

Blackfield 361

Chapter 361: Are You Watching? (2)

Kang Chul-Gyu descended the mountain and went around the outskirts.

The DMZ team was accustomed to operating in places where sniper bullets or large knives could hit them at any moment. Hence, they always moved anticipating snipers. Perhaps that was why the enemy resorted to rocket launchers; their sniper rifles couldn't catch a glimpse of the DMZ team's heads.

Ignoring the blood trickling down the corner of his eye, Kang Chul-Gyu climbed the mountain on the opposite side.

Not even crumbling dirt can stop us.

As Kang Chul-Gyu ascended the slope, he stopped and glared ahead. An enemy sniper was aiming an RPG at the spot where the DMZ team was likely to be.

How reckless! What were they thinking taking positions this close to us? Are they trying to punch a hole through our chests?

Whoosh!

Kang Chul-Gyu charged at the sniper, his footsteps suddenly becoming loud and noticeable.

Whoosh!

Startled, the sniper aimed the RPG at Kang Chul-Gyu, but Kang Chul-Gyu swatted the weapon away just as the trigger was pulled.

The rocket flew down the slope and exploded in a random area.

Whizz! Boom!

Using his momentum, Kang Chul-Gyu grabbed the sniper's neck and then kneed his chest, crushing his ribcage.

Crack! Crunch!

“Ugh! Gah!”

This sniper was on the far right of the area. Taking him down would clear the way up this mountain.

Kang Chul-Gyu flipped him over and pinned his arm with a knee. Smirking, he then drew his knife and stabbed it into the enemy's right eye.

“Aaaargh! Aaaagh!”

As the enemy let out a scream that seemed to have come from the depths of hell, Kang Chul-Gyu pulled the knife out.

It felt good firing that rocket, didn't it? Did you expect me and all of my men to burn to death in the explosion?

“Aaaaargh! Aaaagh! Aaaaargh!”

Keep screaming! It'll terrify your comrades and cover the sounds of my team moving.

“Aaaaargh!”

The scream, now hoarse, sounded even more pitiful. Under Kang Chul-Gyu’s knee, the enemy squirmed and twisted.

That’s it! Keep struggling!

Kang Chul-Gyu slowly moved his knife toward the enemy’s left ear.

“Aaagh! Aaaargh!”

Do you know why we had to abandon our families? Why we had to become this cruel?

We spent our lives putting ourselves in grave danger to protect South Korea, our powerless country! Unless we resorted to this, we would have had no chance of survival.

“Aaaargh!”

Aware that his enemy would faint if the pain decreased or increased, Kang Chul-Gyu twisted the enemy’s neck to keep him conscious.

“Aaagh! Aaaargh!”

You must think I’m cruel, but it doesn’t matter. If it would stop people from trying to ruin what Kang Chan has asked me to do—if it would stop anyone from getting in the way of the mission he has given me—then I’d gladly be a thousand times more cruel than this. The South Korea that Kang Chan is trying to build will be that strong!

Crunch!

Just as Kang Chul-Gyu’s knife reached the enemy’s ear, he heard two screams come from afar.

“Aaaargh!”

“Uuugh!”

Kang Chul-Gyu smirked.

Good work!

He violently twisted the enemy’s head, which was covered in a mix of blood and sticky fluids.

Crack! Thud!

“Aaaaargh! Aaaaargh!”

Screams echoed from elsewhere too. Kang Chul-Gyu turned around, meeting the fiercely gleaming eyes of one of his subordinates.

“Byung-Chul, sir.”

“Clean this up,” ordered Kang Chul-Gyu.

“Yes, sir.”

Kang Chul-Gyu had never hung their enemies on trees himself.

Not far from them, Nam Il-Gyu dragged the knife that he had stabbed into the enemy's ear toward his chin.

Crunch!

“Eeeek! Uuuugh!”

You just had to oppose us, didn't you? Why do you even still try to get in the way of the assistant director's orders? Are you fucking blind? South Korea no longer bows to the US, Russia, or China!

Thud!

By the time Nam Il-Gyu's knife had reached the enemy's chin, the enemy had already stopped breathing.

You bastard! Well, let me show you Seoul!

Nam Il-Gyu aimed the knife horizontally across the enemy's neck.

Squelch! Squelch!

Riled up, Yang Dong-Sik's lips thinned and his front teeth showed. He had heard how dangerous this could be at night, but now that his temper had flared, he couldn't control it.

How dare these fucking bastards oppose the assistant director!

These motherfuckers even made the DMZ King himself step in!

“Uuugh!”

Yang Dong-Sik pulled out the knife that he had stabbed into his enemy's ear and then used it to behead his enemy.

Squelch. Squelch.

“Grggghh! Gah!”

Blood splattered on Yang Dong-Sik's face and soaked his chest, but he didn't care. Kang Chul-Gyu had ordered them to punish their opponents the DMZ team way.

We'll show you just how cruel and merciless our unit can be. Without our cruelty, we couldn't have protected our allies and survived to this day. We only have one rule. Only Kang sunbae-nim is allowed to cut our enemies between the eyes. Think of it like a retired jersey number in pro baseball leagues!

Squelch!

Yang Dong-Sik picked up the severed enemy head and tied it to a tree. Nam Il-Gyu always called this “showing them Seoul.”

“Aaaaargh!”

Hearing another scream echo from afar, Yang Dong-Sik glanced at the distant mountain.

‘I wonder how our juniors are doing.’

Today, for some reason, he had many random thoughts.

Jeong Won-Min and ten soldiers crawled into the water. Since modern rifles worked fine even when submerged, they kept only their eyes above the water. It made them look like crocodiles.

Swoosh. Swoosh.

If one knew how far away human eyes could be seen on a bright, moonlit night like this, they would never make the mistake of looking up.

Splash. Splash.

The water soaked their arms, swallowed their shoulders, and wrapped around their stomachs. The smell of briny water and the musty odor of mud filled their noses. Fortunately, they found it bearable.

Boooooom! Boom! Boooooom! Boom! Boom! Boom!

Down below, the soldiers were fiercely drawing the enemy's attention.

Staying close to the mountains to keep themselves hidden and far from the enemy entrenched on the mountain, Jeong Won-Min and his men moved upstream. Mud seeped into their noses and mouths, insects from the river rushed at their eyes, and bugs sucked blood from their necks, but they kept crawling forward.

Splash. Splash.

Jeong Won-Min lay flat in the water to cross the river, stretching out his legs to keep the current from sweeping him away. After a deep and quiet breath, he submerged his head as much as he could.

Splash. Splash.

Like a camera half-submerged in water, their vision alternated between water and air with each step they took.

They moved tediously slow. However, they needed this much patience to catch their enemies off-guard. Fortunately, their relentless training had made it easy for them to stay in such a low stance for long periods.

Splash. Splash. Splash.

The current grew stronger, and the riverbed dropped sharply, pulling Jeong Won-Min underwater. Nevertheless, he opened his eyes and stared straight into the water.

Swish. Swish.

The dark, deathly river sent mud and tiny particles sweeping past his eyes, yet he still moved slowly. He'd rather drown than ruin the mission.

I'm just having a bit of trouble breathing. Compared to our training, which made me want to die, this is nothing. Choi Chul-Han must be watching us right now. I can't believe he begged me to let him join this operation only to be killed while eating a rice ball. He's missing the battle he desperately wanted to be a part of.

Splash. Splash.

Jeong Won-Min's forehead emerged from the river, followed by his eyes, and finally his nose. They had just crossed half the river.

He submerged once more and pushed onward.

After their meal, Kang Chan's team immediately pressed on, forgoing the usual twenty-minute break.

Up front, Seok Kang-Ho covered Kang Chan so perfectly that they looked as if they were sharing one mind.

Although some might think they were simply running forward, the soldiers acting as vanguard had to do far more than just recklessly rush head-on. That was why Kang Chan kept his rifle aimed in front of him despite moving quickly.

After advancing for about an hour, Kang Chan glared at the mountain ahead.

Considering it was just a small mountain, rather than climbing straight up, it seemed better to go around it. He sharply scanned the path around, then quickly looked back at Seok Kang-Ho.

Kang Chan raised his right hand and made a circular motion, then slowly waved it side to side like a car wiper, signaling them to hide at the sides of their formation. As commanded, the soldiers quickly scattered to their flanks.

Rustle.

Meanwhile, Seok Kang-Ho approached Kang Chan, who gestured to the side of the mountain with a nod. Seok Kang-Ho frowned as he scanned the mountain path, then abruptly gazed back at Kang Chan.

'Tracks!'

Kang Chan nodded. Those were definitely manmade tracks. He raised his hand again and extended his pinky finger.

Rustle.

After a moment, Gérard approached Kang Chan from behind. When Kang Chan pointed to the mountain path, Gérard gave him a knowing look.

With his index and middle fingers, Kang Chan pointed to his eyes, then signaled Gérard to move to his left and Seok Kang-Ho to his right.

Their plan was simple. Gérard would attack from the left and Seok Kang-Ho from the right. When Kang Chan nodded, the two swiftly went into action.

Huff. Huff.

At the same time, Kang Chan immediately began climbing the mountain.

'How do you recognize things like that at a glance?'

Seok Kang-Ho and Gérard had asked similar questions before.

How should I know? They just stand out to me.

Kang Chan truly didn't know. To him, it was no different from asking how he could run so relentlessly.

Huff. Huff.

Not long after, Kang Chan reached the top of the mountain. He slowly scanned the area beyond.

Damn it!

A distance away from his position were more than six large temporary barracks in the middle of a flat and wide clearing, which looked out of place in this terrain. They had even set up a perimeter.

Kang Chan slowly scanned the area again. Considering they were easily over two hundred meters away from the barracks, it was unlikely for the enemy's perimeter to stretch all the way to his location.

Considering they only had people standing guard around the barracks, he thought that he was probably right. They didn't bother positioning soldiers on the mountain he was occupying.

Still, it was better to be safe. Kang Chan took a moment to thoroughly check any suspicious areas. Afterward, he pressed a button on his radio.

Chk.

"All units, climb up the mountain. You too, Daye."

Afterward, he gave Gérard the same order in French.

Rustle. Rustle.

Seok Kang-Ho, Gérard, and the soldiers all gathered around Kang Chan.

"Kang Myung-Gu, I want three soldiers covering our rear and flanks."

With a gesture from Kang Myung-Gu, three soldiers quietly moved into position.

Meanwhile, Kang Chan unfolded a map. He then pointed to two areas further back from where they currently stood.

"606 was stopped here, and the DMZ team here. I heard that after they failed to take us out with fighter jets, the enemy started tracking us via satellite."

Kang Chan traced the long route that the counter-terrorism team was supposed to take.

He continued, "So, to stop us, the enemy would likely be waiting around here. Given how many times we had to take detours, even if they moved quickly from that side, they would've arrived around here at the same time we did."

"That's why we haven't encountered the enemy yet, huh?" Seok Kang-Ho asked.

"That's one way to look at it," Kang Chan responded. After glancing at the enemy barracks, he pointed to another area on the map. "It looks like they

blocked this path to prevent our forces from reaching this location. There must be something there.”

“It doesn’t look like they have rocket launchers with them,” Seok Kang-Ho said.

Kang Chan nodded in agreement.

“For now, let’s capture them. Snipers, get ready. I, Daye, Gérard, Kang Myung-Gu, Choi Jong-II, Woo Hee-Seung, and eight more soldiers will go down.”

Seok Kang-Ho and Kang Myung-Gu nodded.

“We’ll clear each barrack in pairs. We’ll finish them all in one decisive strike. We’ll eliminate the guards, secure positions, and then throw grenades into those makeshift buildings. Kill anyone who manages to survive and get out,” Kang Chan ordered.

He then explained the operation to Gérard again.

“Gérard, take out the left guards. Daye, you handle the ones at the back of their camp. I’ll take care of the ones below. On my signal, everyone else will push forward.”

Afterward, Kang Chan turned to Lee Doo-Hee. “Help the snipers get into position. Provide immediate support if necessary. One here, then one on each flank.”

“Yes, sir,” Lee Doo-Hee answered.

With the orders given, Kang Chan leaned against a tree and looked down. The moonlit barracks looked rather peaceful.

Couldn’t you all have just lived peacefully? Why did you have to mess with a country trying to improve and force us to go all the way here?

“Snipers are in position, sir.”

Kang Chan nodded and turned around. Kang Myung-Gu and ten other soldiers waited eagerly.

Kang Chan assigned each pair to the barracks from the left.

“Daye, take the last barrack with Woo Hee-Seung.”

“Got it.”

“Gérard! You and I will provide support from the center.”

“Oui.”

Kang Chan glanced at the soldiers and advanced. Their operation had finally truly begun.

Jeong Won-Min and his men emerged from the river and immediately headed into the mountain. The mud clinging to their water-soaked uniforms fell off in clumps as they climbed.

Rustle. Rustle.

Compared to the mountains in South Korea and their usual training grounds, this terrain was a piece of cake to them.

Twenty minutes later, they had reached the top.

Jeong Won-Min tied a rope around his waist and tied the other end to a sturdy tree to allow himself to run down the hill. If he felt like he was losing balance or needed to stop, he just had to pull with his left hand.

Right after, he pressed a button on his radio five times in quick succession, a signal that would help them avoid confusion and friendly fire.

Attempting to take out the snipers slowly would only backfire. Considering he already had a rough idea of their positions, it would be far better to rush in and finish their enemies in one fell swoop.

Click.

He slung his rifle over his right shoulder and positioned his index finger on the trigger. After looking around to make sure that his men were ready, He tightly held onto the rope with his left hand.

‘One! Two! Three!’

Whoosh! Whoosh!

They charged down the hill at nearly free-fall speed. Soon, Jeong Won-Min spotted a sniper who had turned his head in surprise.

Bang!

He immediately slowed down and took aim.

Click!

Bang! Thud! Bang! Thud! Bang! Thud!

Hit between the eyes, the enemy fell to the ground.

Bang! Thud! Bang! Thud!

At the same time, gunfire erupted from where the other soldiers were.

Whoosh!

Jeong Won-Min released the rope and continued running downhill.

Boom! Bang!

Another startled sniper swept his rifle toward him, but Jeong Won-Min’s bullets quickly pierced the sniper’s throat, sending him thrashing to the earth.

Snipers normally don’t train for a situation like this, so you’ll never beat us with that aim and reaction speed!

Whoosh!

Jeong Won-Min ran downhill again.

Chul-Han! Are you watching? You better be!

Chapter 362: Just Press the Button (1)

Kang Chan descended the mountain with the other soldiers.

Crumble. Rustle.

The crumbling dirt and the bright moonlight was a problem, however. Those factors made them take twenty five minutes to descend a hundred and fifty meters.

Now, they were about fifty meters away from their destination.

‘Huh?’

Kang Chan cocked his head the moment he saw the armed guards. Judging based on their uniforms and how they were standing, they were undoubtedly Quds.

He turned around toward the path he had been walking on, then pressed a button on his radio.

Chk.

“I don’t know what happened, but the Quds are here,” he whispered. “Based on their numbers, they probably set up here while pretending to target the Jeungpyeong special forces team. Proceed with caution when entering.”

Kang Chan then repeated what he had just said in French.

‘If these fuckers are staying here, then there’s definitely something important here.’

He looked around him as he waited for his men to contact him.

Five minutes later, his radio crackled.

Chk.

“We’re ready,” Seok Kang-Ho said.

Kang Chan then got a response from Choi Jong-Il, who was with Gérard.

Chk.

“We’re all set.”

He could trust Seok Kang-Ho and Gérard with things like this more than anyone else in the world.

Chk.

“Commence the operation. Press the button on the radio once you’re in position,” Kang Chan said.

Afterward, he went down the mountain again. He only had a little ways to go.

Aware that this operation would take them quite long, he couldn’t help but feel rushed. However, he knew that being impatient in an operation like this would only cost his men their lives.

Rustle.

As Kang Chan descended, he pushed the dirt with the sides of his feet, seemingly creating stairs so that it would be easier for the soldiers behind him to follow him.

Going down the mountain wasn't a problem. Keeping watch of their enemies' actions with every step was more important.

Crumble.

He had almost reached the bottom of the mountain.

Kang Chan observed their enemies, taking a step downward only when they had looked away from his direction.

If they were just up against UIS militia, not the Quds, then he probably would've shot them in the forehead and rushed toward them already. Unfortunately, the Quds were no pushovers.

Kang Chan spent another fifteen minutes descending the mountain. He only had five meters left to go.

Chk.

The crackle of his radio signaled him that one of the teams was in position.

Kang Chan looked at the soldiers that had been following him and pointed to the ground with his index and middle finger, ordering them to stand by.

Then, he looked at Choi Jong-Il and pointed at the enemy guards on their right.

Once Choi Jong-Il had nodded in response, Kang Chan went down the rest of the mountain, moving slowly to the left.

Carefully, he closed down the gap between him and their enemies. Meanwhile, his subordinates nervously glared at the enemy guards.

He and his men really did pass down their experiences to their juniors. After all, those who had overcome a nerve-racking situation like this acted differently during training. That allowed them to pass over 80% of their experiences to the soldiers who didn't participate in this operation.

The moonlight, the armed guards standing in front of them, and the barracks standing in their way—there was no better training than being in a situation where they had to breathe carefully and experience suffocating nervousness because a battle could occur with their enemies the moment they made a single mistake.

Haah. Haah.

Finally, Kang Chan got into position.

He looked away from the armed guard and nodded at Choi Jong-Il. Then, he unsheathed the bayonet that he had strapped to his ankle and waited for the other team's signal.

The soldiers standing behind Kang Chan already had their enemies in their sights. If there was trouble with the team that hadn't given the signal yet, they would have to force their way through their enemies' ranks.

While enduring the heavy silence, they finally heard the long-awaited signal.

Chk.

Kang Chan swiftly placed his finger over a button on his radio, then used the crackle to count to three.

Chk. Chk. Chk.

He then counted to two.

Chk. Chk.

Before pressing the button for the last time, Kang Chan glared at the neck of his target.

Chk!

Swish! Swoosh!

As he pressed the button, Kang Chan and Choi Jong-Il threw their bayonets at the same time.

Whoosh! SWISH!

They then rushed toward their enemies like cats pouncing on rats.

Crack!

Kang Chan violently twisted an enemy's neck, who faltered.

“Keugh!”

Crack!

Choi Jong-Il took a different approach. He stabbed the bayonet into an enemy's neck and severed their larynx.

Blood fountained out of the wound, splattering all over Choi Jong-Il's face and chest. Thankfully, his target didn't make any noise.

This was also proof of his experience—Choi Jong-Il didn't try to twist the enemies' necks when he wasn't sure that he could pull it off. And he took care of the enemy in a way he was the most confident in.

After they had taken out the armed guards, Kang Chan raised his hand and turned it in a circle. He then pointed to the barracks.

Rustle. Clatter!

In a crouched stance, the soldiers headed toward the barrack they had been assigned to.

Haah. Haah.

Kang Chan headed to the barrack in the middle.

Within a minute, they had all stacked up on both sides of their respective barracks' entrances.

Rustle.

Gérard approached Kang Chan.

Chk.

The moment Kang Chan gave them the signal, his men took out grenades. They used their mouths and index fingers to remove the safety pins.

All preparations were truly complete now.

Time to sleep for an eternity, motherfuckers!

Once more, Kang Chan pressed a button on his radio.

Chk.

Swish! Swish! Swish! Swish!

The soldiers threw their grenades into the barracks. Then, they quickly took out a new grenade and removed the safety pins.

Ting! Ting! Ting! Ting!

Now, they didn't have to worry about being loud.

Swoosh! Swish! Swish! Swoosh!

They all swiftly turned around and crouched.

Boom! Boom! Boom! Boom!

The barracks, made out of tarp, fluttered as if they were struck by a typhoon. The ground shook with each explosion.

Whoosh! Swish!

The soldiers simultaneously ran into the barracks.

PEW! Pow pow pow! PEW! Pow pow pow! PEW! Pow pow pow!

The kill radius of a grenade wasn't that wide. Kang Chan had been told that it was ten to fifteen meters, but if their enemies were crowded in an area, it might only kill six to ten people.

Even so, consecutive grenade explosions next to them while they were asleep ought to rupture their eardrums at least. Firing a volley or two of bullets while they were dazed would surely kill them.

Even though he could only hear them, Kang Chan could tell that the enemies were all being killed. After all, he hadn't picked up any noise that would have indicated retaliation.

'Damn it! People shouldn't do this.'

Kang Chan wanted to rush into the barracks with the soldiers and remove at least some potential danger that might harm the soldiers. However, commanding the entire situation was the most important aspect in operations like this.

If any of the teams met any problems, they would need at least two people to provide backup right away.

Suppressing his frustration with his glinting eyes, Kang Chan stood nearby, examining the situation.

Chk.

"Area cleared."

As Kang Chan had expected, Seok Kang-Ho was the first to report back to him.

Chk.

“Same here,” Kang Myung-Gu said.

Pew! Pew!

Right after, they heard someone shooting from two barracks away.

The soldiers probably shot the enemies again to make sure they were dead.

Gérard shrugged at Kang Chan. His expression seemed to be saying that he didn't expect the men with them to be this skilled.

It took them about three minutes to clear the whole area.

Chk.

“Daye. Start checking the barracks from that side as you walk over.”

After issuing orders, Kang Chan looked at Kang Myung-Gu.

“Check every barrack starting from this one to that one. When in doubt, shoot the enemies again. Make sure they're dead.”

“Yes, sir.”

Kang Myung-Gu headed to the barracks with a few other soldiers.

Kang Chan heard clunking noises as his men made sure that all of their enemies were dead. Amid the fluttering of the barracks, occasional gunshots echoed.

Clunk. Clunk.

Seok Kang-Ho confidently approached Kang Chan without a care in the world. Then, he held out his hand, offering Kang Chan not just one, but three packs of cigarettes.

Did he take those cigarettes from the people we just killed? What a shameless fucker. Well, keeping them is better than throwing them away, right?

Kang Chan smirked, then turned his head to his left. Kang Myung-Gu had just finished checking the last barrack and was now quickly approaching him.

“Let's vacat this place for now,” Kang Chan said.

He then led the soldiers twenty meters up the mountain.

Thud.

He sat on the ground with his back against a slope. Seok Kang-Ho and Gerard sat near him, and the soldiers spread out below them.

Seok Kang-Ho glanced at Kang Chan and examined his mood.

“Afghanistan is different from Africa. We'll have to go over that mountain first before we can smoke,” Kang Chan explained.

“I didn't say anything.”

Kang Chan felt like Seok Kang-Ho was getting more artful as he became smarter.

Chk.

“Lee Doo-Hee! Lead the soldiers down the mountain. We’ll meet you here,” Kang Chan ordered.

Chk.

“Yes, sir.”

Kang Chan looked at the mountain ahead. It was still quite a distance away.

“Are we strong or were those fuckers just stupid? They’re so easy to take down that it’s almost disappointing,” Seok Kang-Ho complained.

Looking down at the barracks below the mountain, Kang Chan smirked.

Even though the other soldiers were looking indifferent, they were waiting for Kang Chan’s answer.

“You just feel that way because, of all the teams in the world, ours is second to none when it comes to skill. We just hadn’t been this successful because our enemies kept ambushing us.”

Seok Kang-Ho nodded in agreement.

They’d finally get a view of Rukha once they had gone over that mountain.

You’re going to walk again? Right now?

Just the mere thought of walking seemed to be making his body groan in pain.

Standing on top of the mountain, Kang Chul-Gyu glared at the area in front of him.

Although his face was covered in blood and dirt, his eyes remained menacing enough to make people not want to look at him again.

Soon, Nam Il-Gyu approached Kang Chul-Gyu from behind.

“We’ve buried our men, sir,” he said.

Like what had happened in Libya, they had to say their goodbyes to their colleagues in a foreign country again.

“Il-Gyu,” Kang Chul-Gyu called, his voice void of any emotion.

“Sir,” Nam Il-Gyu nervously answered.

“Dong-Sik,” Kang Chul-Gyu said.

“Sir,” Yang Dong-Sik replied.

The two stared at Kang Chul-Gyu’s back.

Not long after, Kang Chul-Gyun turned around. “Thank you.”

This was Kang Chul-Gyu, a man stronger than anyone in the world and the commander of the DMZ team. No matter their opponent, he would always emerge victorious.

He had never been the type to express his emotions, though.

The other soldiers unexpectedly felt like they were watching their mentor—who had been protecting them like the sky keeping them safe from the sun—suddenly aging.

Moreover, they felt as if they could feel Kang Chul-Gyu's sadness. The pain he carried was unbearable, yet he had never shown it until now.

It must have been painful suffering in complete silence, never once letting anyone know about how he truly felt.

Unable to control their emotions, tears welled up in the eyes of Nam Il-Gyu, Yang Dong-Sik, and the soldiers nearby.

“Sunbae-nim, we only managed to get this far because of you. No matter the hardships that we have to face moving forward, I'll never regret following you,” Nam Il-Gyu said.

Refusing to let Kang Chul-Gyu see that he was tearing up, Yang Dong-Sik dropped his head. He then glanced at Nam Il-Gyu.

‘Fuck.’

Yang Dong-Sik swallowed down the only word he could use right now to express himself. He wanted to open up like Nam Il-Gyu, but no matter how hard he tried, he couldn't think of any other word.

Those motherfuckers dare cause our Kang sunbae this much pain? I'm going to cut all of your necks and bring you bastards to Suwon so you can look around there!

Yang Dong-Sik gritted his teeth. Seemingly sensing his determination, Kang Chul-Gyu patted his shoulder.

Yang Dong-Sik gritted his teeth even harder.

Look, you motherfuckers! Kang Chul-Gyu is this kind of person!

Jeong-Wook and his men walked across the river.

Although his arm had been wounded, Jeong-Wook had killed all of their enemies' nineteen snipers in return.

Jeong Won-Min went across the river, then immediately approached the two soldiers that had been laid next to Choi Cheol-Han.

First, he cleaned Choi Cheol-Han.

He went down on one knee in front of Choi Cheol-Han, then used his wet sleeve to wipe his nose and the blood around his mouth.

Swoosh.

Afterward, he took out his bayonet and cut off a piece of Choi Cheol-Han's military uniform. He covered Choi Cheol-Han's nose and ears with it.

Swish!

Jeong Won-Min then untied and removed the laces of Choi Cheol-Han's military boots and used them to tie Choi Cheol-Han's hands together, which were placed above his chest.

He did the same for the two soldiers as well.

The other soldiers simply stood guard, their eyes glinting.

Once done, Jeong Won-Min stood up.

Clunk.

The pistol, magazines, and the bayonet he had strapped to his body seemed to be telling him that the operation wasn't over yet.

"We'll get going," Jeong Won-Min softly told their fallen brothers.

Under the moonlight, the three soldiers remained unmoving on the ground, their faces pale. They seemed to be listening to Jeong Won-Min, though they offered no response.

Jeong Won-Min continued, "We won't be able to visit you guys again, but until I wear my uniform to my own funeral, I will always keep you in my memories."

He saluted the three, then turned around. His eyes had turned red with spite.

"We're pushing forward, men. We'll pick up the pace, so those who'll be taking point, I need you to stay on your toes," Jeong Won-Min ordered.

Clunk. Clunk.

Gritting their teeth, the soldiers turned away from their fallen comrades.

They couldn't get sentimental right now. Their job wasn't over yet.

The 606 had been trained to act this way. This was the reason they could be entrusted with such important duties.

Stab!

Cha Dong-Gyun stabbed an enemy's neck, then pulled the bayonet toward him.

"Keugh!" the enemy groaned.

Blood splattered on Cha Dong-Gyun's face as his heart sank. He didn't want this to happen; he was hoping to pull the enemy with the bayonet and use their body as a shield.

However, when the enemy twisted their neck, the bayonet that was supposed to stay lodged in their bones sprang out.

Cha Dong-Gyun quickly wiped his eyes with his sleeve.

Everything looked red and distorted due to the blood that now covered his eyes.

Pew! Pow! Pew! Pow! Pew! Pow!

Meanwhile, his men shot the enemy in front of him, blasting away blood and chunks of flesh.

I can see again!

Although the moonlight and everything around him looked as if it was painted red, all that mattered was that he could now see the enemy rushing toward him.

At the same time, he heard Kwak Cheol-Ho's gun click empty.

“Reload!” Cha Dong-Gyun yelled.

In response, Kwak Cheol-Ho stepped back and quickly took out a pistol.

Pew! PEW! Pew! Pew!

Afterward, with the snipers covering him, Kwak Cheol-Ho changed magazines.

PEW! Pew! Pew! PEW!

The soldiers assigned as their second line of defense had been shooting their enemies as if they had gone crazy.

Bang! Bang! Bang! Bang! Bang! Bang!

Cha Dong-Gyun, with a pistol in hand, also opened fire. As he did, he felt goosebumps all over his body.

Kang Chan is fucking amazing! How could he kill his enemies with a bayonet and still find time to take out his pistol even while they were all pouncing on him from every direction?!

Did he also learn from someone like how Cha Dong-Gyun learned from him?

Strangely, the enemy that Cha Dong-Gyun was fighting right now felt a bit weaker than the Quds whom they had faced in Africa.

Pew! Pow! Pew! Pow! Pew! Bam! Pew! Pow!

When Kwak Cheol-Ho's rifle began to spew out flames, the situation changed again.

‘Come here!’

Cha Dong-Gyun pulled an enemy crawling up the slope by his collar. He then relentlessly thrust his bayonet at the enemy's neck.

Shhhk!

Can you guess what finger I stabbed you with? Wait, what? Why did I suddenly think that?

Cha Dong-Gyun pulled out the bayonet, allowing blood to spurt out.

Where's the other enemy?

Cha Dong-Gyun looked away in search. Soon, an enemy with an AK-47 rushed past their formation.

I should've stopped him with the fucker I just stabbed in the neck!

PEW! Pow! Du du du du! Pow pow pow pow!

As the enemy sank to the ground, Cha Dong-Gyun was thrown to the back and crashed into the slope on his butt.

Chk.

“Protect our captain!” Kwak Cheol-Ho radioed in.

The soldiers assigned to the second line of defense and their snipers shot at their enemies. They didn’t even seem to care if they gave away their positions.

Ting! Ting! Ting! Ting!

Those sons of bitches! I told them to save the grenades for later!

Cha Dong-Gyun dropped his head and then turned to Kwak Cheol-Ho just in time to witness his men throwing grenades amid gunfire. It looked surreal.

Bam! Bam! Bam!

Crumble.

Dirt and small rocks fell on Cha Dong-Gyun, making him cough.

Whoosh!

Meanwhile, Kwak Cheol-Ho rushed towards him. “Captain!”

He then wrapped his arms around Cha Dong-Gyun.

A brief silence followed.

“The fuck? Did you really fall down just because you got shot on your bulletproof vest?” Kwak Cheol-Ho asked.

Finding the situation absurd, he glared at Cha Dong-Gyun.

Chapter 363: Just Press the Button (2)

Sherman sat across from Lanok, who looked relaxed, and Vasili, who was coldly looking away from him.

To hide his emotions, Sherman took a sip of his black tea, then put down the teacup.

Click.

“It’s time for you to decide,” Vasili said in a very off-putting way.

Looking at Lanok, Sherman smacked his lips. Even though they were in the world of Intelligence, they were working where people lived. Moreover, they were just human like everyone else.

Did Lanok really plan out everything that had happened or did things just work out on their own?

Sherman looked at Lanok through his thick glasses. “Are you sure you can take down the Star of David?”

Vasili glared at Sherman, his expression seemingly asking, “Why is he saying nonsense now? We’ve already come all this way.”

Sherman continued, “Do you really believe that Mr. Kang can maintain world order?”

“Monsieur Kang made a dramatic entrance right after the Star of David had finished preparing their plan for the new currency. He also turned the next-generation energy facility into a reality,” Lanok calmly answered.

After a brief pause, he added, “He also stopped every attempt they made to start a world war. Those feats alone should be enough proof that he can fight the Star of David.”

Sherman now looked overpowered by Lanok, who still wore a mask-like expression.

“If the United States had learned about how valuable Monsieur Kang was first, they would’ve taken him to America even if they had to force South Korea to give him up. That being said, I’ve made my intentions clear,” Lanok concluded.

“We have to respect our President’s will.”

“No country reflects the views of the ones in charge as much as yours do, Sherman. Stop making excuses and tell us what you truly think.”

Sherman felt as though Lanok had become much more adamant than before. He looked down at his black tea in hesitation.

Vasili pursed his lips. “Tell us why the United States accepted the new gold system, the true identity of the Star of David, and why the United States decided to go down a different path.”

Amid Sherman’s lack of response, he continued, “The United States couldn’t have made this plan without knowing the identity of the Star of David, could they? Either way, I suggest you decide quickly. This meeting will be meaningless if the missile Alex is carrying gets launched from the North Pacific.”

“That responsibility falls on Russia,” Sherman said.

“Not really, no,” Vasili immediately retorted. “You were the ones who targeted South Korea with that missile. It’s just heading toward the United States right now because Monsieur Kang and South Korea’s National Intelligence Service stopped the attempt. You can’t get out of this with nonsensical statements, Sherman.”

“That doesn’t change the fact that Russia’s nuclear warhead will be launched from a Russian submarine, Vasili.”

Vasili blatantly shook his head. Firmly, he responded, “The fact that the nuclear warhead will fall on the United States won’t change either. Don’t forget that in the event of a nuclear war, the United States won’t be able to handle the nuclear missiles that Russia, France, and China have.”

Sherman stayed silent for a moment, then raised his head as if he had made a decision.

“My conditions are that there won’t be retribution because of this matter and that no one will request additional compensation,” Sherman said.

Vasili snorted. At the same time, Lanok smirked.

“We can’t just retaliate against the United States, but there at least needs to be some compensation, especially for South Korea. They’re making a lot of sacrifices to solve this matter.”

“If so, then—“

“We don’t have much time, Sherman,” Lanok urged.

Sherman exhaled loudly.

“The Star of David already controls the majority of the United States. That’s why they decided to control the global economy. We agreed to control Asia—China, to be more specific.”

Examining their reactions, Sherman realized that they had already guessed as much.

“The Star of David is the United States’...” Sherman trailed off. He had said enough for the two to know what he was about to say.

After observing their reactions again, he continued with difficulty, “The Star of David acts based on the Economic Intelligence Bureau, which is created by the Federal Reserve Bank[1]. Apart from that, we can only guess what they do.”

Vasili smirked in response.

“Don’t misunderstand—the EIB is an independent organization. It’s completely out of our control,” Sherman added, seemingly making excuses for himself. “We’ve also been looking for ways to deal with them, but they’re secretly in complete control of the United States’ economy and politics. They can also monitor the CIA and DIA’s activities, so there’s really nothing we can do.”

Now that he had said all of that, Sherman actually seemed relieved.

“If a war occurs, the Star of David will make profits from the supplies and construction. I can’t even imagine the interest that’ll occur through the exchange derivatives in Wall Street,” Sherman added.

“What’s the United States’ stance on this matter?” Lanok asked.

“If we can just take care of the Star of David, we’ll do our best to cooperate with the intelligence bureaus of Europe,” Sherman immediately answered.

Vasili smiled strangely at Lanok.

“Vasili, shut down Alex,” Lanok said.

Sherman quickly looked up in surprise.

“Russia is different from the United States; we have devices in every nuclear-powered submarine that allow us to shut them down. If we get rid of Alex, you will naturally provide compensation, won’t you?” Vasili asked.

“Of course, Vasili!” Sherman looked touched.

“Next on our agenda is the problem with the Rothschilds,” Lanok said, changing the topic. “The DGSE will kill thirteen of their key members tomorrow.”

Sherman looked like he didn’t understand what Lanok was saying. It was simply too unexpected and shocking.

Lanok continued, “Have the American intelligence bureau announce that they sank a nuclear-powered submarine from a third-party country. Arrest the rest of the Rothschilds for planning to start a nuclear war in the United States.”

“Lanok, killing and arresting the Rothschilds won’t make the Star of David disappear.”

“We’re going to seize the money that they have deposited in Switzerland along with those that they have invested in France, Russia, Germany, and other European countries under the pretext that they’re using those funds to start World War III.”

Sherman looked at Lanok blankly.

Has Lanok always been so fearsome?

“We’ll cooperate with the United States under the condition that they don’t protest against these measures and that the US courts and the International Court of Justice will deny restitution. I want the countries involved to be given thirty percent of the seized funds. The other thirty percent will be returned to the United States, and the remaining forty percent will...”

Lanok was talking about massive amounts of funds that not even Sherman could imagine it.

He swallowed dryly as he stared at Lanok.

Lanok added, “The remaining forty percent of the seized funds will be disbursed to South Korea.”

“That’s—!”

“You should at least give that much compensation. Monsieur Kang and South Korea’s National Intelligence Service are the ones who stopped this nuclear war from happening.”

“What will happen to the Star of David?”

Vasili shook his head.

“We plan to arrest all of the people involved, no matter what country they’re in, at the same time the Rothchild’s wealth is seized. They’re all going to be sentenced to life imprisonment, and their families will be put under special management. Don’t you even speak nonsense about their human rights or some other bullshit. Otherwise, this is where this conversation ends,” Vasili warned.

Sherman looked stunned.

A moment of silence passed. In the meantime, Vasili brought over a vodka glass, and Lanok lit up his cigar.

“The Star of David uses their funds—their strongest weapon—to threaten the United States, don’t they? Your people should be able to handle their threats with the thirty percent of the Rothschild’s wealth that the United States will take, no?”

“What will happen to the EIB?” Sherman asked.

“The United States will have to handle that on their own, but you can use the agent who hid from Monsieur Kang and escaped Libya as an excuse. Have the President give a formal apology for your country’s involvement in the civil war in Libya and for launching terrorist attacks in South Korea. I suggest killing everyone who was behind those two matters as well.”

Is there even anything Vasili and Lanok don’t know about?

Still, Sherman needed confirmation.

“Doing all of that would be shocking to the Star of David, but that won’t be enough to finish them. You two probably already know that, though, don’t you?”

“The moment we try to suppress them, they will naturally start an all-out war instead of dying a slow death. That’s when the real battle will begin. Consider the forty percent of the funds that’ll be disbursed to South Korea as the war chest that Monseiur Kang will use to fight the Star of David,” Vasili answered.

Sherman shook his head in defeat.

“What did you promise Alman bin Jibril?” Lanok asked as the cigar smoke wafted toward Sherman. “Nothing good will come out of hiding that. If the United States changes its stance again amid all this, then we’ll make sure that the Star of David and the United States will have to fight to the death. Afterward, we’ll just join the side that wins. More importantly, don’t forget that the Star of David’s greed is what caused these results that are difficult to reverse.”

Sherman nodded. “Saudi Arabia is constructing a next-generation energy facility. They were planning on starting an earthquake using the information they obtained from the UK’s intelligence bureau, then officially join the Star of David with the next-generation energy facility.”

“What will the United States earn from that?”

“Control over Asia and a stake in Saudi Arabia’s next-generation energy facility.”

Lanok nodded in understanding. “Those are logical reasons to cooperate with Saudi Arabia. Last question.”

“I’m not hiding anything anymore.”

“Tell us why the UIS gathered in Afghanistan.”

Sherman stared at Lanok.

“I want you to tell us what the UIS is hiding behind the justification that they’ll rebuild a war-torn country and why they made South Korea’s special forces team head there.”

“You guys probably know the answer. Do you really need me to confirm your suspicions?” Sherman asked.

“Don’t you know that trust between intelligence bureaus stems from confessing the truth?”

“The first reason is to kill Mr. Kang Chan,” Sherman started to answer, looking miserable.

Vasili blatantly smirked, then burst into laughter.

Sherman continued, “The second is to create a justification to start an all-out war with South Korea.”

Lanok was still wearing his cold, mask-like expression.

“After establishing a country, the UIS has designated South Korea as the target of their holy war. They believe that revealing the operations that Mr. Kang Chan had done so far would give them enough reason to attack South Korea,” Sherman said.

“The Star of David and Alman bin Jibril gave the UIS the funds for that, didn’t they?”

“That’s correct.”

“Is that why the American special forces team can’t move in to kill the leadership of the UIS themselves? Even if Monsieur Kang succeeded in the operation, America would still need the head of the UIS for the next Presidential election. Unfortunately, the secret agreement is making it difficult for you to interfere and kill him. Did I get it all right?” Vasili asked Sherman with a sardonic smile.

Sherman nodded.

“Sherman,” Lanok called

Sherman simply looked at him in response.

“We agree that the United States is a powerful nation. However, don’t ignore Europe’s vast experience and Russia’s actual power. There’s also China, a newly emerged lion. We are all looking forward to the new order that Monsieur Kang will create in the world of intelligence.”

Sherman quickly glanced at Vasili to examine his mood.

Meanwhile, Lanok continued, “No one has dominated the battlefield like Monsieur Kang has. No one has given us as much trust in the world of intelligence either. He’s...” He put his cigar in the ashtray. “Unlike us, Monsieur Kang is just. I hope that the United States will also follow our wishes.”

Afterward, Vasili filled up a glass with vodka. He then filled two more glasses and held out a pistol from his chest pocket and placed it on the table.

Click.

The message was clear—Sherman either had to follow their lead or choose war and death.

Sherman felt as though the dark muzzle of the pistol was glaring at him.

“Sherman?” Vasili pressed.

“You’re forcing me to make a cruel choice. Isn’t there a gentler way of doing this?” Sherman asked, then held up the vodka glass. “I’ll follow the orders of the European intelligence bureaus and Mr. Kang—”

“It’s Monsieur Kang!” Vasili quickly interjected.

Sherman corrected himself. “I’ll follow Monsieur Kang’s orders.”

Gulp.

Sherman downed his glass of vodka, deciding not to wait for Lanok and Vasili to do the same.

Kang Chan and his men couldn’t see the sun yet, but their surroundings were becoming brighter.

Fortunately, the mountain had quite a dense forest that allowed them to look down at Rukha.

The soldiers scanned their surroundings and then stood guard where protection was needed.

From a distance, they observed their enemies’ base, which looked like a mock city.

At least a thousand enemies were inside that base, and South Korea’s special forces might have to kill them all.

“Kang Myung-Gu. Have the men eat and rest in turns. We’ll proceed at zero-eight-hundred,” Kang Chan ordered.

“Yes, sir,” Kang Myung-Gu responded. He then quickly executed his command.

Meanwhile, Kang Chan found a comfortable place to sit.

“Let’s eat,” Seok Kang-Ho suggested as he approached holding C-rations.

Choi Jong-Il, Gerard, Woo Hee-Seung, and Lee Doo-Hee walked over with him.

There were a few different kinds of Korean C-rations. The ones they were eating now had rice balls like last time.

As everyone ate, Lee Doo-Hee poured water into their misugaru, shook it, then placed one next to Kang Chan.

“This powder is really amazing. It almost seems magical,” Gérard commented.

Of them all, Gérard enjoyed that misugaru the most. It was fascinating.

Well, I guess someone with a sweet tooth would naturally like it. Misugaru does have a lot of vitamins and a bunch of sugar.

Watching Gerard drinking the misugaru, Kang Chan couldn't help but smirk.

I can't believe I'm with a Caucasian man who has rice next to his mouth! Kang Chan reached out and removed the grain of rice that was stuck near Gérard's mouth. It made him feel as if he was raising a child.

Five minutes later, they were done eating.

“You guys sleep first. Let's rotate hourly,” Kang Chan said.

“Alright,” Seok Kang-Ho answered.

Seok Kang-Ho, Gerard, Choi Jong-Il, and Woo Hee-Seung immediately laid down near where they ate.

With his rifle slung over his shoulder, Kang Chan looked down the mountain. He had put one of his feet on a rock.

Afterward, he looked around, finding his men lying on the ground.

These men risked sleeping in the middle of enemy territory just for their sense of duty and the Taegukgi on their left arm.

Kang Chan felt completely different emotions now compared to when he was a mercenary fighting for permanent residency, money, and an escape from his depressing environment.

The sun peeked out above the mountain in the distance. It began to shine radiantly, seemingly unaware of the horrible battle that the soldiers had ahead of them.

Rustle. Clunk.

Kang Myung-Gu carefully approached Kang Chan.

“Why aren't you resting?” Kang Chan asked.

“I made the men sleep first.”

“Have a seat.”

Kang Myung-Gu sat next to Kang Chan in a similar position.

“I wish I could have a cup of coffee,” Kang Chan muttered as if he was talking to himself.

Kang Myung-Gu searched for something, then took out a black plastic bag from his pocket and offered it to Kang Chan.

“What’s that?” Kang Chan asked.

“Coffee. I heard you like coffee, so I brought one.”

Kang Chan blankly looked at the beverage.

Kang Myung-Gu’s expression said, “I made the right call, Didn’t I?”

It seemed this was his way of expressing his sincerity. Taking the coffee and enjoying it was the best thing Kang Chan could do right now.

Hence, rather than asking Kang Myung-Gu why he brought something like this all the way here and commenting that he didn’t need to do this, Kang Chan accepted the coffee and ripped one end of the plastic bag instead. He then had a sip of the coffee with a pleased expression.

“This is good,” Kang Chan commented. He then offered it to Kang Myung-Gu.
“Coffee tastes even better when it’s shared.”

Kang Myung-Gu quickly accepted the coffee and had a sip, making sure his mouth didn’t touch the bag. He handed the coffee back to Kang Chan again.

“It feels like I’m dreaming,” Kang Myung-Gu commented.

Kang Chan glanced over, finding Kang Myung-Gu looking at enemy territory.

“Ever since the incident with Wui Min-Gook, the Directors’ deaths, and the terrorist attack on the International Building, I have been desperately hoping to attack an enemy military base like this.”

Softly, Kang Myung-Gu added, “I would gladly turn into a nameless star a hundred times over for as long as it means we’ll succeed in this operation. After all, this will give South Korea the confidence to face terrorist attacks.”

“Have you thought about the family you’ll leave behind?”

Kang Myung-Gu nodded. “I have, but making South Korea stronger is more important.”

Kang Chan couldn’t help but smirk.

Why do I keep meeting people like Kang Chul-Gyu and Kang Myung-Gu?

Kang Chan felt ashamed that he even thought such brave men cared about being mistreated.

The two continued sharing the coffee as they looked at the enemy base.

After some time, a soldier quickly approached them.

Clank. Clank.

“We’ve just been informed that the DMZ team and the 606 are on their way here from behind our position,” the soldier relayed.

Kang Chan stood up and walked to the back of the mountain.

Clank. Clank. Rustle. Rustle.

From below, he could see the DMZ team with their bayonets on their shoulders and the fully armed soldiers from the 606 coming up the mountain.

At the same time, Kang Chan's men quickly woke up upon hearing people approaching and sensing the sudden change in the atmosphere.

The DMZ team and the 606 eventually reached them.

Kang Chan looked at Kang Chul-Gyu.

Kang Chan had numerous cuts on his face that had now scabbed, and Kang Chul-Gyu had fresh wounds on his.

'How did you get so beat up?' the two wondered as they stared at each other with similar expressions.

The rest of the soldiers also came up. Everyone exchanged greetings with mere glances and nods.

For some reason, they felt as if their enemy territory looked smaller than before.

"You all must have gone through a lot."

"I sent Il-Gyu and Dong-Sik ahead to scout the enemy base. It won't hurt to get a good layout of it while our enemies are still asleep," Kang Chul-Gyu responded.

"We also brought some gifts."

He then looked behind him. At the same time, the DMZ team placed about ten RPGs in front of Kang Chan.

Kang Chan couldn't help but smirk.

"Once those two return, we'll start planning based on what they find. For now, eat and get some rest," Kang Chan said.

Kang Chul-Gyu nodded. The soldiers settled to where they were comfortable.

The sun had now risen above the mountain.

Chapter 364: Good Work (1)

The wind came up from below and whipped around the summit. It then scattered dirt on the men eating rice balls before suddenly vanishing as if it had run away from the weapons.

The enemies were most likely aware that Kang Chan and his men had already begun their infiltration. Nevertheless, Nam Il-Gyu and Yang Dong-Sik now stood among them, scouting and gathering intel.

Kang Chan kept watching the enemy lines while Kang Chul-Gyu and the rest of the DMZ team nonchalantly ate rice balls.

Just as they were about to finish their meals, their radios crackled.

Chk.

"This is Nam Il-Gyu. Heading up now."

Rustle, rustle.

After about five minutes, two men emerged from halfway up the mountain.

“Good work,” Kang Chan greeted.

“It’s good to see you again, Assistant Director.”

The two men uncharacteristically smiled, their eyes curving like crescent moons.

“Go ahead and eat first. Give us your report after,” Kang Chul-Gyu ordered.

“Understood.”

The two men lunged for the rice balls as if it were the most important command in the world.

The soldiers of the 606 had barely poured water into the misugaru when the two men turned back around and wiped their mouths with the back of their hands. Their mouths were still full of rice balls.

“Please have some, sir,” one of the 606 offered.

“Hm? You boys are so kind!”

“Thanks. This looks delicious.”

The two men sounded muffled. Right now, they probably would’ve drunk anything given to them—even if it was rice cakes or kimchi.

Kang Chan didn’t feel it when he was drinking the misugaru himself, but watching the two men drink it made him feel like he was choking.

It didn’t even take them a minute to finish the misugaru.

“There is what it looks like over there,” Nam Il-Gyu said, picking up a branch and drawing squares in the soil in place of the barracks and the buildings.

He then circled the buildings and the area between them. “There is an underground facility right here. They’ve positioned machine guns here, here, and here. They’re hidden right now, but they’re ready to blast us on sight.”

Those motherfuckers!

This was why they had been so calm despite knowing that Kang Chan and his men had infiltrated their territory. They were planning to eliminate all invaders the moment they entered!

Kang Chan turned to the enemy base once more.

Yang Dong-Sik drew a triangle around one part of his illustration. “This area was a bit suspicious.”

“I tried to enter, but it was heavily guarded with people who behave differently from the ones in the open. I’m guessing they’re special forces soldiers. From what I could see, though, they seem to have ballistic weapons.”

“You went all the way there?” Kang Chan asked in surprise.

“Yes. I couldn’t get inside, though. I’m sorry,” Yang Dong-Sik said with a genuinely apologetic expression.

It was absurd.

Kang Chan, Seok Kang-Ho, Choi Jong-Il, Jeong Won-Min, and Kang Myung-Gu were flabbergasted.

“They had a lot of men stationed at the barracks here. Considering they also have machine guns set up above this cave, I’m guessing this is where the main leadership is located. They only have a few guards around the rest of the perimeter. I don’t know if they think the machine guns they’re hiding will be enough, but they have almost no security around the outer section.”

Nam Il-Gyu’s final comment concluded his report on the enemy’s strategy.

Kang Chul-Gyu glanced at Kang Chan, seemingly asking how he planned to invade them.

“The enemies have probably had ample sleep and breakfast already, so just go sleep for an hour for now. Leave the security to the counter-terrorism team members who have already rested. We’ll discuss our strategy once everyone has rested.”

“Got it,” Kang Chul-Gyu replied. Everyone looked for comfortable places to sleep.

“You should get some shut-eye as well, Cap,” Seok Kang-Ho commented.

“I will.”

Kang Chan stayed up all night.

They weren’t in the middle of combat right now, so he had no reason to refuse sleep.

Kang Chan stretched out to lie down where he was. He then closed his eyes.

Strangely, whenever he came to places like these, he always vividly remembered Kim Mi-Young’s face.

Her distinctive laugh, her round eyes...

Kang Chan soon fell asleep.

“They’re a bit sloppy, aren’t they, sir?”

“I agree. I don’t think they’re Quds—what are you looking at?” Cha Dong-Gyun asked.

Kwak Cheol-Ho, who had been looking at the body armor, had looked at him with a mischievous expression.

“Then why did you fall after getting shot by them, sir?”

“You—! You saw the situation earlier!”

“I did. You could’ve used the guy you had stabbed with the bayonet to defend yourself, but you tossed him aside and took the hit instead.”

Cha Dong-Gyun looked at Kwak Cheol-Ho in disbelief, then burst out laughing.

The enemies had come up four times and had been pushed back down again. Enemy corpses had piled up in front of the mountain like a barrier, cutting the men some slack.

“To be honest, it was scary earlier. It made me realize how great the captain is.”

Kwak Cheol-Ho nodded. “Same here.”

“If it had just been us facing the Quds back then, even with all the special forces teams from every single country, we still wouldn’t have survived without the captain.”

Kwak Cheol-Ho nodded again. He then glanced down.

“We’ve killed half of the bastards. Let’s clean the rest so we can eat.”

“Yeah. I realized experience really is important too. I can’t believe we’re having these pockets of peace in a battle like this. We still haven’t lost a single man either.”

“Ha, we almost did, though.”

“Shut it!” Cha Dong-Gyun shouted, feigning anger.

The two began to chuckle.

Pew! Pew!

Just then, a sniper’s gunshot rang out. The two men saw two enemies, who had been approaching the machine gun, fall to the ground in quick succession.

“We have enough bullets, don’t we?”

“The ones we brought with us when we first got here are enough.”

“Let’s push, then.”

Kwak Cheol-Ho glanced down.

“Turn the men in the third line around and have them move to those two locations and outward there. We’ll push down from both sides. Once we get there, it’s just a matter of getting our hands on their machine guns to put an end to this.”

“Understood,” Kwak Cheol-Ho responded, his tone now different from when he was joking and relaxed. With their relationship, he could easily tell whether Cha Dong-Gyun was joking or giving orders.

“We’ll send two teams of five. Get Yoon Sang-Ki and two more to complete our team. It won’t be fun if the real Quds join us.”

“I’ll get them ready.”

When Cha Dong-Gyun nodded, Kwak Cheol-Ho quickly returned to his position.

Kang Chan jerked up, shaking his head.

When he fell asleep tense, he woke up exactly when he needed to.

He twisted his neck from side to side and picked himself up off the floor.

“Here you go.”

Seok Kang-Ho, who had been standing guard by his side, handed him a plastic pack of water.

Kang Chan took a sip and then splashed water on his face. It was a habit he had picked up in Africa.

Afterward, he returned the pack to Seok Kang-Ho and rubbed his hands together, shaking the water off.

Fuck!

The cuts on his face stung like hell. He had forgotten he had them.

“Your scowl is fucking terrifying. Your eyes—”

“What?”

“I’m just saying.”

The men who had been listening smiled.

Seok Kang-Ho had to be the most shameless person in the world.

Kang Chan recollected his bearings and looked at the drawing and the enemy territory on the ground.

The DMZ team was impressively experienced. Nam Il-Gyu had learned so much from their short scouting mission. They even conducted in the brightness of day, not in the dark of the night.

“Wake everyone up.”

“Yes, sir.”

One of the soldiers stood up.

At the touch of his hand, the men opened their eyes and sat up immediately. They rustled but said no words.

A moment later, Kang Chul-Gyu, Yang Dong-Sik, Nam Il-Gyu, Choi Jong-Il, Woo Hee-Seung, Lee Doo-Hee, Jeong Won-Min, and Kang Myung-Gu approached Kang Chan.

Seok Kang-Ho and Gérard were already next to him.

Kang Chan picked up a branch and pointed at the drawing in front of him. "Here's the plan. We'll start by dividing into teams and getting to this area."

"606, groups of three. You'll hit these three locations at the same time."

Jeong Won-Min ingrained the locations in his mind, then nodded. "Yes, sir."

"DMZ team, support the 606. If the enemies have machine guns here, then they likely have some in other places too. Find any that they might still be hiding. Check for claymores or other booby traps as well."

"Got it," Kang Chul-Gyu replied firmly.

"The counter-terrorism will enter Repello Cave with me once the operation begins. We'll go in teams of two and take out any enemies inside to secure the machine guns set up there."

"Yes, sir," Kang Myung-Gu replied with a nod.

"Jeong Won-Min, once the operation starts, fire the RPGs at the machine guns underground. Can you operate them?"

"Of course, sir."

"Fortunately, they don't have a civilian wall. I was worried they'd use innocent bystanders as meatshields. Anyway, we'll move out as soon as everything is ready."

Kang Chan quickly told Gérard the plan in French.

"You'll come with me into the cave."

"Oui," Gérard replied with a satisfied expression, rifle by his side.

"And don't get in my way!"

"I'm not a chick any more!"

"Do I have to remind you of Mongolia?"

Kang Chan looked at his watch.

They were about to have their final battle. Considering the connection of the satellites wasn't the best anyway, he might as well finish the battle first before calling the situation room.

Besides, now that he knew that Lanok was on the move again, he already had faith that Lanok would make some arrangements.

It took a few moments for the DMZ team and the 606 to confer and for the counter-terrorism team to finalize the numbers for each cave.

It was almost time to go.

They all checked their weapons and cautiously switched the safety off.

Although they had discussed the plan and divided the tasks in a relaxed atmosphere, there was no guarantee that everyone here would return alive.

A knife-like tension swept through the air.

“After this operation, no organization will ever dare point their weapons at South Korea again,” Kang Chan said as he looked at the men standing by his side. “The goals of this operation are to kill all the UIS in there and get back home safely.”

The men looked at him with different expressions.

Kang Chul-Gyu and the DMZ team members’ expressions appeared to find his speech impressive, while Seok Kang-Ho and Choi Jong-Il seemed to be saying that much was obvious. Meanwhile, the 606 and the counter-terrorism team looked as if they were shouting, “What an amazing captain!”

“Any questions?”

Everyone looked at each other with the determination to succeed and the desire to get out alive.

Kang Chan looked at his men, then turned. “Let’s go.”

Clank. Clank.

He lowered his stance, reducing the chances their enemies could see him from below.

The men naturally followed him. Choi Jong-Il, Woo Hee-Seung, and Lee Doo-Hee could easily tell his intentions with a glance, while Seok Kang-Ho and Gérard essentially moved as one with him.

Kang Chan led the men forward.

Tension rang through the ranks and over the bodies of the dead enemies.

The Jeungpyeong special forces team knew that their enemies could pounce at any moment.

As the sun showed off the swarming insects and the bugs crawling over the corpses in search of a place to burrow, the men from the third line moved along the ground for cover.

They had plenty of ammo and grenades left.

After all, they had only been defending. Meanwhile, the enemies had tried to push past them four times already. Moreover, they seemed to have been lulled into a false sense of security by their numerical superiority.

Cha Dong-Gyun and his men would end everything in a flash.

In combat, there was no reason to give a tired, demoralized enemy time to regroup.

Finally, the radio transmission they had been waiting for came in.

Chk.

“Ready.”

Cha Dong-Gyun pressed a button on his radio.

Chk.

“It’s time to put an end to this battle. General Choi Seong-Geon is watching us right now, and General Park is waiting for good news. We also have to show the captain what we’re capable of.”

He released the button, causing a crackle in the background. However, he wasn’t finished yet; there was more to be said.

Amid the sharp silence, as the men turned to Cha Dong-Gyun, the wind and the enemy’s shouting pierced their ears.

Chk.

Cha Dong-Gyun pressed the button again.

“Jeungpyeong special forces team, we will win this battle and keep South Korea safe from terrorism. I couldn’t have asked for better men to have beside me. On my command.”

The men turned back to the enemy.

“Go!” Cha Dong-Gyun shouted.

Peeew! Pew! Pew! Peeew!

Gunfire erupted from the enemy’s flanks.

Peeew! Pew! Peeew! Pew!

Sniper bullets hit the enemies who dashed out in surprise, causing their heads to explode.

Peeew! Pew! Peeew! Pew! Peeew! Pew! Pew!

“Go go go!”

Cha Dong-Gyun, Kwak Cheol-Ho, Yoon Sang-Ki, and two other men ran downward.

Du du du! Du du! Du du du du! Du du du!

The panicked enemy fired back, but Cha Dong-Gyun and his men didn’t stop. Instead, they took advantage of the enemy corpses, using them as cover as they rushed toward the machine guns with their rifles blazing.

Du du du! Du du du du! Du du! Du du du du!

Bullets flew from the gaps in the trucks where the enemies were hiding.

The snipers could only do so much. They had to stop rockets from being launched.

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

Kwak Cheol-Ho stumbled and fell forward. There was no time to look back now, however.

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

This time, the soldier who had been running at the end wobbled and fell hard.

Crash! Crash! Crash!

At that moment, Cha Dong-Gyun, Yoon Sang-Ki, and the other soldier with them reached the truck with the machine gun.

Pew! Peew! Pew! Peew!

The snipers quickly covered them.

Du du du! Ping ping ping! Du du! Bang! Du du du! Bang, bang, bang!

As enemy bullets hit the truck, causing sparks to fly, Cha Dong-Gyun climbed into the driver's seat. The truck seemed to loom above everything else.

If he climbed in from the back, he would have just died turning the machine gun.

Creak. Click!

Cha Dong-Gyun turned the large muzzle and swung his arm around to pull the machine gun's breechblock.

Then, he put his index finger on its trigger.

Du du du du du du! Du du du du du du du du! Du du du du du du du!

A booming noise rang in his ears, and a pungent odor assaulted his nose.

Pow pow pow pow pow pow! Pow pow pow pow pow pow! Pow pow pow pow pow pow!

In an instant, the tides were turned.

Yoon Sang-Ki and the other soldiers also turned the machine guns toward their enemies.

You motherfuckers!

Du du du du du du du du du!

Bullets were sucked into the gun. Shells spewed out on the other side. At the same time, Cha Dong-Gyun and his men riddled the other trucks with holes and tore apart their enemies.

As planned, all of his men, except the snipers, leaped forward.

Du du du du du du du! Du du du du du du du! Du du du du du du!

Two of them grabbed two unmanned machine guns. The rest slung their rifles around their sides and tossed grenades like confetti.

Boooooom! Boooooom! Boom! Boom!

It was less of a battle and more of a slaughter, like the fight against the Quds in Africa.

It didn't matter if this battle could stop the terrorist attack heading to South Korea. More than enough bullets had been shot.

The men who had turned to the side to operate the machine guns were now somewhat standing upright. Cha Dong-Gyun continued to shoot.

He was proceeding according to what he had learned. He would wrap everything up neatly to ensure his allies would survive.

Du du du du du du du du! Boom! Boom! Boom!

The one-sided attack lasted for over ten minutes.

Finally, Cha Dong-Gyun let go of the machine gun and lifted his rifle.

“Machine guns, stand by!”

He jumped off the truck and quickly dashed to the enemy’s base.

The smell of blood washed over him. He then saw mutilated corpses lying on the ground.

One of the bodies squirmed.

Pew! Pew!

Cha Dong-Gyun shot the writhing enemy in the head twice. His subordinates did the same to anyone else who dared move in their presence.

The long battle was finally coming to an end.

Du du du du du du du du du.

Just then, they heard an unidentified helicopter in the distance.

Chapter 366: It Will Be a Good Lesson (1)

Kang Chan and his team left Kabul on a civilian aircraft and arrived at the Seongnam Airport an hour before evening. They landed smoothly on the runway and stopped in front of the main building. While vehicles fitted with stairs and a makeshift lift, along with the honor guard, solemnly positioned themselves in front of the plane's door and cargo hold, the plane opened.

The rush of wind and the afternoon sunlight covering the airport made it clear that they were back in Korea. Kang Chan was the first to disembark, dressed in civilian clothes.

"Thank you for your hard work, Assistant Director, " greeted Moon Jae-Hyun.

To Kang Chan’s surprise, Moon Jae-Hyun had been waiting in front of the plane. Behind the president were Jeon Dae-Geuk, Go Gun-Woo, Kim Hyung-Jung, and their aides.

Moon Jae-Hyun seemed internally shocked by the wounds on Kang Chan’s face but didn't mention them. As always, he simply shook Kang Chan’s hand firmly. Kang Chan introduced his men as they disembarked.

“This is Seok Kang-Ho of the National Intelligence Service, sir.”

“Thank you for your hard work,” replied Moon Jae-Hyun.

After shaking Moon Jae-Hyun’s hand respectfully, Seok Kang-Ho moved toward the cargo hold.

Next, Gérard bowed and shook hands with the president. “Gérard de Mermier of the Foreign Legion, sir.”

“Choi Jong-II. National Intelligence Service.”

“Thank you for your hard work.”

After Woo Hee-Seung and Lee Doo-Hee disembarked, Cha Dong-Gyun followed.

“Captain Cha Dong-Gyun, sir!”

“You've worked hard,” said Moon Jae-Hyun.

Cha Dong-Gyun stood beside President Moon Jae-Hyun. One by one, he introduced his subordinates.

“Lieutenant Yoon Sang-Ki of the Jeungpyeong special forces team, sir.”

Meanwhile, Kang Chan exchanged greetings with Go Gun-Woo, Jeon Dae-Geuk, and Kim Hyung-Jung.

“You should take some time off and have a meal with us. I'm starting to forget your face,” Jeon Dae-Geuk quietly said.

Jeong Won-Min came down, greeted them, and introduced the soldiers from the 606. Kang Myung-Gu then introduced the counter-terrorism team members one by one.

It might be a cumbersome task, but this kind of reception could be as valuable as a medal pinned on their chests.

The interpreter soon climbed down as well. He hesitated in front of Moon Jae-Hyun, who shook his hand for a longer time upon seeing his severed fingers. Moon Jae-Hyun then covered the interpreter's hand with his left hand.

“Thank you for your hard work. We won't forget your efforts,” said Moon Jae-Hyun.

The interpreter was now a veteran who had overcome challenging battles in Africa, Libya, and Afghanistan. His entire face was filled with a sense of duty.

Finally, their injured men went down.

“Thank you for your hard work.”

Starting with Kwak Cheol-Ho, Moon Jae-Hyun consoled each of the injured. Once they had hopped onto the ambulance, it departed ahead of everyone.

Moon Jae-Hyun then turned around and headed toward the cargo hold. Everyone else followed. The honor guard, wearing white masks and gloves, was standing on either side of it. Kang Chan nodded at the waiting staff.

Thuuud.

With a heavy sound, the lift installed in the cargo hold lowered a deceased DMZ team member.

"Attention!"

Clack!

The honor guards, wearing khaki tops, and white hats, masks, gloves, and pants, straightened up.

"Salute!"

Snap-!

Slowly, they raised their hands to their temples and saluted the fallen.

"At ease!"

They lowered their hands just as slowly.

"Pay respects!"

Six honor guards walked toward the body in a plastic bag and transferred it into a steel coffin. Once they had properly arranged it, they transferred it to a wooden coffin.

Flap.

Two soldiers waiting at the front lifted the Taegukgi and covered the coffin with it.

"Lift!"

Clank.

The soldiers slowly lifted the coffin with precise movements. Such actions wouldn't bring the dead back to life or lessen the sorrow of their grieving families and acquaintances. However, it was a necessary sign of respect for those who had sacrificed for the country and the Taegukgi.

"Honor guard, move!"

The legs of the honor guards moved as if tied together, slowly moving the coffin to the prepared vehicle. The team, once disbanded, had been called upon by the nation. Even in death, they were receiving the minimal respect they deserved.

Kang Chul-Gyu and the DMZ team members watched with mixed emotions on their faces. After handling the second and third fallen DMZ team members, the bodies of the 606 were lowered.

"Attention!"

Clack.

"Salute!"

Snap.

The soldiers' white-gloved hands slowly rose. This task took a long time, but nothing was more important than this.

"At ease!"

Snap.

Their victory was only possible thanks to these men's sacrifices.

"Pay respects!"

They won this battle thanks to the soldiers who died with rice grains and barley tea powder on their lips.

"Lift!"

Flap!

"Honor guard, move!"

After covering the coffin with the Taegukgi, the members grabbed the coffin and moved slowly.

Once respect had been given to all of their fallen soldiers, Kang Chan approached Moon Jae-Hyun.

"Assistant Director." With reddened eyes, Moon Jae-Hyun grasped Kang Chan's hand once more. "I will remember the efforts you and your soldiers have shown today for the rest of my life."

He then turned around. Jeon Dae-Geuk followed his gesture and fell in line behind him.

"I'll have to go first, Assistant Director. Please discuss the remaining matters with Manager Kim."

Go Gun-Woo also extended his hand, grasping Kang Chan's hand once more before turning away.

"Ready to go?" Kim Hyung-Jung asked, finally looking relieved.

"What about my request?" Chan Chan asked.

"It arrived two hours ago. Preparations should be done by now."

Kang Chan exhaled quietly. He then turned to his men. "We'll disperse here."

All the soldiers were now looking at him.

Kang Chan continued, "Excellent work on completing the mission. You all did well."

As commanded, the Jeungpyeong special forces team, the 606, and the counter-terrorism team headed toward their respective transport. The DMZ team also headed to their hotel accommodations.

Once the three buses had departed, sedans and vans drove up from behind the main building.

"Are you coming with us?" Kang Chan asked.

"I was planning to. Is that a problem?" Kim Hyung-Jung replied in a cheeky tone.

He's getting cheekier by the minute.

Kang Chan boarded a van with Seok Kang-Ho, Gérard, and Kim Hyung-Jung. Choi Jong-Il and others hopped into the sedans.

"We're going to Bangji Hospital first. Director Yoo is waiting for us."

"Did you contact him?"

"Yes. He sounded like he'd be delighted to see us after so long."

While Kang Chan smirked, the car sped forward.

Soldiers were already waiting at the Bangji Hospital. They headed straight to the first-floor treatment room.

"Ouch!"

Yoo Hun-Woo reacted as usual upon seeing Kang Chan and Gérard's wounds. Now, he even had instant coffee ready in the treatment room. Using tweezers to prod the wounds, Yoo Hun-Woo pulled out the bandages that Seok Kang-Ho had inserted.

Rip. Rip-rip.

Times like this really can drive anyone crazy. Removing bandages stuck to the flesh is literally like tearing live flesh.

"Ugh."

Gérard groaned beside Kang Chan as the second bandage was pulled.

What a baby!

The treatment took three hours to complete.

"You'll need to be confined for at least two days," Yoo Hun-Woo said.

"I have somewhere I need to go."

Yoo Hun-Woo shook his head in resignation and administered another injection.

"Make sure to take your medicine on time and absolutely no alcohol."

Kang Chan nodded. "Okay."

He then got up from his seat. He had more than six newly stitched wounds all over him.

The mother looked blankly at her son's face on the altar.

What's he so happy about?

Why did God have to leave behind an old, useless elderly and take someone so young?

Her brother from Jangseong said he would come, but the mourning hall was still empty.

Her son, who had grown up pitifully without knowing a father's affection, had once nearly gone down a bad path because he was quick on his feet, yet he always massaged his mother's shoulders at night to encourage himself.

"I'm so sorry. It's because I'm uneducated and so useless that you died."

She felt regretful. If his parents had been a bit more competent, he wouldn't have had to do such dangerous work. If they had been more able, his final journey wouldn't be so desolate. A few women who used to do business with her came to help and a few who claimed to be her son's comrades. That was it.

The single wreath standing alone in the mourning hall looked particularly lonely. She felt strangely pained by the empty space. It felt too regrettable and sorry that not only could she not properly raise her son in life but was also sending him off poorly in death.

"How much pain did you endure, my child!"

The old lady swallowed her sobs. The grief inside her strangely refused to burst out, clogging her chest. Just then, a group of men and women in black suits rushed in.

'Oh my!'

She wondered if something had gone wrong. Did these people hold a grudge against her son? Through her tear-blurred vision, she saw their faces, all with similar expressions.

"Mother, I'm here."

The mother blinked and looked at the person who spoke. Her blurry eyes cleared in an instant.

It was Seok Kang-Ho. The one whom she had been waiting for so long had finally arrived.

"Oh my! Hyung-nim, you're finally here! Why are you so late?!"

The tears clogging her chest finally burst forth, making her feel reassured and, above all, immensely comforted.

'Mother, I met a wonderful hyung-nim.'

You have met such an amazing hyung-nim, my son!

The old lady now felt she could properly send her son off. She couldn't help but feel grateful. Having someone to lean on in this world was a blessing. The mother clung to Seok Kang-Ho's embrace repeatedly, while Seok Kang-Ho wiped her tears away with his thumb.

"I told you to hold on tightly, didn't I? What happened to your face?"

"I did hold on. I forced myself to swallow water and endure the pain so I could send my child off properly," said the old lady.

"I'd like to take charge of the rituals. Would that be alright with you?"

"Would you?"

A soldier brought water, spirits, and incense inside. They said this wasn't a formal practice, but the two wanted it done anyway. Kang Chan just watched them in silence.

Suddenly, the once-empty funeral hall became bustling. Wreaths started coming in, so many that the later ones had their ribbons removed and placed in one spot.

Once Seok Kang-Ho had completed the preparations. Kang Chan stepped forward, lit the incense, and bowed twice. Then he faced Seok Kang-Ho and bowed again.

"Thank you, Captain," Seok Kang-Ho said.

"Send him off properly," Kang Chan answered.

"I will."

As Kang Chan rose, Kim Hyung-Jung, Gérard, Choi Jong-Il, Woo Hee-Seung, and Lee Doo-Hee stepped forward.

"Oh my! Oh my! You wretched boy! Leaving behind such a wonderful hyung-nim! You poor thing!"

The old lady wailed loudly, seemingly to send her son off properly.[1]

As Kang Chan stepped back, the DMZ team members entered. Kang Chul-Gyu, after exchanging a glance with Kang Chan, moved toward the altar.

Damn.

If everyone here were to be sent into battle, they could probably wipe out an entire city.

Han Kyung-Mi took a deep breath, bothered by the broken mirror that she had accidentally shattered while cleaning. It felt ominous. She kept reassuring herself that it was nothing—that it was just a broken hand mirror.

‘They say it’s best to smash a broken mirror completely and throw it away.’

Recalling her friend’s advice, she put the mirror in a sack and smashed it several times on the ground at night.

‘It’s okay. It will be fine. He will come back safely.’

Han Kyung-Mi habitually wiped down the old sink, which she had cleaned more than a hundred times, when she heard Cha Seung-Ho’s firm shout.

"Ha-ah!"

"Aaaaaah!"

When she ran to open the door, she saw her child with a hand-drawn Dark Vayder paper mask had knocked down her other child, who had a hand-drawn Tarantula-Man paper mask.

"Hey! Cha Seung-Ho! How can you do that to your little brother!"

Han Kyung-Mi was really upset, but she knew she couldn't hit the kids now. In fact, the kids weren't responsible for the broken mirror. She shouldn't take out her frustration on them for her mistake. The one with a hand-drawn Darth Vader paper mask, watching her carefully, retreated to the corner.

Han Kyung-Mi helped the one with the Spider-Man mask up, removed the mask drawn to look like bitten cheeks, and hugged the child. She began to burst into tears again.

Without Cha Dong-Gyun, how could she raise these boys? Could she raise them properly without that dependable man?

No! Why am I having such ominous thoughts?

Han Kyung-Mi struggled to gather her thoughts. She had met Cha Dong-Gyun while working in a small office as an accountant. Since then, Cha Dong-Gyun had been unwavering.

Training, comrades, and missions were his top priorities, but Han Kyung-Mi never once complained about it. After all, her husband was simply that kind of person—and he would never change.

While it was unimaginable for him to abandon the nation, training, and his comrades, he cherished and protected Han Kyung-Mi, Cha Seung-Ho, and Cha Seong-Ho just as unwaveringly.

"Mom, why are you crying?"

"Who said I'm crying?!" Han Kyung-Mi yelled.

It's only natural for me to raise my voice every now and then, right?

At that moment, she felt a small pair of hands wrap around her neck from behind.

"Mom, don't cry."

It was Cha Seung-Ho.

"I told you, I'm not crying!"

"But you were."

Han Kyung-Mi's tears instantly stopped.

"I will clean up the kitchen. Play with your brother, but don't hurt each other," she said.

"Okay," Cha Seung-Ho replied firmly, seemingly pleased with the easy resolution.

Just as Han Kyung-Mi was about to leave the children's room, she froze.

"Dear?"

"What's wrong? Did something surprise you?"

"Are you.... are you okay?"

"What do you mean?"

Cha Seung-Ho and Cha Seong-Ho peeked out from between Han Kyung-Mi's legs and ran toward the voice, shouting, "Daddy!"

"Hey! Were you good?" Cha Dong-Gyun said.

"Yeah!"

Still wearing his combat boots, Cha Dong-Gyun hugged his sons with an arm each.

"Dad, you need to take off your shoes. Come on, get down."

"Okay. Let me first take off my boots, okay?"

After putting the kids down, Cha Dong-Gyun bent over to untie his bootlaces.

His neck, scarred, tanned, and solid, caught Han Kyung-Mi's eye. How frightening and terrible must the moments have been when he got those scars?

Nevertheless, Cha Dong-Gyun, with an unaffected expression, hugged his sons and comforted her.

"Uwaaah!" Han Kyung-Mi ran to him, crying like a child.

"What's wrong? Did something happen?"

Cha Dong-Gyun hugged her gently and comforted her as if she were a daughter. How could she explain that it was because of a broken hand mirror?

"Dear! It's actually you, right?" she asked.

"Well, yes, naturally. Why are you acting like a child?"

"Huh, I'm sorry."

"Huh?"

Cha Dong-Gyun laughed and patted her head.

"Kyung-Mi."

"Yes?"

She was now a mother. At some point, he started calling her "Seung-Ho's mom," and it had become natural. At that moment, though, Cha Dong-Gyun called her by her name.

"No matter what you say, we're having a third child, so don't try to stop me."

"Hey! Stop teasing me!"

Han Kyung-Mi pulled away and glared at Cha Dong-Gyun.

It felt good to have someone to glare at—to have Cha Dong-Gyun by her side again.

Chapter 367: It Will Be a Good Lesson (2)

The funeral hall was now bursting with off-duty 606 members, counter-terrorism team agents, National Intelligence Service's front company staff, and overseas special forces soldiers. It was so crowded with soldiers who had heard about Kang Chul-Gyu and the DMZ team that there was barely any room to walk.

As the funeral home staff struggled to manage the crowd, Choi Jong-Il approached Kang Chan.

"We should use two more sections," he recommended.

"Go for it. Make sure there's enough food as well," Kang Chan ordered.

"Yes, sir."

Choi Jong-Il arranged to use the adjacent empty spaces, which provided a bit more room to sit. When the deceased's uncle and aunt arrived from Jangseong with their children, the line of mourners stretched even longer. While Seok Kang-Ho quietly greeted the soldiers, the deceased's uncle and aunt were simply grateful, not saying much else.

Kang Chan was about to get up when he caught Kang Chul-Gyu's gaze, who seemed to have something to say. There was no need to draw attention. Hence, Kang Chan gestured to the door with a nod and stood up.

"I'm going to have a smoke," Kang Chan said, preventing the soldiers from following him.

Where the hell is that guy, though?

Glancing over, Kang Chan found Gérard talking with the interpreter, surrounded by soldiers listening intently. He decided to leave them be for now.

Upon climbing the stairs and stepping out to the entrance of the funeral hall, the darkness and the city lights seemingly rushed at him. He made sure to avoid disturbing the soldiers who were smoking. Not long after, Kang Chul-Gyu approached him.

He pointed to a coffee shop across the road. "Think we can get some coffee over there?"

There was no need for further discussion. Kang Chan took the lead, and Kang Chul-Gyu walked beside him.

Kang Chul-Gyu was wearing the clothes that Kang Chan had bought for him at the department store last time. It was alright, though, since it still fit the occasion.

"What do you want to drink?" Kang Chan asked.

"Maybe a coffee?"

"Sit down. I'll order."

Kang Chan ordered two warm coffees and brought them to the terrace where Kang Chul-Gyu was sitting. The night air was still chilly.

"When are we heading out?" Kang Chul-Gyu asked as Kang Chan sat down.

He's got something to say.

Kang Chan took a sip of his coffee and put it down. He then looked at Kang Chul-Gyu.

"Dong-Sik looks like he needs some more time. If it's alright, we'd like to leave first and give him time to sort things out."

"What's going on?" Kang Chan asked.

With a slightly awkward expression, Kang Chul-Gyu answered, "I want to give my team a chance to seek forgiveness from their families before it's too late. I told them they could go home if they wanted, but Dong-Sik..."

Kang Chul-Gyu briefly mentioned that Yang So-Mi, Dong-Sik's daughter, was struggling. Honestly, Kang Chan found it funny. These people could take down a UIS executive with a single glance, yet they needed time to deal with a son-in-law. Kang Chan was subtly worried that the son-in-law would end up hanging from a Chinese restaurant sign somewhere in Seoul.

"Are you sure nothing will go wrong?"

"They won't make a scene," Kang Chul-Gyu assured.

He clearly didn't mean that they wouldn't hit him—just that they wouldn't cause any problems.

Well, that's not a big deal.

"Alright, then. I have a meeting at the embassy tomorrow morning. We need to discuss how other intelligence agencies are evaluating this operation and what our next steps should be. It would be best to leave after the funeral and then stay for about three days."

Kang Chul-Gyu nodded, agreeing to stay at the hotel for three more days with no incidents.

Why is he always so composed when we're alone?

"I'm going to head back first," said Kang Chul-Gyu, ending the conversation somewhat awkwardly.

What a stubborn old man!

He wanted to spend more time with Kang Chan but did not want to show that he felt awkward about it. However, his expression had already revealed everything.

Kang Chul-Gyu exited the coffee shop and crossed the street.

Damn!

If it weren't for the awkwardness, they might have gotten even closer. As Kang Chan pursed his lips, Choi Jong-Il and Woo Hee-Seung entered the coffee shop.

"Sit down. Got a cigarette?" Kang Chan asked.

While Woo Hee-Seung went to order, Choi Jong-Il handed over a cigarette and a lighter.

Click.

"Whoo."

Exhaling the smoke, his frustration eased a bit.

"Manager Kim left a while ago. He saw you two and asked me to convey his apologies for not being able to say goodbye."

Kang Chan nodded. By tomorrow morning, Lanok would arrive in Seoul.

"Let's head back to the office after coffee."

"Yes, sir."

"Call Gérard to the side before we leave," Kang Chan ordered.

Kang Chan flicked the ash from his cigarette while listening to Choi Jong-Il's response.

For once, he had truly slept soundly and deeply. He thought about going home to Hannam-dong but disliked the emptiness, so Kang Chan fell asleep on the office sofa.

"Agh!"

Every part of him hurt. Even just sitting or standing up made his entire body ache and throb.

"Ugh."

His wounds had to be stretched regularly. If he left the stitches to pull, every move he'd make would become unbearable. Stepping out of the conference room, he watched the morning light outside the window.

Gérard, lying on a cot, raised his head. Choi Jong-Il, Woo Hee-Seung, and Lee Doo-Hee almost simultaneously got up. It was the usual morning scene. Apart from the lingering pain and wounds, they felt as if they had just woken up from a long dream.

Kang Chan walked to the table against the wall and drank some water. Mornings like this made him crave coffee, especially sweet, instant ones.

Splash.

"I'll handle it," Choi Jong-Il offered.

"No need. Want some?"

While Kang Chan was making coffee with Choi Jong-Il, the interpreter approached with a weary face.

"You didn't go home?" Kang Chan asked.

"I thought things might get busy, so I headed straight here."

It seemed he had come by another car.

Didn't this guy say he had a daughter? Come to think of it, I still don't know her name.

After breakfast, Kang Chan quickly washed up and left the office. Covering the deep wound on his face with a bandage made him look much better.

Eventually, he went on his way to meet Lanok. Looking out the car window, he couldn't help but smile. It felt good that Lanok wasn't in Loriam anymore and that Kang Chan could meet him any time they were both available. It was as if this was some kind of reward for completing the mission and returning alive.

Eventually, the familiar embassy building came into view. As they entered the parking lot, they found Raphael waiting to greet him.

"Welcome, Monsieur Kang."

Raphael certainly looked more relaxed now.

"Where's the ambassador?"

"He's waiting for you in his office. Please follow me."

Raphael treated Kang Chan with even more respect than before. Kang Chan walked through the familiar entrance and up the stairs. Afterward, he made his way down the carpeted hallway and, finally, entered the office.

"Monsieur Kang!" Lanok exclaimed. He approached Kang Chan with a bright smile and wide-open arms.

"Mr. Ambassador."

Kang Chan was genuinely glad to see him.

"Monsieur Kang," Pierre, who was standing nearby, greeted.

"Please, have a seat."

Lanok led Kang Chan to the table.

"Unfortunately, I have an appointment, so I must leave. Please enjoy your time with the ambassador, Monsieur Kang."

After excusing himself, Pierre left immediately. There was nothing they could do about his busy schedule.

Once the two had sat down, Lanok poured them some tea.

Splash.

"How are you?"

"I'm fine."

Lanok nodded and lifted his teacup. Pushing aside the pleasantries, he got straight to business.

"Now, we're truly at war."

He explained in detail how they eliminated key Rothschild family figures, froze their Swiss accounts, and withdrew their investments.

"Roman is in the United States right now, and Josh is detained somewhere in the UK. We will decide on their fate soon."

Kang Chan understood that a lot had happened behind the scenes. With Lanok now back in position, he seemed to have taken the responsibility of handling them.

"There won't be any immediate changes, though. Knowing your abilities and character, they certainly won't act rashly. For now, we should monitor the situation and respond accordingly."

"So we have some time for now?"

"Yes. In the meantime, we need to work on connecting the Eurasian Rail and constructing the next-generation energy facilities. Think of it as a well-deserved break."

"Where will you be, Mr. Ambassador?"

"Where else but by your side, Monsieur Kang?"

Kang Chan laughed. He felt like they had just parted ways yesterday and were meeting again today.

"Since we've cut off a part of their body, the Star of David will undoubtedly plan a major counterattack. Something bigger than nuclear missiles and more frightening than the gold currency standard. We need to prepare as much as we can while we wait for it."

Since Lanok was an expert in this area, Kang Chan asked all the questions he had. Their conversation continued until noon and carried on over lunch. As they finished their meal, a familiar figure walked into the dining room.

"Anne!"

"Monsieur Kang!"

This is what life is about! Meeting and spending time with people you care about.

"Am I interrupting?" Anne asked.

"Not at all," Kang Chan answered.

Lanok, looking unusually relaxed, gestured for her to join them.

"Have you had lunch?"

"I ate out."

After some brief introductions, Anne brought up an unexpected topic.

"The DGSE asked us to recommend a new Director-General."

"Hmm, that's a tough issue. We need someone we can trust completely..."

This was a difficult decision to make.

As Kang Chan took a sip of his coffee, Lanok called him. "Mr. Kang Chan."

"Mr. Ambassador."

Hearing the title "Ambassador" brought a smile to Lanok's face.

"How about sending Gérard to the DGSE?"

"What do you mean?"

Kang Chan didn't know what to say. After all, he didn't expect to hear such a suggestion.

"Gérard is highly trusted among the Foreign Legion, especially the special forces. He is incredibly loyal to you and has a favorable view of Korea. His activities over the past year could pose a problem, though..."

So he has been thinking about this.

The more he listened, the more Kang Chan realized that Lanok had already planned to send Gérard to the DGSE. Kang Chan had momentarily forgotten, but this was the kind of man Lanok was. Gérard joining the DGSE would ensure that Kang Chan could never turn against France—a calculated move by Lanok.

"That concern can be managed by the trust you place in him, Mr. Kang Chan."

"What kind of role will Gérard have?"

"I plan to appoint him as the Inspector Director-General of the DGSE with the same level of authority as the Deputy Director-General."

Kang Chan tilted his head in confusion as Lanok's gaze suddenly turned cold.

"The current DGSE needs thorough reorganization. I will grant Gérard the authority to remove any suspicious deputies below the rank of Deputy Director-General."

Kang Chan exhaled quietly. Such a task would require Gérard to risk his life.

"Will Gérard accept this proposal?"

"It depends on how you persuade him, Mr. Kang Chan," Lanok answered.

"I'm worried there isn't anyone in the DGSE who will follow Gérard."

"He has achieved great success in a short time by winning over the special forces members of the Foreign Legion. If he can do that, he can certainly remove the dubious deputies within the intelligence agency and build a new team that supports him."

"You've had Gérard in mind from the beginning, haven't you, Mr. Ambassador?"

"All that's left is your approval, Monsieur Kang."

Why is everything moving so fast?

Kang Chan was once again reminded of how powerful Lanok was.

"Do I have the authority to make such a decision?"

"Everyone in the intelligence bureau knows Gérard is your man. I'm taking this opportunity to hand over the DGSE to you and to ask you to protect France's future."

Lanok looked straight at Kang Chan, his face void of any smile, expression, or emotion.

"I expect you to use Gérard to take control of the DGSE. Once he has properly established himself, I intend to appoint him as its Director-General. I hope you look after him and nurture any new talents with him."

Lanok's voice, though soft, carried a strong resolve. Another deep sigh escaped Kang Chan. This was a request, a wish, and an expectation he couldn't refuse.

"Understood. I'll discuss this with Gérard as soon as I return."

"I look forward to a favorable outcome."

Doesn't this feel like some kind of trick? It's as if Lanok and the DGSE were put into a bowl and spun around, and then I was asked to pick one.

As if reading Kang Chan's mind, Lanok suddenly changed the topic.

"Monsieur Kang, do you have an idea of the scale of funds flowing into Korea?"

"What?"

"I'm talking about the Rothschild funds that we've seized in Switzerland and other countries. A portion of that amount will be transferred to Korea."

"That's not really my area of expertise," Kang Chan answered.

Lanok nodded as if he had expected that response.

"The Federal Reserve Bank of the United States is not a government institution; it consists of twelve regional Federal Reserve Banks and four thousand eight hundred affiliate banks."

The sudden shift to economics made Kang Chan pay close attention.

"Since most of those banks are in the hands of the Rothschilds, the US is seizing this opportunity to reclaim the Federal Reserve Bank."

Seeing Kang Chan's expression, Lanok quickly continued, "The funds from the Swiss banks and foreign intelligence bureaus amount to roughly two trillion dollars."

Kang Chan couldn't help but laugh.

Shouldn't something like this feel more impactful? Isn't that enough to buy everyone in Korea pork cutlets?

"Negotiate with the Korean government," Lanok said.

Kang Chan had trouble grasping everything that the man was saying.

"If they find out about the influx of that money, it will cause immense social chaos. Local governments, administrative departments, the National Assembly, the judiciary, and even civic groups will scramble to benefit from it."

"How are France and other countries managing this?"

"The DGSE has taken control of it. It's turned into some kind of national slush fund."

What? Are they suggesting we hide the money?

Seemingly reading Kang Chan's mind again, Lanok nodded.

"The Star of David might be waiting for such a scenario so they could trigger massive inflation. They have the power to make the dollar more worthless than toilet paper."

All this is giving me is a vague sense of dread. Honestly, I can imagine a few hundred special forces soldiers charging in with bombs right this instant. On the contrary, talk of money and inflation feels like a distant concern.

Thanks to his economics education in Niaplu, Kang Chan could at least somewhat understand all this.

Did Lanok ensure I get that training because he has foreseen this situation?

Kang Chan couldn't help but laugh again.

"I am no match for you, Mr. Ambassador."

Lanok gave him a mysterious smile. "If the heads of European intelligence bureaus heard you, they'd probably reevaluate me."

The conversation ended there.

Kang Chan stood up and exchanged farewells with Lanok and Anne.

"I'll be taking my leave, Mr. Ambassador. I'll contact you after discussing things with Gérard," he said.

Lanok only nodded. After Kang Chan left the dining room, Lanok sat back down and spoke to Anne.

"Never forget Kang Chan's eyes when he heard about the two trillion dollars earlier. He wasn't shaken at all. People who don't covet what's not theirs are truly formidable. On the other hand, he hesitated when I suggested sending Gérard to the DGSE."

Lanok looked at the door through which Kang Chan had exited, then gazed back at Anne.

"He calculated whether Gérard would be in danger and if he could help in the worst-case scenario. Meeting Kang Chan was a huge opportunity for France. Fortunately, we've endlessly prepared for the future."

"I agree," Anne responded, which Lanok seemed satisfied with.

"Everything seems to be falling into place now."

"Is it really okay to eliminate the DGSE's executives, though?" Anne asked.

"In the world of intelligence, being 'tainted with a different color' means not just being useless but being harmful. Once tainted, they can never return," Lanok replied with a firm expression. "Remember, any DGSE member who carries some other purpose aside from the glory of France must be removed, no matter who they are. They will always be a threat."

"I see."

"Watching Gérard will be a valuable learning experience. His judgment, actions, and decisiveness—if his loyalty to Kang Chan can be directed toward France, there will be nothing more I could wish for."

"Yes, sir," Anne responded respectfully.

Chapter 368: An Awkward Plan (1)

After leaving the embassy, Kang Chan headed to the office.

Gérard as the Inspector Director-General of the DGSE? The same level of authority as the Deputy Director-General?

In this world of intelligence bureaus, the higher the rank, the more likely it was for people to die. Now, Lanok had just suggested giving Gérard the position of Inspector Director-General in the DGSE.

Gérard had a higher chance of being in some kind of danger while removing DGSE executives than a chain smoker suddenly smoking again after stopping for three days.

Should I really recommend this position to Gérard? The man came here because he was lonely. What am I supposed to say if he asks me about what I think he should do?

Kang Chan felt so frustrated that he didn't even want to go to the office. He turned his head from the window to the agents.

"Let's stop by the specialty coffee shop at the intersection over there," Kang Chan said.

"Yes, sir."

By now, the three agents with him could easily read his mood.

While Lee Doo-Hee was parking the car on one side of the road, Choi Jong-Il quickly radioed someone.

Afterward, Kang Chan said, "Choi Jong-Il, pick up Gérard and bring him here. I'll call him so he'll be ready by the time you get there."

"Copy. I'll send one of the teams that are standing by."

Kang Chan simply nodded in response. He could just leave things like this to Choi Jong-Il's judgment.

He then sat on the terrace and called Gérard.

- Hello!

The fucker had always been a bit mischievous.

"I sent agents to come pick you up and take you to a cafe. It's nice outside, so I thought we should have a cup of coffee."

- Yes, sir.

Gérard sounded quite happy.

After hanging up, Kang Chan instinctively sharply examined the seats where enemies could shoot him. At the same time, he noticed the agents that were standing by near the cafe.

Damn it! Maybe I should've just gone to the office. Did I really have to come here?

Kang Chan was wearing an expensive suit, but his face was covered in bandages and small cuts. Choi Jong-Il, Woo Hee-Seung, and Lee Doo-Hee were sitting on all three sides of the terrace, seemingly surrounding it.

The other customers glanced at Kang Chan.

I'm sorry for ruining the mood. I know you guys just wanted to have some coffee in peace. Still, there are times when I also want to have conversations out in places like this.

Kang Chan knew that agents in civilian clothes were walking around the alley and waiting in a van in the parking lot for his sake. Nevertheless, he had to do this. He was worried about sending Gérard alone to France. Considering the distance, Kang Chan might not be able to help him immediately if Gérard found himself in a life-threatening situation.

Just this once, I hope the agents forgive me for putting more burden on their shoulders.

Kang Chan took out a cigarette from his pocket and put it in between his lips.

Chk chk. Chk chk.

Cupping the fire with his hand to prevent the strong winds from blowing it out, he lit up his cigarette.

Kang Chan then exhaled cigarette smoke. "Hoo."

A powerful South Korea?

South Korea would soon receive two trillion dollars. Once they were done constructing the Eurasian Rail and the next-generation energy facilities, then he'd be closer to achieving his goal of making South Korea powerful.

Their nation had started covering all medical expenses for citizens above a certain age, and not to mention, education was completely free.

Haven't I done enough to sit back and live with the people I cherish now?

Kang Chan dropped his cigarette into the cup that was filled with ground coffee.

A familiar van soon stopped in front of the coffee shop, and Gérard in a suit and a shirt got out. He had a firm physique, brown hair, a tall nose, and deep blue eyes with hints of green.

He smiled at Kang Chan.

Gérard didn't look much different from Kang Chan; he, too, had bandages and small wounds all over his face. For some strange reason, though, the vibe he gave off was different.

Compared to when they looked at Kang Chan, the customers in the specialty coffee shop examined Gérard differently.

"Why'd you call me all the way out here, Cap?" Gérard asked.

"Like I said, we're going to have coffee to enjoy the nice weather. Have a seat."

"Let me order first. Have you ordered yet?"

"Grab me one as well."

“Alright. Choi? Want coffee?” Gérard asked. Afterward, he went to the counter to order.

“How can his nasal twang be that attractive?” Kang Chan heard one of the girls in the coffee shop ask. He didn’t even want to look at her.

He wasn’t jealous that women thought Gérard was attractive. Most people knew that Kang Chan was too busy to even see Kim Mi-Young.

“Captain,” Gérard called a moment later. He brought over a few cups of coffee and placed them on Kang Chan and Choi Jong-Il’s table.

Plop.

Based on his expression and the way he sat in the chair, being stuck in the office also seemed to have frustrated Gérard.

“What’s going on?” Gérard asked.

“Have a smoke first,” Kang Chan brightly offered.

In response, Gérard took a cigarette and lit it up.

“Isn’t it nice here? It’s been a while since I last visited this place. Anyway, it reminded me of you and Daye,” Kang Chan said.

“I’m glad I came to South Korea.”

Kang Chan smiled, then sipped his coffee. He seemed tired.

Meanwhile, Gérard finished smoking. “There! All done. What were you going to tell me?”

“How did you know that I have something to tell you?”

“It’s written all over your face.”

That’s not surprising. I would’ve also quickly recognized that Gérard had something to tell me if he met up with me like this.

Kang Chan fixed his expression, then brought up what he wanted to tell Gérard.

“I’ve just been informed that France is planning to conduct a large-scale operation to replace corrupt DGSE executives. They’ll be putting the Inspector Director-General in charge of it. For that reason, they’ll be given the authority of a Deputy Director-General.”

After a brief pause, Kang Chan added, “I was also told that we should take this opportunity to put the DGSE under our complete control.”

“Do they want me to become the DGSE’s Inspector Director-General?”

Kang Chan nodded.

“What do you think I should do?”

Kang Chan already expected Gérard to ask for his opinion, which was why he had been thinking about this so much.

“You’ll be putting your life on the line if you accept this, so you’ll have to decide for yourself. If you want to do it, then accept the offer. Otherwise, you can stay here with me just like what you’ve been doing until now,” he answered.

“So what do you think?”

“Like I said, it’s your call.”

Smirking, Gérard tapped off the ashes of his cigarette.

“What to do, what to do. Should I become the Inspector Director-General of the DGSE or stay by your side?”

Is he even listening?

Kang Chan stopped smiling as he looked at Gérard.

“Well, how far do you plan to go, Cap? If you’re satisfied with what you’ve accomplished until now, then I’ll just stay here, but if you want to accomplish something more than this, then I’ll go to France.”

Kang Chan felt as if he had just been slapped by Gérard.

“What about the blank years in my past, by the way? The DGSE will definitely question that,” Gérard commented.

“Ambassador Lanok told me that it doesn’t matter. We simply need trustworthy people in the right positions.”

Gérard nodded, seemingly getting the gist of why Lanok would say that.

“Does that mean they’re not going to talk about my past anymore because you trust me?”

“Gérard.”

“Oui,” Gérard quickly answered.

“There’s no need to think deeply about this. I’m only worried about whether it’ll be better for you to go to France and become the DGSE’s Inspector Director-General or stay here with me.”

“Captain.”

“Yeah.”

“If that’s all you’re worried about, then I’ll just stay here.”

Kang Chan, who had held up his coffee, burst out laughing.

Gérard's clear-cut answer made him feel stupid for even worrying. The coffee cup that he was holding now felt as if it was filled with refreshing Spirit instead of coffee.

“Phew! I feel like a weight has been taken off my shoulders!” Kang Chan exclaimed.

“You were worried about this?”

“For some strange reason, yes.”

“I’m not going to France,” Gérard repeated.

“I know, I know.”

Once Gérard had made up his mind, there was no longer any for Kang Chan to persuade him otherwise.

“Daye has become a decent human being,” Gérard commented, changing the subject. He now looked relaxed.

“What do you mean?”

“He looked completely different from before at the funeral home. Now that I think about it, I can’t even remember what you and Daye looked like before anymore.”

“Me neither.”

Their conversation now revolved around their past, including the battles that they had fought in Africa and how Daye almost died multiple times. Afterward, they talked about how they met again and fought the Quds together, then how Gérard felt when Kang Chan went to Afghanistan to help.

Every horrible moment in that battle disguised itself as a mere memory whenever they were together like this. Naturally, they didn’t talk about how they killed people—only about how they thought they would die when they ran out of bullets and how great the Jeungpyeong special forces team had become.

“Your wounds definitely heal quicker than normal,” Gérard commented afterward.

“I’ve already told you why.”

“Still, I feel like I’m getting the short end of the stick.”

Cars drove and pedestrians in different outfits walked past as the two talked about various topics. Soon, the smell of food wafted toward them.

Kang Chan couldn’t remember how long it had been since he last spent his time like this. Once again, he realized that he still hadn’t properly shown Gérard around Seoul.

Time flew by.

“Got any plans this evening?” Gérard asked afterward.

“Yes. I’m going to meet someone.”

Gérard looked at Kang Chan suspiciously.

“I’ll be heading there from here. What about you?” Kang Chan asked.

“Should I have dinner with Michelle?”

“Go for it,” Kang Chan answered.

“That aside, Cap, what are you going to do about Sharlan?”

“Well, he had been surviving on drugs, which is probably why he hasn’t regained consciousness yet. I’ll have to watch and see what happens for a few more days. If he still hasn’t come around by the time Smithen gets discharged, then...”

Noticing Kang Chan’s eyes suddenly glinting, Gérard’s glinted as well.

Kang Chan now planned to put a proper end to all this so they wouldn’t have problems anymore moving forward.

Soon, Gérard took out his phone and called Michelle.

“Would you like to have dinner together?” he asked.

Kang Chan almost thought that Seok Kang-Ho was sitting next to him.

What was the point of speaking French with a cool nasal twang when he only talked about things like this?

This guy’s so boring, though!

“Can’t you just have dinner with me without asking questions? Are you busy or not?” Gérard prodded.

Kang Chan shook his head.

With the way you’re talking to her, you’ll end up having dinner at the office!

“I’ll be leaving soon, so go get ready. I’ll call you when I get there.”

Now, he sounded as if he had actually successfully made plans with Michelle.

“The captain already has plans. I’ll be there in fifteen minutes.”

Gérard lowered his phone and hung up.

“Michelle agreed to have dinner with me,” he then told Kang Chan.

“Do you even want to eat with her?”

“Well, she’s the only one aside from you whom I can actually talk to in French.”

“Why did you talk to her like that, then?”

Gérard blinked as if he didn’t understand what Kang Chan was saying.

What can I even say to this bastard?

“Shouldn’t you be on your way? You told her you’ll be right over in fifteen minutes, no?”

“Oh, right! I’ll be taking my leave, then.”

“Alright.”

Gérard stood up. After nodding goodbye at Choi Jong-Il, he headed to the van.

Once he was gone, Kang Chan picked up his phone and called Kim Mi-Young.

It was strange, but while listening to the dial tone, his heart began to race.

Kang Chan smirked. Just as he took a deep breath, Kim Mi-Young picked up.

- Hello?

“It’s me.”

- Hi!

What the fuck? Am I trying to impersonate Vasili or something? I should speak a bit more softly. Otherwise, I’d be no different from Gérard!

“Would you like to have dinner with me?”

- Right now?

“Are you busy?”

- Not at all! Where should we meet?

“Where are you? I’ll pick you up.”

- I’m almost at our apartment. How long will it take you to get here?

“I’ll be there in fifteen minutes.”

Kang Chan felt as if Kim Mi-Young hesitated for a moment.

- Would it be alright if we meet in an hour instead?

“We can just meet next time if you’re not available today.”

- That’s not it. I really am free.

She did seem to be telling the truth.

“Alright. An hour it is.”

- Okay!

It had been quite a while since Kang Chan had heard her answer so brightly.

After hanging up, looked around him.

Where can I have dinner with her in private despite having so many agents guarding me?

He spent the next hour just relaxing, which he hadn't done in a while.

He felt bad for the agents who were watching over him. However, since he was going to meet Kim Mi-Young anyway, he decided to spend his free time at the specialty coffee shop.

He watched the sunset taint the horizon and fill the windows, making it seem as if blood was seeping into the western sky.

'How are you all doing over there?' Kang Chan asked the rookie whom he failed to protect and the other soldiers who died before him.

He'd never forget the faces of his subordinates who were killed in Africa, Afghanistan, Libya, and North Korea.

He also thought about Choi Jong-Geon, who stubbornly held his ground until the end. Hwang Ki-Hyun—and his sharp eyes—and Song Chang-Wook, too. He could still remember Song Chang-Wook asking him if he loved South Korea.

Are you all watching us? We've accomplished a lot, yet I still don't know if we've done enough or what I should even do next.

Damn it! All this spare time is making me have too many thoughts!

Kang Chan looked down from the sky and searched for Choi Jong-Il.

"Come here for a moment," he ordered.

"Sir."

Choi Jong-Il approached the table. To those who didn't know them, Kang Chan probably looked like the son of a powerful gangster. They'd likely also assume that he was on the terrace with a member of the gang.

"I know it'll be uncomfortable for the agents, but I'm thinking of having dinner with Mi-Young today. I'm sorry," Kang Chan said.

"Understood. You don't have to worry about us."

It was best to inform the agents about his plans in advance. That way, Kang Chan could save them the trouble of blindly following him.

"Have you thought about where you're going to have dinner?" Choi Jong-Il asked.

"I'm not sure yet, but I was hoping to eat near our apartment. I still haven't even decided what to eat. Oh, right! Reserve a pension house for us."

"A pension house?"

"Yeah. I want to stay there tomorrow. Make sure it's somewhere quiet."

Choi Jong-Il nodded. He looked as if he was trying hard to look nonchalant.

What's with that look? I just want to go to a pension house. If I could go there alone, I wouldn't have asked him to do this for me.

After their conversation, Kang Chan stood up and headed to the car with Choi Jong-Il.

Oh, shoot! How do we get to the restaurant once I've picked up Kim Mi-Young? Should I just have Lee Doo-Hee drive us there?

Kang Chan pursed his lips.

We should just eat at a restaurant that's within walking distance of the Cheonsang apartment.

Kang Chan's heart strangely fluttered. He thought it was just because he used to live here, though.

It didn't take long for them to reach their destination. Kang Chan got out right in front of the entrance of Kim Mi-Young's apartment complex.

Walking through the complex's main gate, which had large pillars on each side, he saw familiar buildings.

He looked at the bench, seemingly out of habit. There, he found Kim Mi-Young staring at him. She stood up.

Suddenly filled with a mix of emotions, Kang Chan found himself smiling. He felt a tad bit awkward, but he was happy to see her.

"Mi-Young!" Kang Chan called.

"Hi!"

Kim Mi-Young walked toward him. Unlike the last time they had met, she didn't skip.

"What happened to you?" she asked.

"Oh, these bandages? They're nothing—just little cuts."

As Kim Mi-Young examined Kang Chan's face, their eyes met. She seemed to have grown up again.

"You must be in a lot of pain," Kim Mi-Young commented.

"I'm okay. Let's go eat—what do you want to have?"

Kang Chan now realized why she had said that she needed an hour. Judging from her clothes, the smell of shampoo coming from her hair, and her glowing skin, she seemed to have used that time to wash up and change.

"I'm okay with anything, so you can just pick for us."

"Why don't we take a walk and eat somewhere that catches our attention, then?"

"That sounds great."

Kang Chan turned around. Kim Mi-Young walked next to him.

"How's school?" Kang Chan asked.

"It's fine. It was awkward at first, but it's a lot better now."

Kang Chan nodded in response.

Little by little, their surroundings were becoming darker.

“Channy.”

Kang Chan didn't know why, but he seemed to be having trouble getting used to Kim Mi-Young calling his name. Although he missed her all the time, hearing her call him “Channy,” not “Oppa,” made him feel as if he was meeting his younger sister.

When he turned to her, she said, “Let's have pork cutlets.”

“Pork cutlets?”

“Yeah! Japanese-style pork cutlets.”

Kang Chan felt embarrassed to admit it, but he had never had the pork cutlets that Kim Mi-Young was talking about even though they weren't that expensive. He lived quite a sorrowful life.

“Do you know a restaurant that sells those?”

“Yep! We just need to walk a little more from here. Is that okay?”

“Sure.”

Kang Chan walked in the direction that she told him to go. The longer they walked, the darker their surroundings became.

“Did you really have time to meet me today?” Kim Mi-Young asked.

“Yeah. I actually have something I've been meaning to ask you.”

“What would that be?”

“Let's talk about it over dinner.”

Damn it! We stopped talking again. It wasn't this awkward when we were talking on the phone.

Chapter 369: An Awkward Plan (2)

As the evening rush hour began, Kang Chan left the apartment complex with Kim Mi-Young and headed toward a Japanese-style pork cutlet restaurant.

The two strolled amid people walking hurriedly past them.

Kang Chan couldn't help but smile when Kim Mi-Young looked at him.

“What's with the smile?” Kim Mi-Young asked.

“I'm just happy I get to spend time with you.”

Kim Min-Young playfully pouted.

Not too long ago, they used to walk down this road together in their school uniforms. Back then, Kang Chan's hand was bandaged. Now, she was wearing jeans and a plaid shirt, and Kang Chan was wearing a suit. The worlds they lived in had become as different as night and day.

“Don't you find it a hassle to walk all the way to the restaurant just to have dinner with me?” Kim Mi-Young asked.

“You think this is hard for me?”

“Yeah!”

Kang Chan chuckled. Nothing about this could be considered difficult.

“What did you want to ask me?” Kim Mi-Young asked.

“Well, before that, where’s this restaurant you want to visit?”

“It’s that one!” Kim Mi-Young pointed to the building at the corner of the block.

The sign was written in Japanese. Cheol-Su—a character who had appeared in the Japanese book that Kang Chan had read in school some time ago—would’ve been very happy to see this restaurant. Of course, he would’ve just left after asking the prices of various things.

It was a small restaurant that only had ten tables, which were so small that they could only seat two people. Fortunately, they still had one empty table left—the one right in front of the counter. Kim Mi-Young sat near the wall, and Kang Chan sat near the entrance.

“Can I take your order?”

The employee seemed quite impatient.

“One moment please,” Kim Mi-Young said, then held up the acrylic menu.

“I’m going to have a beef tenderloin cutlet. What about you?” Kim Mi-Young asked Kang Chan.

“I’ll have the same thing.”

“Let’s order one beef tenderloin cutlet and one fish cutlet and share instead.”

“Sure.”

When did she grow up so much?

Watching Kim Mi-Young order for them, Kang Chan thought about many things.

“Now, what did you want to ask me?” Kim Mi-Young asked.

it didn’t feel right to ask her the question while people were eating cutlets right next to them.

“Let’s have dinner first and talk about it over coffee instead.”

Kim Mi-Young cocked her head, her expression seemingly asking what he had in mind. However, she didn’t press further.

Kang Chan listened to Kim Mi-Young talk about school, her sunbaes, how different the classes were from high school, and what she’d been doing after classes.

So that’s what you’ve been up to while I was gone... Me? I was going through things I can’t even tell you about.

Soon, their order was served.

Ha! These fuckers cut their cutlets into bite-size pieces.

Even though it was more expensive than the cutlets in the snack bar, it was really nice that they could eat it with chopsticks.

“Try it,” Kim Mi-Young said as she brought up her chopsticks to his mouth.

Since they were in a restaurant filled with people, it felt wrong to refuse. Hence, Kang Chan obediently ate the piece of cutlet that she was trying to feed him.

Crunch. Crunch.

Isn't this more like deep-fried meat than cutlets?

“How is it?” Kim Mi-Young asked.

“It's good.”

Kim Mi-Young smiled brightly and then started eating.

It was ridiculous, but delicious cutlets reminded Kang Chan of Seok Kang-Ho and Gérard.

Would anyone be able to understand why he thought of two darkly tanned men whenever he had delicious food?

They were in a small restaurant that was filled with customers who were looking at them, but Kim Mi-Young didn't care—no, it would be more accurate to say that she was too preoccupied with spending precious time with Kang Chan that she didn't even notice the stares.

The look in her eyes, her smile, and even the way she slathered the fish cutlet in sauce and gave it to him showed how much she liked him.

It felt like the awkwardness between them while they were walking to the restaurant was disappearing with each piece of cutlet.

“This is really good,” Kang Chan commented.

“Right? Huhuhu.”

Kang Chan had been wondering why her laugh sounded different.

Has her laughter always been this nice to hear?

It took them about forty minutes to finish their cutlets, a small bowl of udon, and steamed rice.

“Do you still have time for coffee?” Kim Mi-Young asked afterward.

“Of course,” Kang Chan answered. He suddenly felt bad for making Kim Mi-Young wait for him and worry about taking up too much of his time.

“I'll pay for our dinner,” Kim Mi-Young said.

“What?”

Even though Kang Chan didn't agree to it, Kim Mi-Young stood up from her seat and quickly ran to the counter to pay.

Upon catching up to her, he asked, “Why are you paying?”

“Because you came all the way here even though you're busy.”

Kim Mi-Young unsnapped her wallet's snap fastener and opened it. She then took out two 10,000 KW bills and handed them to the cashier. Kang Chan didn't mean to look inside, but he noticed that she only had a few 1000 KW bills left.

Distressed, Kang Chan pursed his lips.

By the time they had exited the restaurant, it was already dark outside.

"Where do you want to go next?" Kang Chan asked.

Kim Mi-Young pointed to an establishment a bit of distance away from them. "That way!"

"It's a small specialty coffee shop. I like it because it's quiet," she explained.

As they headed to the coffee shop, Kim Mi-Young hugged his arm. She unknowingly pulled on the stitches on his forearm, which almost made him frown.

"This makes me happy!" she exclaimed. Afterward, she asked, "So, what have you been meaning to ask me?"

Had she always been this persistent? Well, it didn't matter. Kang Chan planned to ask her about it tonight anyway.

"Are you busy this weekend?"

"Not really!" Kim Mi-Young answered.

The specialty coffee shop was now right in front of them.

"Let's go inside. What do you want to drink?" he asked.

After placing their order, they sat at a table near the terrace with their drinks—coffee and peppermint tea.

"There's actually someone that I really want to introduce to you..." Kang Chan trailed off.

Curious, Kim Mi-Young looked at Kang Chan.

"He'll be flying to Mongolia soon. I was hoping we could stay at a pension house with him for about a day before he leaves."

"A pension house?" Kim Mi-Young asked, mixed emotions evident on her face.

"If you're uncomfortable with that, we can just find some time later and you can meet him then."

"It's not that. I was just wondering how I'd get permission to go to a pension house."

Ah, right! She needs her parents' permission first.

Kang Chan looked outside for a moment.

“Let me talk to your parents about this,” he then offered.

Surprised filled Kim Mi-Young’s expression.

“It’s better than you sneaking out, right?”

“That’s true, but do you think my dad will let me go?”

Smirking, Kang Chan took out his phone.

“You know my dad’s number?”

“Yeah.”

He looked for Kim Kwan-Sik’s number and dialed it.

The dial tone rang. Soon, he heard the stern voice of Kim Mi-Young’s father.

- Hello?

“Good evening, sir. It’s Kang Chan.”

- Ah. Good evening.

“I’m with Mi-Young.”

- Is that right?

Kim Kwan-Sik sounded delighted.

- How can I help you?

“I’d like to introduce Mi-Young to one of my colleagues. He’s leaving for Mongolia in three days, so I was hoping you’d let Mi-Young spend the day with us in a pension house tomorrow.”

- You want to go there with Mi-Young?

“Yes, sir.”

An uncomfortable silence permeated the call. Kang Chan heard Kim Kwan-Sik let out a groan-like sigh.

- Hmm.

- Although I already know you act without hesitation, I still didn’t expect you to confidently ask something like this. Can you keep the promise you made?

“Yes.”

- Alright. Since I won’t have to worry about Mi-Young’s safety if she’s with you, I’ll put my trust in you.

“Thank you.”

Kim Mi-Young’s eyes, who had been looking at Kang Chan anxiously, widened in surprise.

- You’re really hard to predict. Can you put Mi-Young on the phone?

“One moment please.”

Kang Chan handed the phone to Kim Mi-Young. She answered it with a nervous expression.

“Hello? That’s right. Uh-huh. No. I had dinner with him. Yes. I will. Thank you, Dad.”

When Kim Mi-Young returned the phone to Kang Chan, the call had already ended.

“My dad said that he’d tell my mom about this himself. What did he tell you? Have you talked to him before?”

“I have. About two times because of work.”

It was a relief that Kim Mi-Young didn’t ask about Kang Chan’s work. He didn’t want to tell her that he met Abibu with her father.

While taking in the chilly night air, the warm coffee, and Kim Mi-Young’s clear eyes, Kang Chan felt the spite that had filled him slowly disappear. Right now, he was as far as could be from combat and death.

Kang Chan looked into Kim Mi-Young’s eyes, which shone as brightly as the stars.

“Keep safe,” Kang Chan said afterward.

“I will! See you tomorrow at 1 pm!”

“See you!”

Kim Mi-Young couldn’t turn away from Kang Chan.

Honestly, Kang Chan didn’t want to turn away from her either. He enjoyed the time he had spent with her so much that he briefly forgot that the agents were keeping an eye on them.

He never thought he would enjoy looking into Kim Mi-Young’s eyes and spending time with her this much.

“I’ll get going,” Kang Chan said.

“Bye.”

Kim Mi-Young turned away and went home.

Instead of going home, Kang Chan headed to his office and called Kang Chul-Gyu and Kim Hyung-Jung. He quickly told them everything they needed to know and then hung up. Since it was already quite late, he didn’t bother calling Gérard.

The next day, Kang Chan had a relaxing morning. He left the office after lunch.

“Heading out, sir?” one of the agents asked.

“Yeah. When Daye stops by, tell him that I have plans today and that I’ll be back tomorrow.”

“Yes sir.”

Afterward, Kang Chan headed to the Namsan Hotel. Choi Jong-Il met him at the entrance.

“We parked the car over there.” Choi Jong-Il pointed at the car that they had parked in front of the entrance. He then handed him the key. “We already inputted the pension house's address into the GPS device, so it should be the first address you see when it turns on. We've also prepared everything you'll need at the pension house.”

“Thanks.”

Kang Chan then entered the hotel and found Kang Chul-Gyu standing by the doors.

Kang Chan smirked. Kang Chul-Gyu was wearing clean clothes. They seemed to have been washed here at the hotel.

“Let's go,” Kang Chan said.

Although Kang Chul-Gyu didn't know where they were going, he still followed Kang Chan out without a word.

When Kang Chan pressed a button on the car key, the blinkers flickered and the car unlocked with a click. He slid onto the driver's seat, and Kang Chul-Gyu sat on the passenger's side.

Afterward, they hit the road.

While Kang Chan enjoyed driving on days like this, driving in Seoul was as difficult as fighting in a battle. Because cars kept cutting into the lane, he had to focus so much that they ended up driving in silence until they crossed the Hannam Bridge.

At that moment, he realized that he should never have a weapon with him when he was driving.

“I used to think that people like me shouldn't start a family,” Kang Chan began while they were stuck in traffic, “but I changed my mind after our most recent deployment. I met someone in high school, and she's a freshman in college now. I doubt I'll be perfect... but I'm thinking of having a serious relationship with her.”

The car moved again.

“We're on our way to a pension house so we can spend a day there with her.”

Kang Chul-Gyu just kept quietly looking straight ahead.

They drove the rest of the way to Kim Mi-Young's apartment in awkward silence. Whenever Kang Chan tried to do something with this man, they would always either do it in awkward silence or they'd be awkward around each other while doing it.

When they reached Kim Mi-Young's apartment, she was already waiting out in the front. Kang Chan parked the car on the road and then got out.

Click.

As Kim Mi-Young approached them, Kang Chul-Gyu also got out of the car.

The three stood in a circle. It was fucking awkward.

“This is the person I told you about yesterday,” Kang Chan told Kim Mi-Young. He then turned to Kang Chul-Gyu. “Her name’s Kim Mi-Young.”

“Hello,” Kim Mi-Young greeted Kang Chul-Gyu.

“Nice to meet you.”

“Get in,” Kang Chan said.

Unsure of which seat to take, Kim Mi-Young hesitated. To help her decide, Kang Chul-Gyu took the backseat.

The three then headed to the pension house.

The drive to their destination was so quiet that they could hear when one of them swallowed dryly.

“Um...” Kim Mi-Young trailed off, rummaging through her bag. She then turned toward the back seat and said, “Please try this.”

“Thank you, Miss,” Kang Chul-Gyu said.

“Please be more casual when talking to me.”

Through the rearview mirror, Kang Chan saw Kang Chul-Gyu's expression twist as if he was sucking on an odd-tasting candy.

“Have one too.” Kim Mi-Young gave Kang Chan candy. She had partly removed the wrapper for him.

The candies made it even harder for them to talk.

Amid the silence, the female GPS voice constantly gave Kang Chan directions.

The atmosphere was simply amazing.

“What was your name again, Miss?” Kang Chul-Gyu asked.

“I’m Kim Mi-Young. Please talk to me more casually.”

“Are you sure?”

“Yes.”

The hell? He can say something like that with that kind of expression? Well, it’s quieted down again, so what was even the point of that?

[In two kilometers, turn right to the Gangdong Bridge.]

The GPS talked about the speed and the lanes as if it were saying, “To me, it doesn’t matter whether you guys feel awkward or not!”

Kang Chan drove in discomfort. Meanwhile, Kim Mi-Young, who had a complicated expression, alternated between looking straight ahead and at Kang Chan. Chul-Gyu just kept staring out the window indifferently.

There wasn't that much traffic after exiting the Olympic Expressway. The GPS device didn't say much more either since they just had to go straight.

Soon, they began driving parallel to a river. They then turned right in front of the Cheongpyeong Dam. Stylish pension houses and other accommodations next to the river came into view.

[You'll reach your destination in two hundred meters.]

The GPS device sounded disappointed that they had arrived at their destination.

They had the river to their right, across which was a tall hill. They passed by a sign that said 'Sweet Tree.'

What does that even mean?

Kang Chan parked in the parking lot. A man in his mid-forties then began to approach them. He seemed to be the owner of the pension house.

Kang Chan liked the clear air of the area the most.

"Do you have a reservation?" the man asked. Based on his expression, he seemed to be wondering what their relationship was with each other.

"Yes, we do. It's under Kang Chan. Did we come here too early?" Kang Chan asked.

"Not at all. Please come this way."

The owner glanced at them again, then turned and led the way out of the parking lot.

The pension house was amazing. Its living room gave them a nice view of the river, and it also had a yard out front where they could grill meat.

The owner handed Kang Chan the key to the pension house, then headed to his office, seemingly not wanting to bother them anymore.

Choi Jong-Il might've said something to the owner.

Screech.

Upon entering the pension house, the fairly large living room and the kitchen immediately caught Kang Chan's attention. The living room took up half of this multi-story house's second floor.

There were two rooms and a bathroom on the first floor.

A coffee pot, coffee beans, ground coffee packets, and instant coffee were on the kitchen shelves, while the fridge was filled with meat and side dishes. Rice, soy sauce, gochujang[1], regular ramyeon, and cup ramyeon were in the cupboards above the sink.

It looked as if the agents had gotten one of everything from a convenience store.

Kang Chan opened a bottle of water and poured it into the coffee pot.

“I’m going to have coffee...” Kang Chan trailed off.

It wouldn't be right to speak informally to Kang Chul-Gyu in front of Kim Mi-Young, would it?

“What would you like to drink, sir?” Kang Chan respectfully asked Kang Chul-Gyu.

Kang Chul-Gyu glanced at Kim Mi-Young, then looked back at Kang Chan again.

“I’ll also have a cup of coffee. What about you, Mi-Young?” Kang Chul-Gyu asked.

“I’ll just have green tea,” Kim Mi-Young answered as she approached them.

“We don’t need to make brewed coffee. We can just put two packets of instant coffee into each cup,” Kang Chan said.

Kim Mi-Young looked surprised but still did as Kang Chan suggested, pouring instant coffee into their cups and putting a green tea bag into hers.

“I’ll take a look around outside,” Kang Chul-Gyu said.

As if to avoid the awkwardness, he went out to the yard.

“Did you prepare all of this?” Kim Mi-Young asked.

“I asked some people to.”

“This must have cost you a lot.”

Kang Chan just smiled in response.

“It feels awkward, doesn’t it?” he asked.

“A little.”

They were finally able to talk a little bit now that they were alone.

“What should I call him?” Kim Mi-Young asked.

“Huh?”

“Should I call him sir?”

Kang Chan glanced at Kang Chul-Gyu as he poured water into a mug. The man was carefully examining the area across from them and his surroundings, specifically the places where they could be shot from.

There was no way Choi Jong-Il would leave the house across from the pension house unattended, though. They had definitely stationed agents in it so they could better secure the area.

“Would you like to have our drinks outside?” Kang Chan asked.

“Sure. That’s a good idea.”

Kang Chan and Kim Mi-Young left the living room and went outside. He carried two mugs, and she carried her green tea.

They had an expansive view, and the air was clean and cool. The warm afternoon sunlight pleasantly greeted them.

There was a barbeque grill and charcoal on one side of the yard.

Kang Chan and Kim Mi-Young sat next to each other at the wooden table. Kang Chul-Gyu sat across from them.

Taking a sip of the hot and sweet coffee made Kang Chan feel a little better.

Meanwhile, Kang Chul-Gyu looked at the river.

The sun was starting to go down already, which made Kang Chul-Gyu's wrinkles look much deeper than before.

Perhaps it was because they were always in combat, but Kang Chan had never noticed how many wrinkles Kang Chul-Gyu had until now. The man was already quite old, his face filled with traces of his past.

Chapter 370: I Wanted to Add My Wishes Too (1)

"What do you do for a living, sir?" Kim Mi-Young shyly asked Kang Chul-Gyu.

"I guard a factory being built in Mongolia," he replied.

"Ah, I see," she responded awkwardly.

When timidly smiled, Kang Chul-Gyu's lips curved gently—not cruelly, menacingly, sharply, or mockingly. Kang Chan had never seen him smile like that before.

"What do you want to be in the future, Mi-Young?" Kang Chul-Gyu asked.

"Me? I want to be a diplomat," she said.

"A diplomat?"

"Yes."

Kang Chul-Gyu's smile and question seemed to put Kim Mi-Young at ease. The conversation managed to continue a little longer, though an awkward silence soon threatened to break it again.

This is good enough. What more can I ask for?

Kang Chan gazed at the river.

"Do your family members also live in Mongolia?" Kim Mi-Young asked, surprising Kang Chan.

Kang Chan quickly turned back, his gaze unintentionally sharp. Although he immediately softened his expression, he had already startled Kim Mi-Young.

"My wife and son were with me," Kang Chul-Gyu began, quickly drawing Kim Mi-Young's attention back to him, "but I lost my son in Africa..."

Kang Chan watched as Kang Chul-Gyu struggled through the pain.

Kim Mi-Young's eyes turned red.

"The shock took my wife away shortly after."

"I'm sorry," she said.

"It's alright. You didn't know. Besides, for some reason, I don't mind telling you this story."

Silence followed as Kim Mi-Young blinked away her tears and tried to compose herself.

'Did I make a mistake? Should I have just had a meal or a cup of tea with them? Am I unnecessarily burdening the two of them?' Kang Chan wondered.

"Mi-Young, I'm feeling a bit peckish. Care to have some ramyeon with me?" Kang Chul-Gyu asked.

"Ramyeon? Let me cook it for you."

"No, it's okay. I'm not planning to boil it, so I'll make it myself. Would you like some?"

"Sure," she answered with a puzzled expression.

The way he asked her made it hard for her to say, "I don't like ramyeon!"

Why would someone come all the way to a pension house just to eat ramyeon? It's not like there's nothing to eat here.

Kang Chan shook his head in response to Kang Chul-Gyu's questioning look.

"I'll help you," Kim Mi-Young offered as Kang Chul-Gyu got up.

She followed him inside.

Damn it! Smoking a cigarette would do wonders for my mental health right now.

Kang Chan glanced inside, noticing that Kang Chul-Gyu had taken a frying pan and cooking oil. Meanwhile, Kim Mi-Young was opening a packet of ramyeon.

Recalling the pension house in Gapyeong that he had visited with Kang Dae-Kyung and Yoo Hye-Sook, he realized that he wanted this whole day to be fondly memorable. Eating instant food and drinking tea wouldn't accomplish that.

Is that why Kang Chul-Gyu is doing something he has probably never done before?

Glancing inside again, Kang Chan saw Kim Mi-Young looking curiously at the frying pan.

Fried ramyeon? Like crispy ramyeon snacks? If that's what he wants, they should have just bought some.

Kang Chan took a sip of his now-cold coffee.

Kang Chul-Gyu and Kim Mi-Young came out with a tray of crispy fried ramyeon.

At the same time, Kang Chan chuckled. They had indeed fried the ramyeon pieces until they were golden and crispy. They probably didn't know that the best way to eat ramyeon was to either munch on it raw or sprinkle a bit of the seasoning powder.

"Try it. It's really tasty!" Kim Mi-Young said.

Kang Chan wanted to decline, but he felt sorry for startling her earlier. Hence, he reached out for the ramyeon.

Crunch.

What the...?

He couldn't help but laugh; the taste was simply laughable.

"It's good, right?"

Kang Chan took another piece.

Crunch, crunch.

The three ate the fried ramyeon, catching the pieces in their palms.

"Where did you learn this, sir?" Kim Mi-Young asked.

"Back in the army, this was the best snack. We couldn't use this much oil back then, though."

After eating three or four pieces, Kang Chan was done. However, it felt awkward to stop eating since he felt he had to keep pace with the others.

Well, this isn't such a big deal. We're just sharing two packs of ramyeon.

He finished the bowl. Unlike the pork cutlets yesterday, the ramyeon didn't really remind him of Gérard or Seok Kang-Ho.

Awkwardness dawned upon them once more.

"Why don't you two go for a walk?" Kang Chul-Gyu suggested.

What else can the three of us do anyway?

"Want to go down by the river?" Kang Chan asked Mi-Young..

"Sure!"

Kim Mi-Young's enthusiasm made Kang Chul-Gyu smile gently again.

Just stick to your usual self, old man.

"Let's go. We'll be back soon... sir," Kang Chan said, then stood up. Kim Mi-Young followed.

"See you later, sir," she said.

Kang Chul-Gyu nodded in response.

They walked around the side of the pension house toward where the car was parked, then down toward the river. While walking, Kang Chan held out his hand. Kim Mi-Young intertwined her fingers with his.

The afternoon sunlight broke into sparkling fragments and made the water shimmer. Kang Chan looked both ways to check the road.

"Let's go."

After crossing the two-lane road, they found a path that led down to the river. The distinctive, slightly fishy smell of the river greeted them as they walked along the bank. Kang Chan held Kim Mi-Young's hand firmly.

At that moment, Kang Chan gently squeezed Kim Mi-Young's hand. "You're still young, and we don't know what the future holds, but..."

Kim Mi-Young turned to him.

He calmly continued, "I want us to hold hands, make a lot of memories, and experience new things together. I want your hand in mind until we grow old."

When Kang Chan glanced back, he immediately noticed that Kim Mi-Young's eyes were red again.

Why does she get teary-eyed so easily?

"I'd love that," she replied.

"I'll always be by your side. When you become a diplomat, make sure to tell everyone it was thanks to your husband."

Kim Mi-Young smiled at him in a way only women could do. She looked so filled with love that she looked as if she was glowing.

The wind swept through her hair, and the sunlight breaking on the river illuminated her like a spotlight.

There were probably agents on the other side watching with interest and excitement. Nevertheless, Kang Chan slowly pulled Kim Mi-Young closer and hugged her gently.

"I'm sorry for making you wait. Unfortunately, there will probably be more times like this in the future. I apologize in advance," he said.

Kim Mi-Young wrapped her arms around Kang Chan's waist. Choi Jong-Il and Lee Doo-Hee tried to look away and pretended not to see anything. Still, they couldn't help but smile.

This was a new feeling for Kang Chan. For the first time, he had someone he could call his.

Time passed slowly. Hand in hand, they walked along the river. Occasionally, they would swing their arms back and forth or look into each other's eyes.

When they reached what seemed to be a dock for summer waterskiing, Kang Chan stopped. It felt dangerous to go beyond the perimeter of the mountains on the other side.

"Let's head back," he said.

"Okay."

They retraced their steps.

"How did you meet him?" Kim Mi-Young asked.

"We met through work. Since then, he's helped me a lot. He's like a father to me," Kang Chan replied.

Kim Mi-Young glanced at Kang Chan as if to confirm what she had just heard, then turned to the path ahead again.

"I know it's been awkward, but I really wanted to introduce you to him."

"I'm fine with it."

They fell into silence again as they climbed back up from the river bank, crossed the road, and headed up the parking lot of the pension house. Smiling at each other, they finally let go of each other's hands. It felt a bit awkward to keep holding hands in front of Kang Chul-Gyu.

What's the old man up to?

They turned a corner and entered the yard. Kang Chul-Gyu was sitting at a table, holding a kitchen knife. He was carving something.

Is he butchering a chicken?

"We're back," Kim Mi-Young greeted.

Kang Chul-Gyu looked up at them. He must have known they were coming back but had pretended not to notice.

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

Kang Chul-Gyu smiled at her again. "I wanted to give you something to commemorate our meeting, but I didn't have much to offer..."

He handed her a carving about the size of half a thumb.

"Wow! Did you carve this yourself?" she asked.

"I just have to make a hole at the top to finish it. Do you like it?" Kang Chul-Gyu asked.

"Of course! Are you sure you want to give this to me?"

As Kang Chul-Gyu smiled, Kim Mi-Young handed the carving to Kang Chan.

Kang Chan couldn't help but be surprised. He never knew that the old man had such a skill. It was a bit eerie, though. A carving of a snake coiled around a knife wasn't exactly something one would gift a young girl. It seemed more fitting to be a special forces team's tattoo.

Could it be?

Kang Chan looked up at Kang Chul-Gyu. "A guardian deity?"

Kang Chul-Gyu nodded. "I know you'll keep her safe, but I wanted to add my wishes too."

What was going on in this old man's head while he carved a piece of wood with a kitchen knife? Was he thinking of the son and wife he couldn't protect, making him wish that Kang Chan could protect Kim Mi-Young properly?

Maybe he hoped that this carving would protect her when Kang Chan couldn't.

Kang Chan handed the carving back to Kim Mi-Young.

"If you like it, I'll finish it up. Are you okay with it?" Kang Chul-Gyu asked.

"I love it. This must have been hard to make, though. Aren't you tired?"

Kang Chul-Gyu smiled broadly and took the carving back. "I just need to do the sgraffito and apply some oil. It'll be done by tomorrow morning."

"Sgraffito?"

"Oh, just think of it as the finishing touches."

"You oil it too?"

"Yes. It makes it much sturdier and longer-lasting."

Both Kang Chul-Gyu and Kim Mi-Young looked a bit more at ease now. Not wanting to stand around awkwardly, Kang Chan lifted the nearby barbecue grill and moved it next to the table. He then grabbed some charcoal.

"Anything you want me to do?" Kim Mi-Young asked Kang Chan.

"Could you wash some vegetables?"

"Sure!"

She cheerfully headed inside.

Kang Chan lit up the grill beside Kang Chul-Gyu, who continued to carve the small piece with his kitchen knife.

"What time are you leaving tomorrow?" asked Kang Chul-Gyu.

"Right after breakfast. Why?"

"Just asking."

The old man wouldn't ask questions for no reason, but he also wouldn't give a straightforward answer even if asked. Hence, Kang Chan simply focused on what he was doing.

The smoke danced around the yard like a mischievous spirit.

Scratch, scratch, scratch.

Kang Chul-Gyu carved the wood as swiftly as peeling carrots or potatoes. He was so remarkably skilled that had he chosen to go down this path, he might have had a much different life.

Soon, the charcoal caught fire.

"How much longer will it take?"

"I just need to apply the oil, so it'll be done soon."

Leaving Kang Chan to fan the fire, Kang Chul-Gyu went inside.

"Phew!"

Smoking a cigarette lit by charcoal would be amazing.

The sun hung low over the mountain across the river, making it hard to see how much the charcoal had caught fire.

Kang Chan headed inside to get the meat. As he entered, he saw Kang Chul-Gyu and Kim Mi-Young washing lettuce and perilla leaves together.

It was unbelievable. Kang Chul-Gyu, one of the most skilled special forces team soldiers in the world, was washing vegetables.

Then again, here was the NIS Assistant Director and DGSE Deputy Director-General grilling meat and taking out barbecue supplies.

'They sure prepared a wide variety of meat.'

Kang Chan chuckled as he pulled the beef labeled 'Korean sirloin,' from the refrigerator. He then grabbed some scissors and tongs and headed back outside.

Thud.

As Kang Chan placed the meat on the grill, Kang Chul-Gyu and Kim Mi-Young came out, carrying vegetables, gochujang, chopsticks, bowls, and a pitcher of water.

"What about the rice?" Kang Chan asked.

"I saw some instant rice. We can just have that," Kang Chul-Gyu said.

"I'll heat it in the microwave," Kim Mi-Young said.

"Do you know how?" Kang Chan teased.

Kim Mi-Young playfully pouted and went inside.

Kang Chul-Gyu sat back down at the table, watching the meat on the grill and the food on the table like a child waiting for snacks at kindergarten. When Kang Chan flipped the meat, white smoke rose, and the smell grew stronger.

The meat should have been grilled once the charcoal had settled, but the fire was too strong. Still, this was good enough.

Kang Chan cut the meat into smaller pieces and then placed a well-cooked piece on Kang Chul-Gyu's plate.

"Try it."

Kang Chan noticed Kang Chul-Gyu swallow dryly. Since the old man was trying his best, Kang Chan pretended that he didn't see it.

Kang Chul-Gyu picked up the meat with his chopsticks and brought it to his mouth. Meanwhile, Kang Chan moved the cooked meat to the edge of the grill.

"It's as good as the bulgogi from last time," Kang Chul-Gyu commented.

Kang Chan silently flipped the meat, finding it hard to respond. For some reason, he felt as if Kang Chul-Gyu's words pierced his heart.

Kim Mi-Young came back with a tray of three bowls of rice and some kimchi.

"Looks delicious," she said.

Not wanting to be gloomy around Kim Mi-Young, who was trying her best to remain cheerful and brighten the mood, Kang Chan placed the cooked meat on an empty plate and set it on the table.

Kang Chan looked at Kang Chul-Gyu, who picked up his chopsticks again.

"Let's eat," the latter offered.

"Enjoy your meal. Thank you for the food," Kim Mi-Young said. She and Kang Chan then put some meat onto their plates.

The meat tasted fine. It was the somber and awkward atmosphere that was the problem. Kim Mi-Young was too young to understand and adapt to these complicated emotions and relationships, which made Kang Chan feel sorry.

As the sun set behind the mountains, darkness quickly enveloped their surroundings, and the wind grew colder. Fortunately, they ate early.

"Should I grill more?" Kang Chan asked.

Kang Chul-Gyu and Kim Mi-Young shook their heads. They were just glad that the meal was over.

Clatter, clatter.

Kang Chul-Gyu and Kim Mi-Young took the dishes inside while Kang Chan cleaned the grill and added more charcoal to keep the fire going.

The red glow of the flames, the blue flickers between them, the warmth, and the smokey smell created a comforting ambiance.

"Phew."

All that was missing was a cigarette. After cleaning up, Kim Mi-Young came out with a tray of three mugs, accompanied by Kang Chul-Gyu. The beverages were the same as the ones they had drunk earlier. There was still some time before nightfall, and they would have to eat again after sleeping.

Should we just head back up?

"Sir, um," Kim Mi-Young called as she sat at the table. Kang Chan turned toward her. "Can I call you Dad instead of sir?"

Both Kang Chan and Kang Chul-Gyu stared at her, speechless.

"Chan said earlier that you're like a father to him. So I want to call you that too."

Kang Chul-Gyu blinked oddly. After a brief silence, he responded, "I'd be grateful if you did."

"I'll call you that from now on, then."

"Thank you."

"No, I should be the one thanking you. You even gave me a special gift."

Snap, crackle, pop.

"Thank you, Dad."

As the night began to fall, the charcoal fire illuminated the wrinkles on Kang Chul-Gyu's face.