startled, Kang Chan saw fear rise in the eyes of the flinching Abibu.

"Pass on exactly what I say," Kang Chan ordered.

"Yes, sir."

Kang Chan looked beyond the glass, telling their interpreter to make sure that the attendant was interpreting correctly.

"There's something you two misunderstood," Kang Chan said.

The attendant poured out clear Arabic into Abibu's ear.

"I'm not doing this to get something out of you."

The attendant turned his head toward him in shock. Nevertheless, he still frantically spewed Arabic.

Meanwhile, Kang Chan, who had kept his gaze on Abibu's eyes, noticed the outer edges of Abibu's eyes subtly twitch. A person who wholeheartedly believed that they had been defeated wouldn't have reacted like that.

Kang Chan smirked, now determined to put a proper end to all this.

"Abibu, you bastard," he growled.

Fear immediately enveloped the attendant's expression.

"You just wasted your last chance."

*Whack! Thud!*

Before Abibu's attendant could even come up with an excuse, Kang Chan ferociously kicked his head.

*Whack!*

He then slammed Abibu's head against the wall, causing him to fall sideways to the floor like a scarecrow.

*Crack.*

"Ugh..."

Right after, Kang Chan stepped on Abibu's neck.

The bastard had calculated it all in the brief moment his attendant clung to him. Feeling his subordinate watching him, he remembered his inviolable pride, the authority and wealth that had protected him so far, and the force of UIS.

It was better to just kill him now that it had come to this.

Abibu flailed and struggled. Weakly, he held onto Kang Chan's ankle.

"Aaaah!"

At that moment, the previously foolish-looking attendant glared and charged toward Kang Chan.

*What do you think you're doing, you fucking bastard?!*

*Whack! Crack! Crack! Crack! Crack!*

However, Kang Chan just relentlessly stomped on him.

*This baster, what a faithful servant of a treacherous country.*

*You're just a ruthless loyalist who played his part well in eliminating key South Korean agents and personnel, Abibu! That doesn't make you important and all of our people worthless!*

*The scent of the 606's blood is still fresh in my nose, and you fucking bastard was right there, issuing the orders! You even almost fooled me!*

While Abibu was gasping for breath, Kang Chan mercilessly trampled the attendant, who was beside him.

*If you're so envious of what we have, why don't you offer a fair price for it instead of begging, bombing, and killing people just to force us to give it up?*

*Are South Korea and its agents, who carry out their missions wearing their uniform like they're shrouds, that trivial to you?!*

*Crack! Crack! Crack! Crack! Crack!*

"Assistant Director!"

Kim Hyung-Jung and the agents clung to Kang Chan desperately again. In response, Kang Chan took a step back. His two victims now lay sprawled in similar poses, barely breathing.

He was aware that if they just left them like this, the entire Republic of Korea could be put in danger. Hence, he took out his phone.

*If it's a fight they want, I'll give them one, but I'll do it my way.*

As Kang Chan searched for a number, the labored breathing of the two men filled the room. Eventually, he pressed the call button.

- Hello?

"Director, this is Kang Chan. Is Director Kang with you?"

- Just a moment.

Sensing something odd in Kang Chan's voice, Kim Tae-Jin skipped the usual pleasantries and handed over the phone to Kang Chul-Gyu.

Meanwhile, Kim Hyung-Jung glanced around, and the corners of Abibu's eyes twitched again.

*You bastard! Just you fucking wait!*

- It's me.

"We might have to face the entire UIS soon. If we do, I plan to bring the fight to Mongolia," Kang Chan said.

- Hahaha!

In both his past and current lives, this was the first time he had heard Kang Chul-Gyu laugh out loud.

- We'll prepare accordingly and wait for you!

Kang Chan exhaled softly, unable to make sense of his reaction.

Did Kang Chul-Gyu not fully understand because "UIS" was said in English? Did the idea of a full-scale war with the United Islamic State not spark any fear in him?

*How strange—it seems there are no normal humans around me...*

Suddenly, the call was cut off.

'Who would hang up first if he and Vasili were on the phone?' Kang Chan wondered.

Anyway, he felt at ease now.

Now, he only needed the intelligence bureaus of China, Russia, and Germany to spread rumors about him using his position against the Korean government's opposition to kill the two bastards and then flee to Mongolia. The UIS would certainly prefer to rush to the scene in Mongolia than face a full-scale war with South Korea.

*Alright! Now that it has come to this, I'll get a satisfying revenge for Director Hwang Ki-Hyun, Director Song Chang-Wook, and our fallen agents and soldiers.*

Kang Chan shifted his gaze.

"Pistol."

The agent swallowed dryly and pulled the handgun from his waistband. The counter-terrorism team agents seemed to have been trained to follow orders without questions.

"Assistant Director!" Kim Hyung-Jung yelled. However, one look from Kang Chan was all it took to silence him.

*Click!*

Kang Chan cocked the gun.

Bewilderment flashed in Abibu's swollen eyes, making them look as if they had been slashed with a knife. He appeared to have finally grasped Kang Chan's character. Moreover, his instincts seemed to be telling him that the atmosphere right now was anything but ordinary.

He struggled to spit out Arabic.

*It's too late, you bastard! And I don't know Arabic!*

However, Abibu managed to utter a word that Kang Chan could understand.

"Afghanistan..."

Kang Chan's ears deviously perked up.

*Ha! This bastard!*

He was really making him feel simple and childish.

The attendant groaned as he began to relay Abibu's words. "The original plan started in Afghanistan. We were going to hold Koreans there and kill them one by one, but the hostages were rescued. It was absurd."

"What does that have to do with this situation?" Kang Chan asked.

"Your agents in Libya found out about this."

Kang Chan and Kim Hyung-Jung were dumbfounded.

It was so astounding that they didn't even know what to ask or press into.

"It was Josh's operation. He informed us of every detail about the Koreans in Afghanistan while Ethan was unknowingly drawing attention by trying to kill Ambassador Lanok and the God of Blackfield."

*These fuckers! Who do they think are they trying to kill?*

This was ridiculous.

"We were planning to put a stop to the situation through the assassination of the agents in Libya, but it instead further escalated when you and your men came to Libya and retaliated. We had Romain's help then."

Kang Chan just openly laughed in response. Romain was also the one who had given him the intel about the UIS in Libya.

"I'm telling the truth," Abibu said, seemingly thinking that Kang Chan didn't believe him.

Honestly, at this point, trust had gone out of the window.

He continued, "This terrorist attack was no different."

"You must have received something in exchange for all this!" Kang Chan shouted. "I doubt you're short on money, so what did they give you that was so valuable they got you making such a mess?"

Abibu shuddered.

*Is this bastard still messing with me?*

Kang Chan aimed the gun at Abibu's head.

In response, Abibu uttered another word that Kang Chan could understand, expanding his hope for a life extension.

"Blackhead!"

*What timing.*

"They promised to build a next-generation power plant in Saudi Arabia using Blackhead. Construction has already begun."

"What about the attack in Mongolia?"

"We needed samples of denadite and cetinium. Given how tightly they control things over there, we expected that with such a huge force, we would at least obtain few."

Kang Chan sighed. "Haaa."

He suddenly desperately wanted a cigarette.

"Got a cigarette?"

Kim Hyung-Jung searched his pockets and then looked at the glass. It seemed he had left them inside.

"Please... If word gets out that I caved in and gave you all that information, neither the DGSE nor the British intelligence bureau will let us live," Abibu uttered in Arabic, his voice fading. "If the public learns that I was involved in a terrorist attack, I'll also lose my place in the line of succession to the throne. I'll keep quiet about this and even announce that your government has moved to a safe location for my protection. That should leave the UIS with no justification to attack South Korea."

*This dying man sure is talkative!*

*Click.*

The door opened, and the interpreter came in with cigarettes and a lighter.

Kang Chan looked at him, his gaze seemingly asking "Did the bastard interpret everything correctly?"

The interpreter nodded briefly.

*Click.*

"Hoo."

*Thud.*

Kang Chan pulled a chair over and sat down.

"You haven't told me why you had to kill two of our directors yet."

The agents' reactions were so sharp that they could almost be felt on the skin.

"I don't know. Romain just requested to have it done," Abibu replied.

"Ah, it's troublesome to end up like this at the last moment."

"Can't... breathe..."

Abibu did look like he couldn't hold on much longer.

*Should I just kill him?*

Kang Chan pondered for a moment. He had heard far more than he wanted to, and the deal Abibu had offered was tempting. However, he still had to avenge those that this bastard had killed.

While smoking, he glared at the two men.

It wasn't his decision to make.

Considering this could potentially affect all of South Korea, its government naturally should be the one to decide Abibu's fate.

"Get the medical team to treat him," Kang Chan said.

"Call the medical team!" Kim Hyung-Jung shouted toward the glass.

It was like some kind of magic glass. Asked for cigarettes, and cigarettes came; called for a medical team, and they appeared.

Kang Chan exhaled a long puff of smoke. "Hooo."

*Romain, that motherfucker. All this mess was just to build another next-generation energy facility, huh? They even sent the ambassador back to France for this.*

The medical team briefly hesitated when they saw the scene. After greeting the people inside with a nod, they rushed to Abibu and his attendant's aid.

*Thud.*

Kang Chan slowly stood up and left the room. As he did, the armed agent standing by the door caught his attention.

Curious about what the agent, whom he had never spoken to before, was thinking, he stopped and fixed his gaze on him. The agent now looked startled.

"Are your parents still alive?"

"Yes, sir."

"Is your relationship with them okay?"

Although the agent seemed puzzled, he still firmly answered, "Yes, sir."

"If you knew you were going to die in the next operation, would you still volunteer?"

"My answer would never change, sir. I would go," replied the agent.

Kang Chan smirked. "Don't give me a textbook answer. What about your parents, who are waiting for you at home? Have you never thought about how sad and troubled they would be?"

"Assistant Director," Kim Hyung-Jung called.

Kang Chan glanced at Kim Hyung-Jung and then looked back at the agent. In that short period, the agent's eyes had reddened.

"The day the director's security was breached, I was supposed to be the one on duty. Instead, I lost a senior who had agreed to swap shifts with me because it was my mother's sixtieth birthday. The Taegeukgi on my left arm has felt too heavy ever since. I've never missed a single standby since that day! Please let me join the counter-terrorism team's operations."

Kang Chan sighed softly as he left the room. Of all the people to ask, he just had to choose an agent with such a heavy story!

### Chapter 338: Because It's Urgent (1)

While watching Abibu get carried away on a stretcher through the glass, Kang Chan pulled out his phone. Although the sudden terrorist attack had caused a delay, he still intended to stop Lanok from having to go into the basement of Loriam. He also wanted to ensure Anne's safety. After a few rings, a familiar female voice answered the phone.

- Hello?

"Anne?"

- Yes, Deputy Director-General.

"Why are you speaking so formally? I already told you that I've quit."

- It hasn't been processed yet.

"Let's not be so formal with each other. I told you that last time as well."

Anne suddenly quieted down. If she were busy or in another meeting, she would not have answered the call in the first place. Kang Chan tensed up.

"What's going on? Did something happen to the ambassador?"

- Channy, I'm sorry, but could you come to the embassy now?

"Sure. I'm on my way."

After hanging up, Kang Chan immediately looked for Choi Jong-Il. He then changed into the shirt that he had left in the car and drove to the embassy with Lee Doo-Hee.

*What could it be? Has Romain done something reckless?*

He felt uneasy during the entire trip.

The embassy was still guarded by the 606's Special Operations Unit. Upon seeing Kang Chan, they bowed as a gesture of respect and familiarity.

"Monsieur Kang, this way please," Raphael, who had been waiting, greeted.

Kang Chan could tell at a glance that something was amiss. In complete silence, he walked into the building and went to the office on the second floor. When he opened the door and entered, he immediately saw Anne rising from the table.

Right after, a man stood up from Lanok's desk.

"It's been a long time, Assistant Director," Pierre, the head of the intelligence bureau in Niafle, greeted.

*What? Why...?*

"Pierre, why are you sitting there?"

"I am the new French ambassador to South Korea," Pierre replied.

Kang Chan motionlessly stared at him.



*Knock, knock, knock.*

If Raphael hadn't brought in some tea, he might have stood there for much longer.

"Why don't we sit down and talk?"

Kang Chan first gave Anne a look, then turned to Louis standing by the door to determine if Anne was under threat.

"Assistant Director."

Kang Chan turned his gaze back to Pierre.

"Just call me by my name," said Kang Chan.

"Understood, Monsieur Kang."

At the very least, Pierre was clearly being cautious around him. After Raphael left the room, Kang Chan finally moved to the table and sat down.

"What's going on?" he asked.

"The director put me in this position."

"How's the ambassador?"

"He is in Lorian."

Kang Chan reached for a cigarette and then slowly raised his gaze.

"Say that again, Pierre."

"He is in the basements of Lorian."

Hearing the same thing twice and seeing Anne cover her mouth with her hand confirmed that the ambassador was now trapped in the sinister underground prison of Lorian, the same place where they had locked Sharlan.

"Did Romain order this?"

"The DGSE has complete management rights over Lorian."

"Pierre, I'm warning you. Don't play word games with me about the ambassador's situation. Did Romain order this?"

"Yes, Monsieur Kang."

Kang Chan sighed softly.

He had thought that he would have at least three days of leeway. Hence, after listening to Abibu's confession, he rushed over to discuss what to do with Romain.

He had heard about this from Vasili. However, he hadn't expected things to escalate so quickly and without any warning. Now that they were in this situation, he was seething.

"Pierre, I'm taking Anne, Louis, and Raphael with me."

"That will be difficult."

Kang Chan smirked.

Meeting his demanding gaze, Pierre explained, "Please don't misunderstand. If Anne, Louis, and Raphael leave the embassy, the ambassador will truly be in danger. Moreover, since the director wants to negotiate with you through me, their absence would only make him tighten his guard."

Anne nodded from across the table.

"Why did the ambassador accept being locked up in Loriam earlier than scheduled?" Kang Chan asked.

"The main reason was to prevent the DGSE from publicly exposing you, Monsieur Kang," Pierre quickly responded. "The threat video that the UIS had broadcast during the terrorist attack on the International Building was supposed to be around five minutes long."

"That video from yesterday?"

"Yes. It included footage of your activities in Afghanistan, your stay in a UN base in Africa, your battle with the Quds, and pictures of your operations in Libya."

*Abibu! That bastard!*

There was yet another unspoken crime.

"Intelligence bureaus should never commit such actions among themselves. Nevertheless, the UIS had intended to go to such lengths to target you, but the ambassador stopped them."

"Ah!"

Kang Chan was tired of only being able to retaliate. He had also been ranting about building a stronger South Korea and improving its intelligence bureau.

*How long does this have to go on?*

"How long do we have to endure watching people we care about sacrifice themselves?" he muttered to himself.

Kang Dae-Kyung and Yoo Hye-Sook had gone abroad, and Lanok was trapped in Loriam.

They had also lost Choi Seong-Geon, Hwang Ki-Hyun, and Song Chang-Wook.

He had been running around so much that despite Kim Gwan-Sik's joking suggestion, he hadn't even called Kim Mi-Young. What had he been doing all this time?

"Channy," Anne called.

Kang Chan calmly looked at her.

"My father... asked you not to hate France and to protect and take care of his successor."

*Damn it. What is the ambassador thinking?*

Vasili was saying that he had chosen Loriam in order to capture the Star of David, and Pierre was saying that it was to protect Kang Chan.

Kang Chan turned back to Pierre. "Are you confident that you can protect Anne?"

"I will do my best, Monsieur Kang."

Kang Chan turned to Louis.

"Louis, have there been any changes in the embassy staff?"

"No, Monsieur Kang."

"Please take care of Anne."

"I will," Louis responded with a nod.

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Moon Jae-Hyun, who had been walking along the Blue House pathway, stopped.

"How should we handle Abibu?" he asked.

"The situation requires further consideration. We've got solid evidence that ties him to the terrorist attack on the International Building, so there's no problem there. However, the cases involving former directors Hwang Ki-Hyun and Song Chang-Wook are based solely on statements, so we need objective evidence."

Moon Jae-Hyun grimaced.

It wasn't just any statement. Go Gun-Woo had rushed over in shock because Kang Chan had beaten up Abibu so severely that the medical team almost failed to save him.

"Given the public sentiment, we can't just decide on Abibu's verdict based on the International Building incident alone. Let's give this issue some more thought."

"Yes, sir," Go Gun-Woo responded with a heavy face.

"How about other matters?"

"We've received a report stating that we have obtained the OTP device for a missile launcher. While this is a significant achievement, the pieces we've gathered do not connect into a single picture."

"Hmm."

The two continued walking toward the Blue House, which looked like broad shoulders that stretched to both ends of the landscape.

"We're putting too much burden on the assistant director, yet we can't even give him full authority over the National Intelligence Service..."

"Considering his career, age, factional support, and the views of the opposition and the public, it's impossible to entrust the National Intelligence Service to him."

"His aggressive nature could also be a problem," Go Gun-Woo remarked.

The two chuckled.

"There's no other option for now. We'll have to rely on your protection, Director," Moon Jae-Hyun said.

"I understand. Are you looking for a successor, though?" Go Gun-Woo asked.

Moon Jae-Hyun gave Go Gun-Woo a questioning gaze.

Go Gun-Woo inadvertently shook his head. "Mr. President, while watching the assistant director handle Abibu, I realized I am not fit to be the head of the National Intelligence Service."

He continued, "I have never felt the meaning of risking one's life as clearly as I do now. You must have seen the CCTV footage, too. My heart raced when the agents threw themselves into the lobby of the International Building."

As if recalling that scene, Go Gun-woo's expression understandably tensed up. After all, he had lived his entire life as a bureaucrat before finding himself amid such an operation.

"With your permission, Mr. President, I would like to consider myself a stand-in director for the assistant director. Until we can give this position to him. I'll follow his intentions whenever possible."

"What about his aggressive nature?"

"I suppose managing that is part of my job. I also have administrative issues and factional matters to coordinate."

Moon Jae-Hyun nodded. "We have already bought the land in Goseong, and road construction has started. If we can just endure for another year, we'd be able to somewhat complete the picture we so desire to see."

"Do you believe the next administration will push this agenda as firmly as you do, Mr. President?"

"I don't know." Moon Jae-Hyun looked at the Blue House. "However, I trust our people. Against all the hardships and adversities they will face, they have the capability and resilience that have built South Korea into what it is today."

With a determined expression, he added, "Our people can turn South Korea into a leading global power. They deserve to live in such a country."

Realizing that he had no choice but to continue filling the role of the NIS director, Go Gun-Woo exhaled softly as he looked at Blue House.

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The Jeungpyeong special forces team's bus stopped in front of their barracks. Afterward, starting with Cha Dong-Gyun, the soldiers began to disembark. The door of the barracks opened at the same time.

"Attention!" ordered Cha Dong-Gyun.

As commanded, the soldiers immediately stood at attention.

Park Chul-Su scowled at Cha Dong-Gyun. "What are you doing? Hurry up and help me out!"

Although the aide was holding him up by his left arm, Park Chul-Su was still moving so slowly that he seemed stuck in the door of the barracks. Cha Dong-Gyun quickly saluted and then ran to assist. As soon as he held Park Chul-Su's right arm, his expression darkened.

"Did getting promoted to Captain get to your head? How could you scowl when a general has asked for your help?" Park Chul-Su questioned.

"With all due respect, sir, why are you moving around in your current condition?"

"How could you ask me that when you've gone out to an operation with a hole in your stomach?"

Still pale and heavily bandaged around the chest, Park Chul-Su was clearly in no condition to be outside.

The other soldiers quickly ran over, lifted Park Chul-Su, and helped him down the barracks. At the same time, the aide brought over a wheelchair. Once the soldiers had sat him on it, the aide draped a blanket over him.

"Cha Dong-Gyun," called Park Chul-Su. "No, you're Captain Cha Dong-Gyun now."

He managed a weak smile. "Being a general is great."

"Congratulations on your promotion, sir."

"Yeah. Thanks to that, I can now sneak out like this and even buy gifts for you bastards." Despite the pain, Park Chul-Su grinned mischievously. "I bought Korean beef. Consider it my treat to celebrate my promotion, so eat as much as you want."

"Did you really sneak out?"

"Why? Want to try it?"

Cha Dong-Gyun glanced at the side. Park Chul-Su wouldn't lie to them, but this kind of joke was certainly different from his usual demeanor.

"I might not be back for another two months," Park Chul-Su said, his tone now more serious. "Although I'll still support administrative aspects and occasionally buy you all some beef, I'm planning to start taking it easy."

With the soldiers done unloading the equipment, the bus slowly began to drive away.

With a stern and resolute expression, he continued, "So, from now on, you lead this unit."

Cha Dong-Gyun didn't know what to say.

"Give my aide a list of all the personnel and equipment you need. I'll secure everything using any means necessary. In return, create a force that can survive Africa and even yesterday's terrorist attack. I want this team to become so strong that just the mention of its name makes terrorists tremble."

Park Chul-Su slowly turned his gaze toward the makeshift city. "Now that I have the stars, I finally understand why General Choi Seong-Geon couldn't leave this barracks."

Cha Dong-Gyun stared at Park Chul-Su in confusion. Maybe he would never understand what he meant. After all, according to him, one would need the stars to comprehend it.

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After leaving the embassy, Kang Chan headed back to his office. On the way, he called Assistant Manager Kim.

- Hello?

"It's me. My parents' phones are off."

- Assistant Director.

Assistant Manager Kim spoke gently.

"How's the situation over there?"

- They actually came up with the plan for this trip a few days ago. However, they only decided to push through with it and began making reservations when they learned about the terrorist attacks that took the lives of two of our directors. We were already at the airport when they learned about the incident over at the International Building.

"It took them that long to learn about the attack on the International Building?"

- They had turned off their phones, TVs, and internet, so they're completely unaware of any recent affairs.

Kang Chan cocked his head.

- After the news from France began circulating, they started getting flooded with calls...

"Ah."

Kang Chan now understood why the two decided to travel abroad. Having to completely cut off contact and stay at home likely made them feel more like they were being confined than being protected. It was not strange at all for them to want to escape and rest somewhere no one recognized them for a day or two.

"Are they with you right now?"

- I upgraded them to first class. Should I switch you over?

"If you can."

- Please hold.

After a moment of background noises and Assistant Manager Kim explaining things to a flight attendant, Kang Chan heard another voice.

- Hello?

It was Kang Dae-Kyung.

"Father, this does not seem fair."

Choi Jong-Il, who was in the driver's seat, glanced around and then quickly looked out the window.

- Your mom and I are finally having a proper honeymoon.

In the background, Kang Chan heard Yoo Hye-Sook ask, "Is that Channy?"

Kang Chan had spoken in a somewhat whiny tone, but he still felt a twinge of remorse.

"I'm sorry, Father."

- What are you talking about? We're out on a trip, so stop worrying about us already. As it turns out, going abroad with your mom feels better than I thought.

"Okay," Kang Chan responded.

- I'll hand you over to your mother. One moment.

Kang Chan was just thinking of Yoo Hye-Sook when her cheerful voice burst through.

- Channy!

"Mother."

- Where are you? Have you eaten? Are you hurt anywhere?

His smile was tinged with sadness and apology.

"I'm doing fine. I'm sorry I couldn't keep in touch properly."

- It's okay. I know you're busy. Your father has told you not to worry about anything else while you're working, hasn't he?

Kang Chan cocked his head, surprised by the brightness in Yoo Hye-Sook's voice.

"Is there anything you need?"

- Just don't skip your meals.

"I won't."

- Channy.

"Yes?"

- This is a trip your dad and I have always wanted to take since we got married, so don't feel bad or uneasy that we're doing this now, okay?

*She definitely practiced speaking like this!*

Kang Chan finally realized why Yoo Hye-Sook sounded so cheerful. Although she wasn't fond of the trip, she had probably practiced responding this way just in case he called. The way she answered and talked to him made her seem as if she was reading a book.

"Should I be expecting a sibling soon?"

- You! Don't be disgusting!

Choi Jong-Il glanced at him, but it didn't matter to Kang Chan. He could simply laugh with Yoo Hye-Sook. They talked for about thirty minutes, hanging up only when Kang Chan was almost at his destination.

Chapter 339: Because It's Urgent (2)

Upon entering the office, Kang Chan sat at the table by the window.

"Coffee?" Seok Kang-Ho asked.

"Yeah. Instant, please," Kang Chan requested.

"Got it."

Shortly after, Seok Kang-Ho came back with two large mugs of instant coffee.

"Where's Gérard?" Kang Chan asked.

"He's with the agents manning the satellites."

Kang Chan took a sip of his coffee. As he set down the mug, Seok Kang-Ho offered him a cigarette.

*This guy really knows what I want in situations like this.*

They both lit up cigarettes.

"Call Gérard over," Kang Chan said.

"Alright."

However, before Seok Kang-Ho could leave, they heard someone shout.

"Captain!"

As if overhearing their conversation, Gérard appeared from the room further inside the office even though no one had called for him yet.

"I'll be back with some coffee."

"Sure."

They weren't in a rush anyway.

Long legs, a body that looked good in a shirt, brown hair, and blue eyes with hints of green—it was somewhat absurd seeing such a man dumping two packs of instant coffee into a mug and stirring it with the wrapper.

Gérard soon walked to the table and took a seat, a cigarette already in his mouth.

Kang Chan had initially planned to explain what he had heard from Abibu to these two. They could then put their heads together to figure out what to do next. However, although they were reliable in a fight, Kang Chan had always had doubts about their intellectual abilities. Hence, he decided to call Kim Hyung-Jung first instead.

- Assistant Director.

"Can I see you for a moment? I'm at the office."

- I'll be coming from Samseong-dong, so I'll be there in ten minutes.

"Okay. I'll wait."

After ending the call, Kang Chan leisurely told Seok Kang-Ho and Gérard that he had roughed up Abibu. Telling the whole story took quite a while since he had to do it in both Korean and French.

"Ah! Damn it! I should have been there."

As Seok Kang-Ho was expressing his regrets, Kim Hyung-Jung entered the office. After exchanging pleasantries, he took a seat at the table. A mug of instant coffee was already in front of him.

"I asked you to come over because there's something we all need to discuss," Kang Chan said.

"Doo-Hee! Bring over that whiteboard please!"

As instructed, Lee Doo-Hee dragged over the whiteboard in the corner.

Afterward, Kang Chan ordered, "Jong-Il and Hee-Seung, come over here! Bring chairs!"

The two soon brought over three chairs to the table.



Kang Chan walked to the whiteboard and picked up a pen.

"My thoughts are all jumbled up right now, so I need your help organizing everything and figuring out if I missed anything."

He then quickly relayed the same information to Gérard in fluent French. Ironically, even though he was in Korea, he felt as if his French was improving. Kang Chan first wrote "Abibu" at the top left of the whiteboard.

"This bastard's deeds..."

Afterward, in order, he wrote "Hostage kidnapping in Afghanistan - Josh," "Assassination of South Korean agents in Libya - to cover up the incident in Afghanistan," and the rest of Abibu's confession.

"Look. This is the sequence. When the agents we had sent to Libya realized that the kidnapping in Afghanistan was orchestrated, our enemies decided to kill them."

Kang Chan then moved on to the revenge operations.

"They likely attacked our base in Mongolia not only to destroy it but also to obtain denadite and cetinium samples for their new next-generation power facilities."

By the time he was done recounting and documenting everything that Abibu had revealed, including what the UIS had intended to broadcast, he had already completely filled the left side of the board.

"That fucking bastard!" Seok Kang-Ho cursed on Kang Chan's behalf.

"We're not done yet. Next is Director Hwang's death. According to Manager Kim, he left coordinates using a phone number, and that's likely the reason DGSE Director Romain decided to kill him with a terrorist attack."

Kang Chan first wrote "Hwang Ki-Hyun" and then "Romain" below it. He then connected the International Building terrorist attack, Hwang Ki-Hyun, Romain, and Abibu with lines.

"After that, one of our agents obtained coordinates from a Greek-Egyptian naval intelligence officer, which led us to a ship transporting the OTP device of a nuclear warhead. The crew aboard the ship were presumed to be of Greek military origin."

Seok Kang-Ho nodded in response. After Kang Chan said the same thing in French, Gérard nodded as well.

"Lastly, Ambassador Lanok got locked up in Loriam's underground prison. Pierre, the head of the Nifles branch of France's intelligence bureau, has replaced him."

After his monologue, everyone stared at the whiteboard with serious expressions.

"Think about the connections. There has to be something here. Even if there isn't, we need to find one. How and where Director Hwang obtained the coordinates, where the Egyptian naval officer got the coordinates to the ship carrying the OTP device... there's got to be something we can work on."

Looking at the people seated before him, Kang Chan added, "Considering there were no other ships near that area, those who were supposed to receive the OTP device were likely in a submarine. If so, then the missing nuclear warhead was likely aboard it."

Silence enveloped the spacious office.

"Can I smoke?" Seok Kang-Ho asked.

"Go for it," Kang Chan replied.

Using their brains definitely intensified their craving for cigarettes.

However, that was simply how it was when it came to smoking. Once someone had reached out to bum a cigarette, the other people in the group strangely extended their hands out too. Eventually, Kim Hyung-Jung nodded, permitting Choi Jong-Il, Woo Hee-Seung, and Lee Doo-Hee to smoke as well.

The smoke from their cigarettes swirled toward the ceiling vent.

"Captain," Gérard called. "How about we try getting an informant in Egypt? They might have some other information routes connected to the senior officers."

Kang Chan wrote "Egyptian informant" on the whiteboard, then relayed Gérard's suggestion in Korean.

"Wow!"

Seok Kang-Ho looked at Gérard in surprise. His expression then filled with the determination to come up with an even more amazing suggestion.

"Assistant Director," Kim Hyung-Jung called, causing everyone to turn to him.

"There are only a few countries that could have sent a submarine there. As Mr. Gérard suggested, we should start by looking for an informant in Egypt and trying to find a submarine equipped with missiles that require launch codes."

As Kang Chan interpreted Kim Hyung-Jung's suggestion to French for Gérard and wrote 'Submarine-owning countries' on the whiteboard, Seok Kang-Ho's face grew increasingly anxious.

*Why is this bastard so enthusiastic about using his brain?*

Kang Chan felt a bit sorry for Seok Kang-Ho, but there was no other choice at the moment.

\*\*\*

Jo Seok-Do sat facing the road on the terrace of a coffee shop. After some time, someone walked over to him.

"Sorry, I'm late. Have you been waiting long?"

Jo Seok-Do stood up and greeted the person. "Not at all."

"It's been a while."

"It has, hasn't it? Please, have a seat."

Once his companion had sat down, he took his seat again.

"How have you been?"

"Terrible. You know how it is, don't you, sunbae-nim?"

"Yeah. We're on the same boat, then."

A moment of frivolous conversation passed.

"I've got a scoop for you, but can you handle it?"

"What is it?"

"The main culprit behind the recent International Building incident is a Saudi Arabian prince."

Jo Seok-Do quickly looked around.

"Seriously?"

"I wouldn't spout nonsense."

Jo Seok-Do opened his notebook and swiftly began to take notes.

"The prince was arrested at the Park Hotel in Samseong-dong during the incident. Cross-referencing the hotel records should reveal everything to you."

As his companion spoke, Jo Seok-Do just kept taking notes.

"I've got something even more shocking for you. The assistant director of the National Intelligence Service has tortured the prince and his attendant. They are now in critical condition."

Jo Seok-Do stopped writing and sharply looked up. "W-what?"

"Even though the prince was behind the terrorist attack, it's still hard to forgive the emergency arrest of a foreign dignitary, especially since they were tortured almost to death to force them to confess."

"Do you have evidence?"

His companion shook his head.

"The moment I bring out evidence, everyone will know who did it, and I'll immediately be..." he made a slitting gesture across his throat.

"Hmm."

"No need to ponder. Just announce the arrest first. That alone would be a scoop, wouldn't it? Just say that the person identified as the perpetrator is now in critical condition due to torture. If he's alright, he'll appear on TV soon, and if the official announcement is delayed, your article will validate itself."

Jo Seok-Do pressed his lips together and stared at his notes.

"Are you sure it was the assistant director of the National Intelligence Service who tortured him?"

"Yes, the very person who led the counter-terrorism team."

Jo Seok-Do tilted his head in disbelief. "Haaa."

"What is it?"

"He's currently a national hero. Writing that he tortured someone without evidence won't get past the desk."

"Is that so? Forget I said anything, then," his companion nonchalantly replied.

"Sunbae-nim, why are you giving me this information? To the National Intelligence Service..." Jo Seok-Do looked around before continuing, "You're not exactly low-ranked."

His companion scoffed. "Hmph. I can't tell you everything, but because of the assistant director, our country might go to war."

Jo Seok-Do didn't seem all that surprised. Perhaps it was because he found the claim absurd.

"I know. Hard to believe, isn't it? I'm the one who handles the information, yet I'm just as baffled. Try to connect the dots, though. The Eurasian Rail conference terrorist attack, past military deployments, the recent assassination of two of our directors, and now the International Building incident. It's not impossible. We are in a dire situation."

"So you're doing this to prevent a war? No other intentions?"

His companion scoffed again. "I'll let you be the judge of that, but get back to me within two hours. You're the first person I gave this info to since you're my junior. There wouldn't be any hard feelings if you were to refuse."

The person stood up and left the coffee shop without looking back.

"Hmm."

Jo Seok-Do silently stared at his notebook.

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"Captain," Gérard called once more.

"How did the agents in Libya find out that Josh ordered the kidnapping of hostages in Afghanistan? If they were killed to cover it up, does that mean Josh and Romain were aware of the entire operation?"

"We still don't know. They've killed all agents who knew the details."

Kang Chan wrote Gérard's question on the whiteboard again and relayed the gist of his idea in Korean. Once written, it felt more objective to look at it one by one. While lost in thought, Kim Hyung-Jung took notes about everything written on the board.

Choi Jong-Il raised his hand. "What about our fight with the Quds in Africa? Is that unrelated to this situation?"

Kang Chan and the others blankly looked at him.

"The Quds seemed to be trying to annihilate all of the special forces teams, including us. There has to be a reason for that too, especially since they're of Arab descent..."

*That's it!*

Kang Chan snapped to attention.

*How could I have missed that?*

While telling Gérard what Choi Jong-Il had just said, Kang Chan turned to Choi Jong-Il. He looked as if he had just realized something.

Only Seok Kang-Ho's gaze, filled with a strong determination to blow something up, was different from the others

Staring intently at the whiteboard, he called, "Captain."

Kang Chan wanted to stop him, concerned that what he was about to say would be so farfetched that it would only upset him... He honestly hoped Seok Kang-Ho would just suggest grabbing a snack instead.

Instead, with a grave expression, Seok Kang-Ho asked, "You said the hostages in Afghanistan weren't just kidnapped for ransom, right?"

"That's right."

Kang Chan was so nervous he almost couldn't hear what Seok Kang-Ho was saying.

*This bastard makes me tense up over nothing.*

"You also said that our agents in Libya were killed because they have discovered the true objective of the kidnappings in Afghanistan."

"Yes."

*Is he actually onto something...? Maybe he found a clue?*

Seok Kang-Ho met Kang Chan's gaze, then turned around with a somewhat arrogant expression. Meanwhile, Kang Chan relayed his ideas to Gérard.

"Oh!" Gérard exclaimed.

That was the exact reaction Seok Kang-Ho had been hoping for.

"Think about what happened in Africa. The non-existent Somali government and the UN tried to annihilate the tribe. Even the Quds showed up with around six hundred men."

*This guy?*

Kang Chan felt a chill run down his spine due to Seok Kang-Ho's development. At the same time, he felt something tickling him.

*What? What is it? Hurry up and get to the point already!*

Choi Jong-Il swallowed dry saliva while intently listening to Seok Kang-Ho.

"Everything I've mentioned so far involves Muslims."

"So?"

Seok Kang-Ho looked over at Gérard as if to say, "Bet you didn't think of this."

Afterward, he finally concluded, "Let's beat up Abibu one more time."

"What?"

Everyone's reactions were no different from Kang Chan's.

"That bastard knows something, doesn't he? We should beat him up and get more information out of him."

Although he made it sound like a great suggestion, it was actually nonsensical. He should have kept it moderate instead of going overboard.

*I shouldn't have expected anything from this bastard!*

Seemingly completely misunderstanding Kang Chan's profound gaze, Seok Kang-Ho said, "Phew. Let's go. I'll beat him up myself this time. I don't need an interpreter."

Kang Chan quickly turned his gaze toward the whiteboard in an attempt to stop himself from cursing in front of everyone.

\*\*\*

Smithen followed Sharlan's movements with his head like a sunflower would keep looking at the sun. His restraints were undone, and he had been moved to a sofa. Although his thighs were now covered with burn dressings, his face still showed a bit of pain.

"Think, Smithen. Even if you find your parents, meeting them will be difficult if you keep behaving like this."

Sharlan crossed his legs and took the chair that Smithen had just vacated. Men with stern expressions surrounded them.

"Can you find them?" Smithen asked.

"Stop worrying about that and focus on how you'll meet them once we do find them. In your current condition, you can't even make a direct phone call!"

While Smithen kept sneaking glances at Sharlan, a brief silence fell.

"Give me the injection first," he asked.

"No."

"If the pain goes away, I might be able to think of a way. Please."

Sharlan laughed cruelly. He then nodded at one of the men. With a pleased expression, the man inserted a thin syringe into Smithen's outstretched arm.

Smithen sighed in relief. "Haaa."

He then leaned back on the sofa, his lips curving into a smirk.

After throwing away the empty syringe in a trash can, the man asked, "Can we really use this guy?"

"We'll have to observe the situation until tomorrow morning. The International Building incident has quieted down, so we might meet that kid as he said."

After seeing the man's meaningful look, Sharlan continued, "Give this guy a strong shot and send him out with a bomb, and that kid is done."

Sharlan glanced back at Smithen with a villainous smile.

"It doesn't even have to be him. There are plenty of other people around him whose deaths could break his heart just as much as his parents. That's why, for now, keep giving him the drugs regularly until tomorrow."

When the man nodded, Sharlan stood up.

*Click.*

He opened his briefcase, took out a different syringe, and injected it into his own arm.

"God of Blackfield!"

Sharlan smiled at the ceiling, a satisfied expression on his face.

Chapter 340: Very Tired (1)

After the meeting, they had food delivered. They then ate dinner right where they were sitting, finishing every last piece of it.

After having coffee, one by one, those in attendance began to leave.

"I'll be at the office in Samseong-Dong," Kim Hyung-Jung, who was sitting with Kang Chan, said as he put down his mug.

"Don't you ever get off work? You should go home at least once."

"Choi Jong-II, Woo Hee-Seung, and Lee Doo-Hee haven't gone home in days either. I believe this is something people in our line of work need to be willing to do."

"You're the agents' manager, and you've got a sense of duty, so I understand, but won't your family be lonely? They would naturally feel that way if the head of the household doesn't come home in days, wouldn't they?"

Kim Hyung-Jung looked at the mug and grinned. This was Kang Chan's first time seeing him smile like that.

"I do feel more than sorry for my wife and children, especially whenever I can't come home on anniversaries and holidays, but...."

Kim Hyung-jung gazed out the window.

"Someone in South Korea has to do it. I'm eternally grateful that I'm able to."

"What if your children end up resenting you?"

Kim Hyung-Jung neither beat up his children nor had a raging alcohol addiction like Kang Chul-Gyu had. Still, what affection would children have for a father who worked so hard that he was neglecting his family?

"This reminds me of something my late father told me."

Kim Hyung-Jung bitterly smiled at Kang Chan.

“We were watching TV at the time, and one of the scenes was showing people unloading relief goods after the Korean War. Whenever the cloth bags of cornmeal would come off the ships, a bunch of skinny men would rush in and fight over them, hugging them tightly. They got paid a mere penny to carry them.”

It was already getting dark outside.

“My father said, ‘That’s what it’s like to be the head of a household. They’re holding on as if their lives depended on it just so they can put cornmeal porridge on the table for their family.’”

What did that have to do with family members being upset that the head of the household wasn’t at home?

Kang Chan tilted his head in confusion.

“As I watched that scene, I had a different thought. If someone had just organized the whole unloading process and lined the men up so everyone could have their turn, even the helpless ones would have been able to go home to their families with a handful of cornmeal for dinner.”

Kang Chan found Kim Hyung-Jung’s statement so unexpected that he didn’t know what to say. Hence, he just kept listening.

“If that war hadn’t happened, and if we were a more prosperous country, wouldn’t the families of all those men on TV have had full stomachs? That’s what I thought, at least. It’s what made me want to become a soldier and the reason I ended up working at the NIS.”

“Does your family understand those ideals?”

“They have always understood. When I was in the army, I lived about half of every month in the barracks. Now, since there are so many emergencies, they think it’s only natural that I don’t come home.”

Kang Chan grinned.

He supposed even Seok Kang-Ho had been staying at the office for days, eating and sleeping here even though his home was right around the corner.

“I should go.”

“Sure. Take care.”

After seeing Kim Hyung-Jung off, Kang Chan returned to the table and sat facing the window.

Kang Chul-Gyu, Kim Hyung-Jung, his parents—who had shut off all their electronic devices and stayed at home because of Kang Chan—and the agents of the counter-terrorism team who couldn’t go home because they were on emergency standby...

His family and those he cared about also suffered because of his service.



Kang Chan looked at his phone. He had to decide what kind of answer he would give Kim Mi-Young now.

She might answer coldly because she was tired from waiting. However, if she had been waiting, then all the more reason for him to tell her now.

Would he be able to have a family? Was it okay to keep Kim Mi-Young in his life when he didn't even know when or where he would die?

“What are you thinking about so deeply?” Seok Kang-Ho gruffly asked.

“Where have you been?”

“I went to buy cigarettes.”

Seok Kang-Ho showed him the plastic bag.

“Did Manager Kim leave already?” he asked.

“Yeah.”

“That man is something.”

Seok Kang-Ho plopped down on the chair opposite Kang Chan.

“You're not heading home?”

“Nah. I'm right where I belong.”

“Why?”

“Huh?”

“Why do you have to stay by my side?”

Seok Kang-Ho grinned mischievously.

“What?”

“Think about it. If you don't have me, how are you going to have tasty coffee and these cigarettes?”

“Ha. You just make instant coffee.”

“Hey, don't fret over the tiny details.”

It was strange, but whenever Kang Chan was with this bastard, he was quite quick to burst out laughing.

“Phuhuhu. Want a cup of coffee?”

“I just had some.”

The two chuckled over nonsensical topics. Afterward, Kang Chan picked up the phone.

The call rang thrice before it was answered.

- Aren't you busy? How do you have the time to call me?

As cold as ever, Vasili didn't even say hello.

Kang Chan told him about the information that he had received from Abibu, the OTP device they had found in the briefcase, and his meeting with Pierre at the French embassy.

- It's hard to believe that they're building a next-generation energy facility in Saudi Arabia right under our noses.

"That's what I heard."

- Hmm. Send me a picture of the OTP device after this call.

"Sure."

- I'll discuss it with Yang Bum and see what we can find.

As soon as Vasili was done talking, he ended the call.

*That rude fucking punk!*

Nevertheless, Kang Chan still took a photo of the OTP device and sent it to Vasili. He then looked through his contacts and pressed the call button.

- Hello?

"It's Kang Chan, sir."

- Oh! Should I connect you to Kang Sunbae?

"It can wait. How have you been?"

- I should be the one asking you that. The situation over there sounds a lot tougher than our lives here. How are you holding up?

"I'm doing well. Unfortunately, considering Oh Gwang-Taek's condition, it seems you'll be stuck there for a while."

Kim Tae-Jin laughed.

- I get to work with Kang sunbae, and I'm satisfied with what I'm doing these days. It's quite rewarding.

Kim Tae-Jin truly sounded happy.

- Wait, he's coming. I'll hand the phone over to him.

After a brief pause, another voice came from the other end of the line.

- Hello?

It was Kang Chul-Gyu.

"We should be able to wrap the situation up soon. If nothing else happens, things should end quietly."

- I see.

Kang Chul-Gyu seemed to be asking why he had called. Kang Chan felt like he should say something, but he didn't know what. While he was thinking...

*Beep.*

The call was disconnected.

*Damn it!*

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Upon arriving at the Charles de Gaulle International Airport in France, Kang Dae-Kyung and Yoo Hye-Sook looked around in fascination.

“Aren't you tired?” Cha Min-Jeong asked politely.

“Not at all since the seats were so nice. I'm sorry for putting you through this, though.”

“Don't be. Thanks to you, we're able to go on a nice trip.”

Their group headed down the elevator. Instinctively on guard, Cha Min-Jeong quickly scanned her surroundings as she spoke.

Three men in suits were waiting in the lobby. Upon seeing them, they surrounded Kang Dae-Kyung and Yoo Hye-Sook. They then waited for a moment until Assistant Manager Kim came with their luggage and gestured at the doors.

“We're good to go now.”

Right after their plane had landed, Kang Dae-Kyung and Yoo Hye-Sook canceled their original schedule and followed the discretion of the local agents instead. This was something that Assistant Manager Kim had told them in advance.

After exiting the airport building, which looked like something out of a sci-fi movie, they walked out onto a wide sidewalk, where another group of men in suits were waiting along with vans and sedans.

Assistant Manager Kim guided Kang Dae-Kyung and Yoo Hye-Sook to the vans. He and Cha Min-Jeong then got in with them.

As the car started, Assistant Manager Kim, who was in the passenger seat, handed Cha Min-Jeong a radio and a holstered pistol. “I got those from the local agents in the car in front of us. You'll have to return them when you leave the country.”

Afterward, he turned around and talked to the couple, seemingly apologetic for having to show the pistol to them. “Are you sure you just want to stay at the hotel this afternoon?”

“It's fine. Have you confirmed the flights?” Kang Dae-Kyung asked.

“Yes. There's a flight that leaves tomorrow. It's going to take a while to get there because there's a layover in China, but it's the fastest.”

“Thank you.”

Kang Dae-Kyung smiled and then looked at Yoo Hye-Sook. She seemed more relaxed now that she had had a chat with their son for twenty minutes on the plane.

“Are you sure you’re not upset?”

“It’s fine. We’re already here, so let’s just enjoy the trip. Once everything has settled down and Channy has gotten married, the four of us can just come back.”

“Wouldn’t that make him and his wife uncomfortable?”

“Not our son.”

Assistant Manager Kim and Cha Min-Jeong laughed along at their conversation.

“President Kang, Manager Kim from the Samseong-Dong branch has requested cooperation with the local agents, so you can freely travel around Europe if you want.”

Kang Dae-Kyung kindly denied Assistant Manager Kim’s offer. “It’s alright. We shouldn’t have even left in the first place. If we had learned earlier about the terrorist attack, we would have canceled our plans the day before and just stayed at home.”

Yoo Hye-Sook reached out and carefully squeezed Cha Min-Jeong’s hand, which was next to her. She then said, “My husband made this request just because I didn’t feel at home in our new house. Our shortsightedness made us think we might as well go abroad since we were going to be protected by agents overseas anyway.”

“Why would you say that, ma’am? If we’re the reason you feel that way, then please stop worrying about us. You can explore Europe as much as you want.”

Yoo Hye-Sook smiled and shook her head.

“I already miss our home. I want to play badminton too. I’m sorry for being so fickle.”

Cha Min-Jeong looked at Yoo Hye-Soo sympathetically.

This life must have been so hard and exhausting for Yoo Hye-Sook, an emotional person who had been living as an ordinary housewife until recently.

Considering her son’s high position, she could have easily looked down at the agents and flaunted her authority in front of others. However, Kang Dae-Kyung and Yoo Hye-Sook instead continued to speak formally to Assistant Manager Kim and Cha Min-Jeong.

“Ms. Min-Jeong, is there anything that our son might receive criticism for?” Yoo Hye-Sook suddenly asked.

Kang Dae-Kyung and Assistant Manager Kim glanced at her. Cha Min-Jeong seemed confused too.

“People always talk about Channy, but I still can’t help but wonder how he’s doing and if he’s getting bad reviews from people who work for him...”

When Cha Min-Jeong smiled, Yoo Hye-Sook swiftly added, “Don’t just tell me things that are nice to hear. Please let me know if he’s making mistakes without realizing it. He’s still young, so he might not know some things.”

“Well, I don’t know a lot about what’s going on, but there is one thing I’m disappointed about,” Cha Min-Jeong replied, earning a puzzled look from Assistant Manager Kim. “He should be resting, but he never does. His work has gotten to the point where he can’t even call you, which is making us all worried.”

Yoo Hye-Sook squeezed Cha Min-Jeong’s hand. She was grateful they were all so considerate of her son.

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

Dawn had just broken when Kang Chan’s phone began to ring, making him sit up on the sofa.

“Hello?”

- It’s Vasili.

For some reason, whenever Kang Chan was speaking to Vasili, he always felt like he should respond with “It’s Kang Chan.”

- I just got the results of the examination on the OTP device. The password is similar to the ones we use to launch ballistic or nuclear missiles from our submarines.

Kang Chan was so shocked that his sleepiness swiftly disappeared.

- We are now covertly checking the course of our submarines, and we should have the results soon. If any of them were near the place where you found the device, I’ll let you know right away.

“Thanks.”

*He’s going to do it now.*

As Kang Chan had expected, Vasili immediately ended the call.

He now knew the timing when Vasili would hang up.

He stood up from his seat and went to the office. Seok Kang-Ho, Choi Jong-Il, Woo Hee-Seung, and Lee Doo-Hee were still sleeping in the cots that they had set up against the wall. Gérard was at the far end.

Kang Chan picked up a bottle of water in the corner and went to the table. The glass reflected his shabby sweatpants and t-shirt.

After sitting down, he drank a bit of water and looked around.

In that briefest of moments, life seemed so unremarkable. National Intelligence Service agents and a foreigner who was once the commander of the Foreign Legion’s special forces were just sleeping soundly on cots in comfortable clothes.

‘That punk!’

Kang Chan grinned when he looked at Gérard. He always slept with one foot out of the bed.

He was sipping more water when Gérard suddenly sat up.

“You’re up already?” Gérard asked.

“Yeah. Someone called.”

While running a hand through his matted hair, Gérard went to the corner and started a pot of coffee.

“Smells good,” Kang Chan commented.

“I’ll make you some too.”

*That bastard!*

Kang Chan realized Gérard probably hadn’t even washed his hands.

Gérard took a cup and turned around. At the same time, Seok Kang-Ho suddenly woke up with a groan.

As if taking that as a signal to wake up, Choi Jong-Il, Woo Hee-Seung, and Lee Doo-Hee also got up, drank water, and gathered at the table with some coffee.

“The format of the OTP password is the same as the one Russia uses,” Kang Chan suddenly revealed.

“What?”

Surprised, Seok Kang-Ho turned to Kang Chan mid-yawn.

“They’re looking into the courses of their submarines secretly right now, so don’t tell the agents manning the satellites about it yet.”

Kang Chan explained everything to Gérard as well.

Afterward, Seok Kang-Ho asked, “What are you doing today?”

“Not sure,” Kang Chan replied. “We don’t have any pressing matters to handle right now. Why?”

“I’m going to stop by home later then.”

“Alright,” he answered, finding no reason to stop him. He then downed the rest of his coffee.

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

It was a busy morning. They hadn’t even had breakfast yet.

Kang Chan looked at his phone and pressed the answer button.

“Hello?”

- Captain, it’s me.

“Smithen? Long time no chat.”

- Yeah.

The name made Seok Kang-Ho and Gérard look at Kang Chan.

- Are you busy today?

“No. I don’t have any plans yet. Why?”

- I was wondering if we could meet today.

Kang Chan glanced at Seok Kang-Ho.

“Did you drink yesterday?”

- No.

“Why do you sound like that?”

- I’m just happy at the thought of seeing you.

Kang Chan unknowingly chuckled.

“When do you want to meet?”

- Can we have lunch together?

“Sure. Gérard’s with me, so we can meet together. Where are we meeting?”

- At the coffee shop from last time is fine.

“I can’t remember where we last met. Give me an exact location.”

- The coffee shop at the intersection. I’ll see you there.

“Alright. If you’re going to bring girls with you, you can forget about it.”

- It’s not like that this time. I’ll be there at eleven-thirty.

“Got it.”

After hanging up, Kang Chan told Gérard about the call.

“How’s that punk so good at Korean?” Gérard griped.

“Are you having lunch with him?” Seok Kang-Ho asked Kang Chan.

“Yeah. Why?”

“I’m thinking of joining you.”

Kang Chan grinned. “Just go home. How long has it been since you last went? It’s just right around the corner anyway.”

“We’ll see. Let me just wash up for now.”

Seok Kang-Ho left.

“How’s Smithen these days? Is that bastard a decent human being now?”  
Gérard asked.

“Why? Did something happen?”

“I remember him being a total dick the few times we were in operations together. He was a total simp for girls too.” Gérard scoffed as he picked up a cigarette. “I even almost killed him once. I only stopped because of you.”

“Go easy on him. Ever since his body changed, he strangely became weak. It’s a bit pitiful,” Kang Chan replied.

Gérard lit up his cigarette. “I’m just saying. He might have changed, but considering how sly and snarky he used to be, I’m not buying his bullshit.”

“Are you coming to lunch with us or not?”

“Of course I am, but I’m ordering the food.”

*Shit!*

Kang Chan suddenly felt like going alone.