

## **Blackfield 371**

Chapter 371: I Wanted to Add My Wishes Too (2)

The three remained at the table until the charcoal turned white. The stars looked as if they were about to rain down on them, just like in Africa or Afghanistan.

Kang Chan wanted to go straight back to Seoul. However, he couldn't suggest that in this awkward atmosphere. After all, he was the one who dragged them here against their will.

"Do you mind if I head to bed first?" Kang Chul-Gyu asked quietly, getting up from his seat. "I'll take the room at the end of the hall."

Kang Chul-Gyu headed inside as Kim Mi-Young got up from her seat as well.

*This wasn't what I had in mind. I wanted to create a more relaxed atmosphere. Maybe I should have suggested drinking.*

Kang Chan had no idea what to do. Meanwhile, Kim Mi-Young sat opposite him.

"Aren't you tired?" she asked.

"Not at all," Kang Chan replied.

Kim Mi-Young gently held Kang Chan's hand on the table.

"This place is really nice," she said.

"Really? That's great to hear."

"Does Dad usually go to bed this early?"[1]

"I don't know."

Kang Chan took out his phone to check the time. It was only 8 PM, too early to sleep.

"If he's doing this to give us some space, we can call him back and do something together."

"I'm not sure what we can do, though," Kang Chan said, then looked around.

"We can ask the owner," Kim Mi-Young suggested.

"Huh?"

He hadn't thought of that. Surely, the owner of this place would know something.

"Stay here," he said.

"No, I'll come with you."

"Alright."

Kang Chan and Kim Mi-Young walked to the owner's office on the other side of the pension house.

*Ding. Ding.*

The wind chimes rang as they entered.

The office was quite impressive. It had the atmosphere of a city café, making it pleasant to the eye. Soon, the owner showed up.

"Yes?"

"Excuse me. Is there anything to do at night around here?" Kang Chan asked.

"Right now?"

"Yes."

The owner thought about it for a moment, expressing his willingness to cooperate. "How about fishing by the river? It costs 5,000 won per fishing rod. Worms and dough bait are also 5,000 won."

"Anything else?"

"Well, if it were daytime, you could take a boat ride, but right now..."

Kang Chan looked back at Kim Mi-Young, who was waiting.

It seemed a bit much to just go to bed at 8 PM.

"We'll rent the fishing gear. We've never fished before, though. Can we still do it?" he asked.

The owner sighed. With a serious expression, he said, "I can go set it up and explain how it works to you, but I can't stay long."

"That would be great."

"It can get chilly at night with the moisture, so prepare accordingly."

As Kang Chan and Kim Mi-Young left the office, they heard the owner call out, "Honey!"

Kang Chan and Kim Mi-Young went straight to the pension house's living room. Kang Chul-Gyu was there with a towel around his neck.

"Dad! Let's go fishing," she said.

Kang Chul-Gyu looked at Kang Chan as if asking for an explanation.

"Heading to bed this early would be a shame, so we thought we'd go fishing. We rented the gear here."

"Come with us," Kim Mi-Young urged.

Kang Chul-Gyu smiled at her. "Alright. Let's see if we can catch some fish, Mi-Young."

His tone and expression made it seem like he should be holding a knife instead of a fishing rod.

"They said it might be cold."

"Let's bring a coat, then."

Soon, the three headed to the office together.

They took chairs, a parasol, three fishing rods, stands, holders, bait bowls, worms, and a fishnet. The sheer number of things they needed almost convinced them not to do it.

The three followed the owner in a line. Once they reached the riverbank, the owner spent the next thirty minutes setting up the fishing rods and explaining how to cast them.

"Hope you catch a lot," the owner said. He then left so quickly that he almost seemed to be fleeing.

The three had never seen chemical lights used in operations made so small to serve as fishing bobbers. The three blue lights glowing in the dark river looked quite picturesque.

"You know, Dad," Kim Mi-Young called, then began telling him about the time Kang Chan set up the sports club and helped struggling kids. She seemed bothered by Kang Chul-Gyu going inside earlier.

Every now and then, they would check if the worms on the hooks were still alive and replace the dough bait. Kang Chan felt that this wasn't really something people should be doing for spontaneous fun. Despite how vast the river was, they couldn't even catch a single fish.

Kim Mi-Young and Kang Chul-Gyu chatted intermittently until three in the morning. It was a hundred times better than simply sleeping, yet they didn't want to do it again.

Afterward, Kang Chan made omelets for breakfast. Considering Kim Mi-Young and Kang Chul-Gyu were satisfied, Kang Chan thought he did well.

Kang Chul-Gyu unraveled the threads of a towel, twisted them into a string, and turned the wood carving he had made into a neckless.

"Thank you," Kim Mi-Young said.

Having been coated with oil and attached to a string, it now looked quite presentable.

Finally, they were ready to go. They stopped by the office to pay for the fishing rods and got into the car.

"Do you mind if we stop by Namyangju on the way back to Seoul?" Kang Chul-Gyu asked quietly as Kang Chan started the engine.

"There's a memorial park in Sudong. It's hard to find time to visit, so I was hoping we could stop by on the way..." he trailed off as he looked at Kang Chan.

Knowing that Kang Chul-Gyu would never ask for a favor like this unless it was really important, Kang Chan didn't hesitate to search for the memorial park on the GPS. He then picked up his phone and called Choi Jong-Il.

"We'll stop by the memorial park in Sudong on the way to Seoul," he said.

- Yes, sir.

Afterward, they hit the road.

Spending a night together and having conversations while fishing seemed to have brought them closer. The awkwardly flavored candy that Kim Mi-Young had shared now tasted less awkward.

They reached the memorial park about thirty-five minutes later. Three vans, likely carrying agents, were already parked there. After Kang Chan parked the car, two more vans and a sedan arrived. Although he already had a good idea of who might be there, he only realized it when he saw the memorial building. Chills unexpectedly ran down his spine.

She had never hugged or told Kang Chan "I love you." Her face had always been weary from life, never showing him even a small smile.

Kang Chan bought a bouquet of white chrysanthemums at the entrance. He then walked past the agents in black suits and sunglasses openly guarding the entrance and the area inside.

Kang Chul-Gyu walked down the cool marble hallway and stood facing one wall. In front of him was an old photograph of a woman in her younger years—a time before life wore her down and when she still looked at Kang Chan with hopeful eyes.

Kang Chan swallowed dryly through clenched his teeth.

Kim Mi-Young seemed to sense that the person in the photo was Kang Chul-Gyu's wife. As Kang Chan placed the chrysanthemums in front of the photo and stood up, he saw Kang Chul-Gyu's lips move.

"I'm sorry," he mouthed.

*Why has life been so hard?*

*Was running away really the best option?*

*Why couldn't I have protected them as I protect my family now?*

*Should I have stayed in Korea as a non-commissioned officer and protected these two instead of joining the Foreign Legion?*

Kang Chan spoke to the photo.

"I was just a kid back then. I didn't know anything,"

Kang Chul-Gyu and Kim Mi-Young looked at him with reddened eyes.

"I was too young to think about protecting you both, so..."

Kang Chan thought he had forgotten. He believed he had sorted out his feelings completely. That was why he never imagined it would hurt this much.

"Please forgive me. May you be reborn in a happy place."

About ten minutes passed.

"Phew!"

Kang Chan gathered his emotions and looked at Kim Mi-Young, whose eyes were brimming with tears.

"They are like parents to me."

Kim Mi-Young nodded.

\*\*\*

Nusa Dua Beach, Bali, Indonesia.

A grand villa resembling a massive castle sat on top of a hill, looking down arrogantly at the turquoise sea in the distance. It had a private driveway that made it inaccessible to the public and a luxurious swimming pool.

In the wide shade cast by a payung—an Indonesian parasol made of cloth—Ziegfeld set down a glass of iced tea.

"What do you want to do next?" Ziegfeld asked.

"I don't know," Parthal replied meekly, sitting in front of him.

Parthal's bleached blond hair gave him a striking appearance.

"Things seem to be finally taking shape, don't they?"

Ziegfeld, who looked to be in his sixties, smiled at Parthal.

"We've killed half of the Rothschild idiots and taken five trillion dollars. Now it's their turn to be complacent."

"Do you really think they'll do that?"

Ziegfeld laughed in amusement. "You know it costs quite a bit to build this villa, don't you?"

He picked up a sugar cube from the table and dropped it on the ground. "Still, I couldn't stop ants from hiding here. Not even God can stop them from swarming to something sweet."

Parthal glanced at the sugar cube on the ground with minimal interest.

"Look, they've already surrounded it. To us, they're just ants, but from their perspective, they're in a brutal fight, cutting each other's throats. That's the world you've stepped into now."

Ziegfeld looked away as if he had lost interest.

"The ones who win and get the sugar always become complacent. Eliminate them, and it's over."

*Crush!*

Ziegfeld stomped on the sugar cube.

"It's foolish to overthink when dealing with ants. Just crush the ones who win, and they'll start fighting among themselves again."

He drank his iced tea and set the glass down.

"Next-generation energy facilities? Eurasian Rail? If you stop them now, they'll fight fiercely, but if you destroy them just before they're completed, they'll be too devastated to get up again."

"He's not someone to be underestimated," Parthal said.

Ziegfeld snickered.

"Oh no! Our future is completely ruined," he sarcastically remarked. "In that case, take down everything around him."

"I've been trying to do that."

"Parthal."

Ziegfeld now sounded cold. Parthal looked up at him, adjusting his attitude accordingly.

"Save your pride for those stupid Rothschilds."

"I'm sorry, sir."

"Phew."

Ziegfeld sighed, calming his emotions. "Will you feel better if I kill him?"

Parthal's head snapped up.

"Does the idea of getting rid of that damn Oriental make you that happy?"

"He made me taste failure for the first time."

"You made several mistakes. You used people bound to fail, united your enemies, and fought them in a way they excelled at. Naturally, you'd lose."

"Yes, sir."

To Ziegfeld, everything about Parthal seemed pleasing.

"Let's take out Moon Jae-Hyun first."

"What?"

Ziegfeld laughed heartily.

"That insignificant president of South Korea... Taking him down by removing those around him one by one around him will make you feel better."

"Did you already know everything?"

"I've been waiting because Lanok hasn't revealed all his cards yet. Unfortunately, it seems I need to give you some encouragement now."

Parthal looked hopeful.

"What do you think will happen if we eliminate Lanok?"

"Wouldn't he go mad with rage?"

"That would be even better."

"Will you let me handle Kang Chan?" Parthal inquired.

Ziegfeld looked surprised. With a smile, he nodded.

"Since he handed you your first defeat, it's only fitting for you to snap his neck yourself. For now, just rest until I've completely dismantled everything around him."

"Yes, sir."

Ziegfeld looked at Parthal as if he was the most precious person in the world.

"What did I tell you to do with ants?"

"Crush them."

"That's right! Don't lose heart over ants. You were just bitten because you let your guard down. No matter how much they act up, they're still just ants that cut each other's throats. Make them realize that."

Parthal smiled sheepishly. "Thank you, sir."

Ziegfeld burst into a hearty laugh. "You're such a pure soul to lose heart over mere insects. It's worrisome."

\*\*\*

Kim Mi-Young got out right in front of her apartment.

"Thank you for coming with us. I had fun. Take care," Kang Chul-Gyu said.

"Thank you for the gift. I had a wonderful time too. Please contact me the next time you're in Korea," Kim Mi-Young responded.

As Kang Chul-Gyu nodded, Kim Mi-Young hesitantly stepped forward and hugged him.

"Take care, Dad."

Kang Chul-Gyu's cheek twitched.

"Take care," Kim Mi-Young told Kang Chan.

"Sure. I'll call you later," Kang Chan replied.

Once Kim Mi-Young was inside, Kang Chan and Kang Chul-Gyu got back into the car. They headed toward the hotel.

"I've been having a bad feeling since this morning," Kang Chul-Gyu said, his gaze fixed on the van ahead of them. "I won't go into details since you seem to have a similar sense. It would be best to be more vigilant around you and your surroundings for now."

Kang Chan understood why Seok Kang-Ho often asked, "Is it really that bad?" during conversations like this. Since the feeling didn't specifically tell them what was about to happen or where, he had never been able to give him a concrete answer. Hence, there was no need to ask.

Kang Chan, too, had been feeling uneasy since that morning, attributing it initially to their visit to the memorial park. However, what Kang Chul-Gyu had just told him made him realize that he needed to be even more cautious.

After reaching the hotel and parking the car properly, Kang Chan walked over to Kang Chul-Gyu, who had gotten out of the passenger seat.

"We're leaving the day after tomorrow."

Kang Chul-Gyu nodded. "Don't worry about the factory in Mongolia and the two people there."

"If things get too dangerous, retreating is also an option."

Kang Chul-Gyu let out a wry smile. He then addressed Kang Chan by his title. "Assistant Director, trust the DMZ team and the NIS anti-terrorism team."

They both seemed to sense an imminent crisis. Unfortunately, its nature and target remained unknown.

In his heart, Kang Chan wished they could just shut down operations in Mongolia and gather everyone in one place for safety.

Why did this ominous feeling have to come right after their short vacation?

"Take care," Kang Chul-Gyu said, then turned to leave.

Kang Chan didn't feel right letting Kang Chul-Gyu go like this. Staring at his back as Kang Chul-Gyu walked toward the hotel entrance, Kang Chan felt a strong urge to call out, warn him of the danger, and tell him to retreat if necessary.

As he stood there, unable to look away, Choi Jong-Il and Woo Hee-Seung approached him.

"Good work."

"It felt like a day off."

Kang Chan let out a quiet sigh.

Kang Chul-Gyu had already entered the hotel and walked out of sight.

"Got a cigarette?"

Choi Jong-Il handed him a cigarette and a lighter.

*Click.*

"Phew."

The smoke quickly dissipated into the air.

Chapter 372: You have crossed the line (1)

On the way back to the office, Kang Chan took out his phone and called Kim Hyung-Jung.

"Do you have a moment?"

- Good timing. I was just about to call you. Where are you?

Kim Hyung-Jung sounded noticeably different from usual.

"Let's meet at the office. I'll be there in twenty minutes."

- Copy.

Kang Chan hung up and looked around, finding the car crossing Hannam Bridge. The river below looked different from the one near the pension house.

It was common to have breaks in between combat. Sometimes, the enemy would take that moment to regroup or pray, but no matter what they did, it would all lead to the same thing.

They would come back more brutally and fiercely than before. Enemies who weren't confident would, of course, choose to flee as fast as they could.

The bad feeling that Kang Chul-Gyu got essentially confirmed that the danger that Kang Chan's instincts were warning him about was real.

Back in his previous life, he would've just had to keep an eye out for Daye, Gérard, perhaps any new recruits, and the operation itself. Now, he had so many people to protect that it had become his biggest problem.

Soon, they arrived at the office building.

The road was filled with cars and people. Naturally, many were entering and leaving the building.



Kang Chan headed to the office through the underground parking lot. Seok Kang-Ho, Gérard, and the interpreter greeted him.

"You good?" Kang Chan asked.

"Of course. Thanks, Cap," Seok Kang-Ho replied.

They gave each other their characteristic smiles.

Seok Kang-Ho looked like he had shed some of the heavy burden that he had been carrying.

"Want some coffee?" Seok Kang-Ho asked.

"Make it a double. Bring some water too."

Normally, Seok Kang-Ho would have asked the interpreter to do it, but today, he made the coffee himself. He even stopped Choi Jong-Il and Woo Hee-Seung from helping. It was probably his way of expressing his gratitude for the help he had received with Um Ji-Hwan's funeral.

No words had to be said right now. All that was left was to bury Um Ji-Hwan in his heart and wait for the wound to heal.

Kang Chan took off his coat, hung it up, and sat down at the table.

"Were you out doing something important?" Gérard asked.

"No. I just spent a day with Director Kang since he's about to head back to Mongolia."

Having guessed Kang Chan's relationship with Kang Chul-Gyu, Gérard didn't pry any further.

"Here you go."

Kang Chan picked up and drank the bottle of water that Seok Kang-Ho had brought. He then grabbed the mug of coffee and took a sip.

At the same time, Kim Hyung-Jung entered the office.

"Welcome."

Kim Hyung-Jung was holding a paper bag with his left hand.

As they exchanged greetings, Kang Chan noticed that Kim Hyung-Jung's eyes were bloodshot due to sleep deprivation, and his face was showing signs of fatigue. Nevertheless, he still looked sharp.

"You look like you can use some rest," Kang Chan remarked.

"I plan to take a vacation once this is all over," Kim Hyung-Jung replied.

Believing that claim would be as wise as believing that Seok Kang-Ho would cut down on his eating. The interpreter quickly made coffee and offered it to Kim Hyung-Jung.

"Could you step out for a moment?" Kim Hyung-Jung then requested.

"Yes, sir."

The interpreter moved to the far end of the office and hung out with Choi Jong-Il.

Just as Kang Chan was wondering what this was about, Kim Hyung-Jung opened one of the many urgent matters they had to discuss in this hectic time.

"We might be able to catch the people who had Director Hwang and Director Song killed," he said. Kang Chan's eyes glinted. As Seok Kang-Ho looked at Kim Hyung-Jung with equal intensity, Kang Chan conveyed what he had just heard to Gérard in French.

Gérard smiled knowingly, the scar on his cheek stretching. He seemed as eager as Seok Kang-Ho to catch the terrorists.

Afterward, Kim Hyung-Jung took out documents from the paper bag that he had brought and placed them in front of Kang Chan.

"That file contains information about Jeon Sang-Woo, the Director of the NIS External Affairs division. It also has the bank account details of his relatives."

Kang Chan continued interpreting Kim Hyung-Jung's report in French, believing it was best for everyone to be aware of the situation.

"We gathered this information independently and without a court order. The director authorized the investigation intending to take full responsibility for it."

Kang Chan gazed down and examined the documents. However, he didn't see anything wrong with it.

"Do you remember Assemblyman Huh Sang-Soo?" Kim Hyung-Jung asked, pointing to a section with his finger.

"His cousin married a man named Yang Seok-Woo. They have two daughters now, and their eldest is Director Jeon Sang-Woo's wife."

*Yang Seok-Woo?*

Kim Hyung-Jung nodded briefly in response to Kang Chan's questioning look.

"He's the cousin of the late Yang Jin-Woo. It appears the two families have made what we call a 'Line Circle' marriage."

"Line Circle?"

"The 'Inner Circle' refers to the immediate families of top conglomerate executives and high-ranking officials like ministers. Their relatives are usually called the 'Line Circle.'"

*These bastards! Does that mean everyone else is just a servant or a slave?*

Kang Chan smirked, then relayed all the information he had just gotten to Gérard, not wanting to make him feel left out. He knew that despite his somewhat slow demeanor, Gérard had moments of brilliance when facing the enemy.

After listening to him, Gérard said, "We just need to kill that bastard, then."

*Oh boy. I might have expected too much from him.*

Kang Chan returned his attention to Kim Hyung-Jung.

"The computer in the director's office has a folder where all intel from our agents is stored. Besides reports about misconduct and insubordination, it also contains important information that requires the director's approval. As a security measure, entering the wrong password three times wipes the folder clean. Now, please take a look at these photos."

Kim Hyung-Jung took out four photos from the folder and placed them on the table. They were of a man moving toward a door and then walking away.

"Check the date and time in the lower right corner."

Kang Chan looked at the numbers that Kim Hyung-Jung had pointed to.

"He entered the director's office two days after Director Hwang was killed. His last entry was at 1:10 AM. At that time, there was no reason for anyone other than the anti-terrorism team and the Jeungpyeong special forces team to go in there."

After a brief pause, Kim Hyung-Jung added, "I believe one of our agents directly reported intel about the International Building terrorist attack to Director Hwang. Upon learning about it, Director Jeon Sang-Woo then had Director Hwang removed."

"What about Director Song?"

"They probably used his death to divert attention and disrupt the next-generation power facility project. At the time of the International Building attack, Director Jeon Sang-Woo had been preparing an international trade conference with KOTRA at the NIS External Affairs office."

Although Kang Chan understood the situation, he still felt that they were missing something. After relaying the details to Gérard, Kang Chan looked back at the documents. Kim Hyung-Jung seemed to understand how he felt.

"Please take a look at this. I wasn't sure about all this either until I got this information. Do you remember when the president announced a thorough investigation into dual citizenship and those who have assets overseas?"

"Was that when Japan mentioned investing in us?" Kang Chan inquired.

"Yes," Kim Hyung-Jung answered. He then pointed to a part of the bank statements.

"Jeon Kang-Ho, Jeon Sang-Woo's youngest brother, is an American citizen, and his wife practices law over there. Moreover, just three months ago, they established an investment company. Three billion won in dollars have been invested in it."

"By whom?"

"Alman bin Jibril, a Saudi Arabian royal who has such deep ties with Abibu that he might succeed him. This file has more information on him."

*These bastards!*

Kang Chan faintly smiled at Kim Hyung-Jung.

Kim Hyung-Jung looked like he had been sleep-deprived for so long that his eyes were about to bleed. Moreover, his lips had chapped due to fatigue. While Kang Chan was in Afghanistan, he must have dedicated himself to this work, obtaining such critical information as a result.

"You've done well," said Kang Chan.

He, Seok Kang-Ho, and Gérard felt that they had finally caught the enemy by the tail.

With glinting eyes, Gérard picked up a cigarette. As always, now that one person had lit up a cigarette, everyone else followed. Soon, the four men all ended up smoking.

"What about Abibu?"

"His condition seems to have stabilized. Smithen can be discharged, but he has requested to stay in the hospital until he meets with you, Assistant Director. Sharlan hasn't regained consciousness yet."

After taking a sip of his coffee, Kim Hyung-Jung looked at Kang Chan again, his cigarette in between his fingers.

"What did you want to tell me?"

"Ah, right." Kang Chan flicked the ash from his cigarette. "It's hard to say this anywhere else, but..."

Kim Hyung-Jung and Seok Kang-Ho focused on him.

"I have a bad feeling that something's about to happen again. For now, I'd like to tighten our security."

"Got any ideas where this might go down?"

Thankfully, instead of doubting him, Kim Hyung-Jung immediately believed Kang Chan.

"It's just a feeling, so I have no idea where or how it will happen," Kang Chan replied.

At the same time, Seok Kang-Ho pulled the documents toward him with a surprised expression.

"What is it?"

"You mentioned Alman bin Jibril earlier, right?"

"Yes," Kim Hyung-Jung answered with a curious expression.

"That's an Arabic name. Jibril is Gabriel in English."

"Gabriel?"

"The guy who had allegedly been killed was named Gabriel, remember?"

*How is this bastard's memory so good?*

Kang Chan tilted his head. "Isn't that stretching things too far? If we went by names, all the Kims, Lees, and Parks would be in cahoots."

Gérard glanced at Seok Kang-Ho, then asked, "Cap, what is Daye saying?"

Kang Chan quickly explained what Seok Kang-Ho had said.

"He's always been Gabriel. Isn't it a coincidence?"

"That's what I'm saying."

"What did he say?" Seok Kang-Ho asked Kang Chan.

*These fucking idiots!*

Thinking of doing it for Kim Hyung-Jung instead, Kang Chan interpreted what Gérard had just said. Before he could finish, however, Seok Kang-Ho dismissed his suspicions.

"Isn't it about time we have lunch? I found a good place for naengmyeon[1], and they serve meat with it, too. Let's order from them."

Kang Chan was sure that Seok Kang-Ho had already made his decision before even sharing it. At the very least, they would never have to worry about the menu for as long as they were with this guy.

"Order whatever you like."

Seok Kang-Ho stood up and walked toward Choi Jong-Il.

"Where is Jeon Sang-Woo now?" Kang Chan asked.

"He's under disciplinary action and currently at home." Kim Hyung-Jung quickly responded.

"What about his surveillance?"

"We've assigned two people to monitor him."

"And Jibril?"

"We haven't pinpointed his location yet. Being a Saudi royal, we might need help from the French or Russian intelligence bureau."

Kang Chan nodded. "Manager Kim, how deeply do you think Alman bin Jibril is involved in this?"

Kim Hyung-Jung paused for a moment. "Let's get Director Jeon Sang-Woo's statement about this matter first."

"We're finally approaching the final battle," Kang Chan said. "I don't know what the Star of David is planning, but instead of waiting for a moment to counterattack, we should launch a preemptive strike now."

When Kim Hyung-Jung looked at him with flustered eyes, he added, "We'll have no choice but to act on revenge again if they cause another incident similar to the International Building terrorist attack. We should remove Jibril before that happens. At the very least, that's what the French and the Russians would do."

"Captain! Chilled broth or spicy[2]?"

Kang Chan quickly turned to Seok Kang-Ho. "Order whatever you want!"

Afterward, Kim Hyung-Jung said, "This isn't something the director would authorize."

"Can the anti-terrorism team handle this independently?"

Kim Hyung-Jung shook his head. "I don't mean to sound pessimistic, but if we fail or leave evidence behind, it will become a national crisis. We also need to consider transportation, personnel deployment, and weapon supply."

He certainly had a point. Unlike the DGSE, they didn't have agents who specialized in assassination.

"In that case, please inform the director of my plan. That aside, please set an appointment with the hospital for me and tighten the security at the French embassy."

"Understood. Should we assign the 606 to the French embassy again?"

"Yes. Having them over there would be reassuring," Kang Chan replied.

They were already wrapping up their discussion when Seok Kang-Ho returned to the table.

"I'll be stepping out for a bit tonight, Cap," he said.

"Sure. You should drop by at home, you know. You haven't gone in what, nearly a month?"

"Oh! These days, the person I respect and try to emulate the most is Admiral Yi Sun-Sin[3]."

*What the hell does that even mean?*

Kang Chan and Kim Hyung-Jung looked at him curiously.

"When he left home, it took him at least five years before he returned," Seok Kang-Ho explained. "Isn't that how a man should live?"

*This crazy bastard!*

Kang Chan couldn't help but burst out laughing. He then asked, "Why are you going out anyway?"

Kang Chan didn't want to stop or question Seok Kang-Ho. The man's ridiculous statement just made him curious.

"Ji-Hwan's mother is going to Jangseong today. I'd like to accompany her for a bit."

Kang Chan simply nodded in response.

Soon, their naengmyeon arrived. Even though Seok Kang-Ho had ordered five extra bowls, they still managed to finish all of them.

After the meal, Kim Hyung-Jun stood up. He didn't even wait to have coffee.

"I'll be off now," he said.

Kang Chan stood up as well and walked him to the office door. "I don't know where or when this bad feeling will turn into a reality, so no matter how busy you are, I need you to always have a security detail with you. Right now, no one is more important than you are, Manager Kim."

Kim Hyung-Jun smiled in appreciation, then left the office after saying goodbye. Kang Chan returned to the table, rejoining Seok Kang-Ho.

"Where's Gérard?"

"He's gone inside to the satellite team. That bastard's Korean has improved a lot."

"Really?"

Seok Kang-Ho nodded. "Anyway, if this Jibril is an ally of Abibu and is involved in the attacks on Director Hwang and Director Song, won't he be planning another retaliation over this UIS matter?"

"He most likely is."

"Then let's work with the DGSE and eliminate Jibril ourselves already. You having a bad feeling about all this means we don't have time to be hesitating like this."

*Why is this guy so proactive all of a sudden?*

Seemingly noticing the doubt in Kang Chan's gaze, Seok Kang-Ho added, "I thought about what you said earlier. There are too many people around me who could get hurt. Not just my family but everyone we know, including Director Go, Manager Kim, Director Kim Gwan-Sik, and even our people in Mongolia...."

Seok Kang-Ho picked up a cigarette and handed it to Kang Chan.

*Click.*

Their conversation paused as he lit the cigarette.

"Let's take the initiative this time. The three of us are enough to act as the DGSE of Korea, don't you think?"

When Kang Chan simply smirked in response, Seok Kang-Ho gasped, frustration evident in his expression.

"I'm not doing this just because of Ji-Hwan!"

"Who said you were?"

"Well, honestly, if I get to eliminate those bastards too, then this will be a bit more exciting."

Kang Chan blew out a puff of smoke and looked out the window. The brilliant sunlight was shining on the city.

*Damn it. It feels wrong to decide to kill someone on a day like this.*

"Let's wait for Manager Kim's report before we decide."

"Understood," Seok Kang-Ho replied quietly.

Kang Chan then took out his phone and called Lanok. He informed him that Gérard had decided not to take up the position as the Inspector Director-General of the DGSE and that they would be strengthening the security of the French embassy starting today.

- Is something wrong?

"Mr. Ambassador, this might sound unreasonable, but my instincts are warning me of danger. I would also like to discuss something with you in person."

- Mr. Kang Chan, your instincts are a talent that others do not possess. Having seen it in action several times myself, I consider it a more reliable warning than any other information can give me. Anyway, it seems we need to tighten our internal security as well.

"That would be reassuring,"

Lanok burst out laughing. When he finally calmed down, he called out to him.

- Mr. Kang Chan.

"Yes, Mr. Ambassador."

- I understand that your codename implies you bring death to your enemies. Hence, should someone target you or those around you, be sure to do the same to them.

Recalling Lanok's words from before, Kang Chan asked a similar question. "Does that mean we need to take a tougher stance from now on?"

- Remember, I, Lanok, am behind you.

Kang Chan chuckled in response. Soon, Lanok joined him.

Chapter 373: You have crossed the line (2)

Moon Jae-Hyun had such a tight schedule and so many meetings that he didn't even have time to catch his breath. Things were still somewhat manageable after the announcement of the Eurasian Rail. However, the announcement of the next-generation energy facility made his schedule absolutely brutal. When South Korea's special forces team flawlessly executed a mission to eliminate the UIS leadership in Afghanistan, his workload intensified even further, as if fuel had been thrown on the fire.

A South Korea that could stand on equal footing with France, Russia, China, and the United States, make Japan take a step back, and defeat the UIS was a powerful image. Observing this, underdeveloped countries in Africa and other nations seeking development clamored for meetings with Moon Jae-Hyun.

South Korea's status had clearly changed. This shift became evident when a Korean university student in Australia and a Korean businessman in the Philippines were killed. The President of the Philippines and the Prime Minister of Australia promptly expressed their condolences to the Korean embassy and personally called the South Korean Prime Minister. They even made an official announcement to promptly investigate the incidents.

Right after a meeting with the President of Togo, Moon Jae-Hyun headed to the second reception room. His schedule was so hectic that two teams of attendants were required to manage it.

"Mr. President," the Chief of Staff quickly approached Moon Jae-Hyun. "The NIS director wishes to meet with you with Assistant Director Kang Chan."

"Really? Then please make time for it somehow," replied Moon Jae-Hyun.

"You have a meeting with the President of Malawi right after this. We'll arrange it twenty minutes after that meeting."

"Notify the director accordingly."

"Yes, sir. How about taking a short break?"

Moon Jae-Hyun had five meetings with African presidents scheduled today. Although the major points were handed over to the responsible officials after laying the groundwork, he couldn't miss any of these meetings.

"This is glory earned through the bloodshed of our men. If I miss such opportunities, then I do not qualify to represent South Korea."

Refusing the Chief of Staff's suggestion, Moon Jae-Hyun reached the reception room. Jeon Dae-Geuk stood right behind him with his security detail.

One had to row diligently when the water was in.



The meetings involved building airports, roads, and government offices for the African countries in exchange for their resources. The construction costs and expenses for resource development were all included, and the resources were deducted from their debt every time they were brought in. Through power and money, this method was made available to South Korea.

In the past, developing resources required significant payouts, and all the roads and development facilities had to be built at Korea's expense. Now, the government paid the construction companies upfront for ports, airports, roads, and other buildings, and later received payment in resources. One might wonder—what if, after the construction was complete, the African countries refused to hand over the resources and acted defiantly?

Would they dare defy South Korea, which had flawlessly executed a mission to eliminate the UIS leadership in Afghanistan? The visiting presidents knew all too well that South Korea had the power and resolve to send its formidable special forces to deal with any such defiance. Stories of South Korea's operations in Afghanistan, China, Libya, and France had already somewhat spread through intelligence networks.

South Korea even arrested and warned the Saudi Arabian prince. Hence, the countries now lining up to request cooperation believed that the UIS could not hinder their development.

Developing resources was as crucial to South Korea as the next-generation energy projects. Just like the next-generation energy facility, which would generate enormous profits, the resources they'd gain prepared their nation for the distant future.

Moon Jae-Hyun stared at the particularly vivid Taegeukgi near the reception room's entrance, supported by long-tailed phoenixes on both sides. It made him remember the special forces soldiers who had been brought back in body bags at the Seongnam Airport. Today's glory was certainly rooted in their bravery.

Moon Jae-Hyun habitually gazed at the Taegeukgi and the phoenixes.

'I will not retreat or let their sacrifices be in vain. I will approach these talks with pride to honor our soldiers and agents who bled for South Korea..'

Moon Jae-Hyung took a deep breath, then nodded. The attendant pushed open the large door of the reception room.

\*\*\*

Having finished his call with Lanok, Kang Chan took a cold shower and changed into new clothes. Removing the remaining stitches from his wounds made it much easier to move.

Soon after, Kang Chan's phone rang.

*Buzz. Buzz. Buzz.*

"Hello?"

- This is Kim Hyung-Jung. The Director would like you to accompany him to the Blue House.

"When?"

- We're meeting in Naegok-dong in thirty minutes.

Kang Chan had no reason to refuse. They had to decide on the matter with Jibril anyway. Hence, after telling Kim Hyung-Jung that he'd be there, he immediately hung up.

"Choi Jong-Il, we're going to Naegok-dong."

"Yes, sir."

Lee Doo-Hee headed down to the basement first while Choi Jong-Il and Woo Hee-Seung waited in front of the office.

"See you later. I'll be out this evening," said Seok Kang-Ho.

"Don't forget what I said. Take agents with you and make sure to keep a pistol with you," replied Kang Chan.

"Got it," Seok Kang-Ho firmly answered while looking into Kang Chan's eyes.

Convinced that Seok Kang-Ho understood him well enough to follow his instructions, Kang Chan headed to the underground parking lot with Choi Jong-Il and Woo Hee-Seung.

It was currently around three in the afternoon. Nevertheless, as if it was already approaching the dead of the night, his uneasiness grew stronger the more time passed.

Kang Chan double-checked everything. He made sure to check on the 606 guarding the French embassy, the DMZ team protecting Mongolia, Kim Tae-Jin, and the soldiers assigned to protect Kim Gwan-Sik and his family.

Afterward, he took a deep breath. It felt like half of his lungs were filled with mud, making it hard to breathe fully. His gleaming eyes made the atmosphere in the car sharp and heavy.

When they arrived at the main entrance of the Naegok-dong headquarters, Go Gun-Woo and Kim Hyung-Jung stepped out of the main gate.

"Assistant Director," Go Gun-Woo greeted.

Kang Chan bowed his head in response.

Noticing Kang Chan's intense gaze, Go Gun-Woo glanced at Kim Hyung-Jung. He didn't say anything about it, however.

Go Gun-Woo gestured to a black SUV. "Let's head over to the Blue House together, shall we?"

Kang Chan got into the SUV with Go Gun-Woo and Kim Hyung-Jung.

Their convoy consisted of more than six SUVs.

"Assistant Director, there's something I want to confirm before meeting the President."

Kim Hyung-Jung sat in the passenger seat. Go Gun-Woo was behind him, while Kang Chan was behind the driver's seat.

"I heard the report from Manager Kim. First, I'd like to hear your opinion on whether it's right to eliminate Jibril based solely on facts that could be seen as simple investments," Go Gun-Woo said. "Secondly, we cannot ignore the possibility of failure. If things go wrong, dealing with the aftermath will undoubtedly be detrimental to us. We would be accused of attempting to eliminate a foreign prince without sufficient evidence."

Go Gun-Woo glanced at Kim Hyung-Jung and then back at Kang Chan.

"Why don't we conduct a more thorough investigation on Jibril's involvement in the attacks on Director Hwang before planning our next move?"

Go Gun-Woo was clearly reluctant about eliminating Jibril. However, suggesting to meet Moon Jae-Hyun together showed that he respected Kang Chan's opinion.

"I'm sure you're aware that UIS and Abibu are connected," Kang Chan said.

"There's no doubt about that," said Go Gun-Woo.

"I believe our country is currently at war."

Go Gun-Woo let out a low sigh. "Hmm."

"They attacked the International Building, killed Director Hwang and Director Song, and threatened us by gathering the UIS in Afghanistan."

*Thump-thump. Thump-thump.*

Just as he finished speaking, Kang Chan's heart suddenly began sending him warnings. The sharpness of it was so intense that Kang Chan even wondered if an enemy was aiming a rocket launcher at them from a nearby building.

Go Gun-Woo looked at Kang Chan with a puzzled expression.

"Director, there are times when my senses become exceptionally sharp. When that happens, my eyes are always the first to show it," Kang Chan explained.

"Like at the Eurasian Rail announcement?"

"Yes."

Now that he had thought about it, Go Gun-Woo had been there too.

Kang Chan wanted to make it clear to Go Gun-Woo that his gaze had become so intense not because Go Gun-Woo refused to accept his opinion.

"Since this morning, my senses have been strangely sharp, just like that day. Even now, I feel like someone is aiming a rocket launcher at us from somewhere nearby."

Kim Hyung-Jung, sitting in the passenger seat, looked around, and Go Gun-Woo reflexively checked the front and back.

There was no way to avoid going to the Blue House now, though, nor did they have an alternative course of action. Hence, Kang Chan decided to just keep talking for now.

"As I was saying, I believe that gathering evidence and enforcing the law applies only to our citizens. Dragging out time to prove the crimes of a hostile country's leadership, who is fatal to us, is extremely dangerous."

Go Gun-Woo took a deep breath and exhaled slowly.

"Assistant Director, you are becoming too prominent and significant in the eyes of those who have a vested interest in this. They're keeping their silence now because of your success in quelling the

International Building terrorist attack and eliminating the UIS leaders, but if you make a mistake, they will undoubtedly turn on you."

Kang Chan found it hard to understand what Go Gun-Woo was saying.

"Even the military has quieted down because of your achievements, but if the operation to eliminate Jibril fails and problems arise, they are likely to be the first to denounce you."

With a bitter look in his eyes, Go Gun-Woo added, "They don't know the full details, and they believe you are being given too much power and authority. Moreover, if the public sees your achievements as our military and the NIS counter-terrorism team's achievements, public opinion might turn against us, and we might not be able to officially protect you."

As Go Gun-Woo finished speaking, the SUV entered the Blue House's driveway.

*Thump-thump. Thump-thump.*

Kang Chan looked out the window and sharply scanned the area around them.

They were already in the Blue House. His heart should have calmed by now, but his instincts were warning him of even greater danger instead.

*'Could it be...?'*

Kang Chan shook off the thought that momentarily crossed his mind.

Jeon Dae-Geuk was definitely a reliable person. Was someone deceiving him and targeting Moon Jae-Hyun? Kang Chan scanned the perimeter of the driveway once more.

\*\*\*

After his meeting, Moon Jae-Hyun headed back to the first reception room.

"Have the director and assistant director arrived yet?" he asked.

"They are expected to arrive before your meeting with the President of Malawi ends. Shall I guide them to the second reception room?"

"No. Prepare us a place in the garden."

"Yes, sir."

After giving instructions to the Chief of Staff, Moon Jae-Hyun gazed at the phoenixes and the Taegeukgi at the entrance of the first reception room.

South Korea was becoming a stronger nation.

He was grateful that talents like Kang Chan were born in this land. He was also both grateful and sorrowful for the soldiers and agents who shed blood and sacrificed themselves for South Korea and the Taegeukgi.

"Haaa."

Moon Jae-Hyun exhaled deeply. When he nodded, the attendant opened the door of the reception room.

\*\*\*

Kang Chan handed over his pistol at the Blue House entrance. Since no one other than security personnel was allowed to carry firearms, he couldn't argue his way out of this.

*Thump-thump. Thump-thump.*

His instincts were screaming that there was no more time left.

All Kang Chan could think about was that he had to meet Moon Jae-Hyun and Jeon Dae-Geuk as quickly as possible.

"Assistant Director, you also need to hand over your radio according to regulations," the security staff requested cautiously but firmly.

"Can you contact Director Jeon?"

"We can."

"Contact him now. Tell him it's urgent."

"The President is in a meeting. Unless it's related to security, we can't disturb him."

*Thump-thump. Thump-thump.*

There was no more time to waste here. Kang Chan was just about to yank off the radio when a staff member approached him.

"You're quite early. Anyway, the president has prepared a place in the garden. Please follow me," the staff member respectfully said.

He then looked around nervously, noticing Kang Chan's intense gaze and the deadly atmosphere at the entrance.

"Where is the president?"

"He's in the first reception room."

"Take me there."

"Pardon?"

"Take me to him. Now."

"Assistant Director, please cooperate with the security—"

Kang Chan's sharp glare was so intense that the security officer couldn't even finish his sentence.

*Thump-thump. Thump-thump.*

There was no time to argue. Kang Chan turned to Go Gun-Woo.

"Director, you have to trust me. The President could be in danger. We need to go to him immediately."

Go Gun-Woo did not avoid Kang Chan's gaze.

"Manager Kim."

"Sir."

"As the Director of the National Intelligence Service, I am declaring an anti-terrorism emergency at the Blue House due to a potential threat against the President. Assistant Director Kang Chan will take command."

"Yes, sir."

*Click!*

Kim Hyung-Jung immediately drew his pistol and aimed it at the security officer in front of Kang Chan.

"The Director of the NIS has declared an anti-terrorism emergency. Security personnel must cooperate!"

*Click. Click. Click.*

The surrounding security officers quickly pointed their guns at Kim Hyung-Jung and Go Gun-Woo.

"The Assistant Director is going in. You all know he's unarmed."

"Please don't do this!"

"This is an anti-terrorism emergency! Stop getting in the way and contact Director Jeon immediately! Go ahead, Assistant Director!"

After glancing at Go Gun-Woo and Kim Hyung-Jung, Kang Chan sprinted into the Blue House.

*Woosh! Woosh!*

Two security officers rushed at him. They were not enemies. They were agents moving with the same purpose.

*Smack! Smack!*

Kang Chan deflected their hands to the side and struck their necks and sides.

*Bam-bam-bam!*

Using the momentum, he sprinted up the stairs.

*Click.*

Kim Hyung-Jung lowered his gun.

"Contact Director Jeon immediately!"

Finally, the security officers picked up their radios.

Inside the reception room, Moon Jae-Hyun shook hands with Muritaka, the President of Malawi.

"Please have a seat," he offered afterward.

As Moon Jae-Hyun sat down, President Muritaka took the indicated seat. Two interpreters sat close to them, holding notepads and concentrating.

Tea was served.

"Don't you find the weather in Korea cold?"

"Perhaps because I came with passion, but I don't feel the cold," Muritaka skillfully responded. Standing inside the reception room, Jeon Dae-Geuk touched his ear with a puzzled expression.

*Chk.*

"I'll repeat, the Director of the National Intelligence Service has declared an anti-terrorism emergency at the Blue House."

*What is this about?*

Jeon Dae-Geuk signaled the security guards to heighten their alert. Trust in Go Gun-Woo was one thing, but security was an entirely different matter.

*Chk.*

"Assistant Director Kang Chan is heading to the first reception room unarmed."

*Kang Chan?*

He acknowledged Kang Chan's ability to detect crises, which had been clearly demonstrated during the Eurasian Rail announcement. He also had accomplishments to his name.

*Did our security really fail to pick up danger?*

Jeon Dae-Geuk scanned the reception room sharply.

"May I smoke?" Muritaka asked.

"Of course. Feel free," Moon Jae-Hyun responded with a generous smile, even extending his hand.

"This is made with tobacco from our country. Would you like one?"

"Thank you, but I've quit smoking."

"You've lost one of life's pleasures."

Moon Jae-Hyun laughed in response.

*Click.*

*Bang!*

Just as Muritaka lit his lighter, the door burst open, and Kang Chan dashed in. Everyone's eyes, including Moon Jae-Hyun's, turned toward him. Muritaka also looked at Kang Chan with wide eyes.

"What's going on? What are you doing?" Jeon Dae-Geuk growled lowly as Kang Chan surveyed the room.

*Huff. Huff.*

"Kang Chan!"

Jeon Dae-Geuk called out again.

*Huff. Huff.*

Time seemed to slow down for Kang Chan.

*Thump-thump. Thump-thump.*

Even the sound of his heart beating to warn him seemed to slow down.

*What is it? What am I missing? The guards against the wall?*

There couldn't be a bomb planted in the building.

*It's not Jeon Dae-Geuk.*

*Crackle. Crackle.*

At that moment, sparks flew from the cigarette in Muritaka's mouth. Cigarettes mixed with sugarcane tended to spark like that.

Kang Chan's eyes caught Muritaka's surprised gaze.

*Damn it!*

Kang Chan lunged at Moon Jae-Hyun.

*Whoosh!*

Two security guards reflexively lunged at Kang Chan, while two more drew their guns.

*Click! Click!*

*Crash!*

Kang Chan, the two guards trying to stop him, and Moon Jae-Hyun tumbled to the floor in a tangled mess.

"Gah! Ugh!"

Right after, Muritaka grabbed his throat and convulsed, a horrifying expression on his face.

Kang Chan clamped his hand over Moon Jae-Hyun's nose and mouth.

"Don't breathe! Get the President out of here!"

As expected of Jeon Dae-Geuk, he quickly grasped the situation, rushed over, hooked his arms under Moon Jae-Hyun's armpits, and pulled him away. Kang Chan continued to cover Moon Jae-Hyun's nose and mouth as he followed Jeon Dae-Geuk.

"Ugh!"

"Ack!"

"Urgh!"

The two interpreters collapsed to the floor, writhing in agony like Muritaka. Two nearby security guards fell to the floor in similar distress.

Chapter 374: The Beginning of the War (1)

"Keuk!"

"Cough!"

Kang Chan, the two security guards who had gotten tangled up with him, and the security guards who had pointed their pistols at him struggled on the floor, their pain evident in their expressions.



*Hiiiiissss!*

Jeon Dae-Geuk, whose face was now red, pulled Moon Jae-Hyun away. Kang Chan moved with them, firmly covering Moon Jae-Hyun's mouth and nose. Soon, they got out of the reception room.

“The stairs! Go!” Kang Chan yelled through held breaths.

He felt so much discomfort in his chest and throat that they seemed about to explode. His head burned as well.

*Hiiiiissss! Bam! Bam!*

Once Moon Jae-Hyun had gone down the stairs, Kang Chan removed his hand from Moon Jae-Hyun's face.

“Haa!”

The three breathed heavily.

“Huff! Huff!”

Kang Chan had been covering Moon Jae-Hyun's mouth and nose so firmly that he had left a clear imprint on his face.

“Bring him downstairs!” Kang Chan shouted.

Nobody had time to question Kang Chan speaking informally to them. Following his order, Jeon Dae-Geuk ran down the stairs with Moon Jae-Hyun on his back.

After taking a deep breath, Kang Chan ran back into the reception room, finding the security guards, attendants, and interpreters shaking in pain on the floor.

“Ugh!”

“Urgh!”

*Crackle. Crackle. Crackle.*

Muritaka's cigarette had fallen to the floor, but it continued to burn. Hence, Kang Chan ran toward it, picked up a cup of tea on the table, and poured it on the cigarette.

*Chkkk.*

He then dragged away the agent closest to the entrance by the shoulders.

Kang Chan was already running out of breath, and he felt as if his eyes were about to explode. Still, he couldn't stop. He hoped to save everyone in the room—or even just one more life.

“Ugh.”

By the time Kang Chan pulled the second agent outside, the agent's eyes had already rolled into the back of his head.

Unfortunately, there wasn't really much he could do to save the others since they were further inside the room. With his lungs seemingly being torn apart, he was left with no other choice but to stay outside.

'I'm sorry! I'll make sure to get revenge for this!'

*Bang!*

Kang Chan closed the large door of the reception room. He then ran toward the stairs again, finding Kim Hyung-Jung and a few agents running up.

"Go back!" he yelled. Still holding his breath, his face was now red, and his eyes glinted with spite.

*Swish! Swoosh!*

He took off his jacket and shirt as if he was ripping it off his body, then threw it toward the reception room.

"I said go back!" Kang Chan shouted.

Upon seeing Kang Chan taking off his pants, Kim Hyung-Jung and the agents immediately went down the stairs.

Only when Kang Chan had taken off his pants did he go down the stairs.

"Haa! Huff huff! Huff huff!"

Kim Hyung-Jung took off his jacket and wrapped it around Kang Chan's waist. From outside the building, they heard ambulance sirens and agents' vehicles quickly leaving.

*Weeeooo. Weeeooo. Weeeooo. Weeeooo.*

Go Gun-Woo couldn't hide his surprise. Fortunately, he chose to trust Kang Chan.

He believed that no matter the circumstances, they had to prioritize keeping Moon Jae-Hyun safe. Hence, he believed in Kang Chan's capabilities, which Kang Chan had shown everyone at the presentation hall for the Eurasian Rail.

Nevertheless, he never imagined that something like this would happen. If Kang Chan hadn't been around to intervene, this incident would have thrown South Korea into chaos. Moreover, they would've found it difficult to know what was going to happen next.

Kang Chan still had wounds on his face, and his body was riddled with bruises, stitches, and old scars.

'It doesn't matter to him if he returns home with wounds like those. He never hesitates to go on an operation to prove South Korea's strength!' Go Gun-Woo thought.

Go Gun-Woo felt ashamed. While he was going around yelling that he would make South Korea more powerful, soldiers returned from faraway battlefields covered in injuries or body bags.

He couldn't believe that he had been such an idiot. Even though Kang Chan had just gone back home from the frontlines with wounds all over and the death of his men weighing heavily on his heart, Go Gun-Woo still found the gall to suggest gathering evidence.

For the first time in his life, he felt a surge of hostility toward their enemies. He remembered Kang Chan saying that they were at war and that the law should only be enforced according to evidence when their citizens were the ones being questioned.

A security guard brought over a shirt and a suit for Kang Chan. They seemed to have prepared extra clothes for emergencies like this.

Kang Chan wordlessly put them on. Once he had buttoned up his shirt, Go Gun-Woo walked up to him.

“What happened?” Go Gun-Woo asked.

“Right as I entered the reception room, I heard the end of President Muritaka’s cigarettes crackling. When I saw his nose, mouth, and the pain in his expression, I judged that it was poisoned.”

Dumbfounded, Go Gun-Woo failed to respond immediately. Kang Chan gathered all that just by looking at President Muritaka and his cigarette?

Agents in hazmat suits rushed into the building through the entrance while the security guards quickly secured the surrounding areas.

Go Gun-Woo informed Kang Chan that he had issued an anti-terrorism emergency decree and that Jeon Dae-Geuk had gone to the hospital with Moon Jae-Hyun.

After reporting to Go Gun-Woo, the agents received an order from Kim Hyung-Jung to clean up the area.

Thanks to Go Gun-Woo’s anti-terrorism emergency decree and his initiative to quickly set up a command structure, the terrorist attack in the Blue House was quickly contained. He had done everything at such a perfect time that it seemed as if God had played a part in it.

After a brief lull, one of the agents assigned to the President’s security detail approached Go Gun-Woo.

“We’ve determined that President Muritaka’s cigarettes are poisoned. I’ll report back as soon as we have definite results from the analysis, but we think they had potassium cyanide capsules in them.”

“What about our casualties?” Go Gun-Woo asked.

“We lost sixteen men, including the interpreters, the attendants, and the bodyguards.”

“Have you heard from the President?”

“Not yet, no.”

After giving his report, the agent returned to his post.

Go Gun-Woo stared at the stairs that led to the reception room. Soon, the Chief of Staff walked over to him.

“We’ve just been informed that the President is fine. He’ll be discharged as soon as they get results from a thorough medical checkup.”

Go Gun-Woo heaved a loud sigh of relief. “Phew!”

“The President wants to see you and the assistant director, Director,” the Chief of Staff added.

“We’ll head over right away. I’ll leave the scene to you,” Kim Hyung-Jung said.

“Yes, sir.”

Go Gun-Woo walked away. Kang Chan and Kim Hyung-Jung followed him.

\*\*\*

Thanks to the police escorting them, it didn’t take them long to reach the National Police Hospital.

Armed soldiers from the 35th brigade had been positioned near the hospital, tightly guarding its vicinity.

Some of the agents who had been guarding the entrance guided Go Gun-Woo, Kang Chan, and Kim Hyung-Jung to the seventh floor.

*Rattle.*

Once they opened the door and entered the suite reserved for VIP patients, they immediately saw Jeon Dae-Geuk and more than fifteen bodyguards.

The room was quite spacious. It even had an enclosed space, where Moon Jae-Hyun was sitting in his bed with his upper body raised. An IV had been attached to his arm.

“What happened to the attendants and agents in the reception room?” Moon Jae-Hyun swiftly asked.

“We’ve received a report that a total of sixteen people have been killed. Among them were the agents and attendants.”

Moon Jae-Hyun groaned through gritted teeth. Kang Chan had seen his eyes full of determination a few times, but this was Kang Chan’s first time seeing him look so angry.

“If I hadn’t quit smoking, then...” Moon Jae-Hyun looked down and shook his head.

If he had taken the cigarette that Muritaka offered him and lit it up, he would’ve died as well.

A heavy and sharp silence filled the room. After a while, Moon Jae-Hyun broke it.

“How did you know that the cigarettes were poisoned, Assistant Director?”

Kang Chan reiterated what he had told Go Gun-Woo—that he figured it out by looking at Muritaka’s face.

They were all aware of Kang Chan’s capabilities. Hence, although it was so unbelievable that they were rendered speechless, they had no choice but to accept his explanation.

“How should we take care of this situation? This incident is grave enough for us to be in an international conflict with Malawi,” Moon Jae-Hyun asked no one in particular.

Kang Chan was the first to speak. “The President looked like he didn’t know that his cigarette contained poison.”

*He even noticed that in that short moment? Does this make sense?*

Nevertheless, again, they felt inclined to believe him. After all, he did figure out what was wrong just by seeing Muritaka’s expression and the cigarette spattering.

Kang Chan continued, “Someone killed the President of Malawi in hopes of killing you as well, Mr. President. Taking that into consideration, anti-government forces are likely waiting in Malawi right now.”

“Even if we insist on that explanation, we will have to take full responsibility for this situation. If things go wrong, this can cause a misunderstanding and make people think that we’re blaming the President of Malawi for our failure to provide adequate security.”

This had never happened before. Still, they needed to sort out this incident.

Moon Jae-Hyun and Go Gun-Woo were definitely flustered. They didn’t even know how they should officially announce the incident and take care of the aftermath.

“How about we ask the UN to investigate this incident?” Kang Chan suggested.

“The UN?”

“Yes. They should be able to contact the United States, Russia, the UK, France, and China. Fairness won’t be a problem if the UN itself announces the results of the investigation. We should also send the Jeungpyeong special forces team to Malawi as a peacekeeping force and have them find the culprit.”

Moon Jae-Hyun looked at Kang Chan as if he was asking for more explanation.

“We’ll have to find and protect the President of Malawi’s successor until he assumes the position. However, if he’s connected with the anti-government forces, then...” Kang Chan trailed off.

Noticing Moon Jae-Hyun nervously waiting for him to continue, he finally added, “We’ll have to kill him and choose someone we’ll benefit from to succeed President Muritaka instead.”

Moon Jae-Hyun exhaled softly, finding Kang Chan’s proposition shocking.

“If we do that, then we’ll be interfering in the domestic affairs of another country,” he replied.

“Someone has just used cigarettes in an attempt to kill you and the President of Malawi, Mr. President. We need to find the culprit and kill them. We need to show people that those who attack South Korea will never be forgiven.”

Moon Jae-Hyun nodded unknowingly.

“In Africa, hesitating even when we have the power to act means death. We need to at least instill the belief that Africa’s administrations won’t need to worry about anything once they start depending on us,” Kang Chan added. “That way, the countries that follow us will know that we have the power to take action, which in turn will prevent them from being swayed in the future. If those countries are ever in danger, they’ll ask us for help before they ask anyone else.”

“Like what people do with France, huh?”

“Yes, sir.”

Kang Chan could confidently answer because he was well aware of how powerful France’s control was over the African countries.

“Won’t the Jeungpyeong special forces team have trouble figuring out the local situation in Africa?” Moon Jae-Hyun asked.

“Do you remember Gérard de Mermier, the commander of the Foreign Legion’s special forces?”

Looking straight into Kang Chan’s eyes, Moon Jae-Hyun nodded.

“We can send him to Malawi. Gérard and the Jeungpyeong special forces team should be able to completely dominate the country. If needed, I’ll have France’s Foreign Legion stand by in a neighboring country as well.”

Moon Jae-Hyun nodded again. “I keep having to ask you to do difficult things for us. For now, let’s wait how the five countries you just mentioned respond before we decide if we should send the Jeungpyeong special forces team. Right! Director, you wanted to see me?”

Although only a short moment had passed, Moon Jae-Hyun finally looked like he was somewhat back to normal.

“Mr. President.” Go Gun-Woo paused to look at Kang Chan. He then continued, “We believe that South Korea is currently at war with terrorists. To that end, I’d like to ask for your permission to kill Alman Bin Jibril, whom we presume to have played a major role in the terrorist attacks on the International Building, Director Hwang, and Director Song. We also suspect that he’s one of the people that assembled the UIS in Afghanistan.”

Moon Jae-Hyun was naturally surprised. Kang Chan and Kim Hyung-Jung exchanged surprised glances as well—but for a different reason.

“Did we find evidence that he played a major role?” Moon Jae-Hyun asked.

“Judging crime with evidence only applies to our citizens. We believe that wasting time looking for evidence to kill our enemies’ leader while we’re in the

middle of combat is exactly what leads to dangerous situations like the incident today.”

Once again, Moon Jae-Hyun looked at Go Gun-Woo as if he was dumbfounded.

“That sounds like the Assistant Director’s opinion, no?” he asked.

“You’re right. It is his opinion.”

“Does that mean you agree with him? Even if you’ll be the one facing the consequences if we fail?”

“Yes, sir.”

Moon Jae-Hyun nodded, then looked away from Go Gun-Woo. “Do you have anything to add, Section Chief?”

“When the President of the United States visited us last time, I found the requests of their security service disrespectful. However, I learned a lot today. I’ll do my best to prevent something like this from ever happening again.”

Moon Jae-Hyun briefly nodded. He then looked Kang Chan in the eyes. “Assistant Director.”

“Mr. President.”

“Are you certain that you’re proposing this for South Korea’s sake, not to take revenge?”

“Yes, sir,” Kang Chan answered swiftly.

“I know that it has only been three days since you returned from Afghanistan, which makes this even more difficult for you to do. But for South Korea and our dream to make it stronger, I’m going to ask you to...”

A heavy and sharp nervousness brushed past the table.

“I’m going to ask you to make sure that the UN does a fair investigation into today’s incident. Please have the UN send a peacekeeping force to Malawi with our special forces team as its key member, too. Have them protect Malawi’s administration and kill our enemies’ leadership,” Moon Jae-Hyun firmly requested.

“Yes, sir,” Kang Chan answered with determination.

“Hearing the director say that we’re currently at war made me realize a lot of things. After you’ve discussed the fine details with him, you have my permission to proceed with this plan. As the President of South Korea, I hereby approve this National Intelligence Service operation.”

Moon Jae-Hyun giving his permission—with an unprecedentedly determined expression—completed the due process.

“I’m truly grateful for what you did for me today. Personally, you saved me. For South Korea, you saved its President. I will never forget this for as long as I live,” he said.

Kang Chan simply bowed instead of answering.

\*\*\*

Approximately ten minutes later, Go Gun-Woo, Kang Chan, and Kim Hyung-Jung left the room.

“How about you have coffee with us before you leave, Director?” Kang Chan suggested.

Go Gun-Woo smiled strangely at Kang Chan, who had clearly noticed that Go Gun-Woo was starting to feel exhausted as he finally got to relax.

Now that he had confirmed that Moon Jae-Hyun was safe, he could afford to spend about ten minutes having coffee with Kang Chan.

“Well, I suggested coffee, but I’m not really sure if there’s anywhere we can go to for that,” Kang Chan said.

“You can use your position at times like this, you know,” Go Gun-Woo commented.

Heeding his suggestion, Kang Chan called over the agent closest to them.

“I need a place where the director and I can have coffee and talk in private,” he said.

“This way, please.”

Following the agent, Go Gun-Woo smiled meaningfully again. It was strange—nowadays, he kept finding himself forgetting about Kang Chan’s age.

There were even times when Kang Chan seemed like a veteran with a lot of experience on the battlefield. However, during moments like this, Go Gun-Woo always felt as if he was looking at someone who lived in a completely different world.

They walked past the elevator and reached a room that looked like a waiting room or a lounge for the agents.

“We only have instant coffee here,” the agent said.

“It’s fine. Please make three cups for us. Put two packets in each one,” Kang Chan responded.

“Yes, sir.” The agent bowed and then went outside.

“You’ll feel a bit better once you’ve drunk something sweet,” Kang Chan said.

Go Gun-Woo nodded in response. His hair, which had always been tidy, was now disheveled. He was clearly exhausted.



“I was only an administrator until recently, so incidents like today still catch me off guard and make me nervous. I just never know what to do or how to respond,” Go Gun-Woo said.

*Rattle.*

The door opened, and an agent brought over three mugs on a tray.

“Thanks,” Kang Chan said.

“Not at all, sir.”

These agents guarded the President. Perhaps it was because Kang Chan saved Moon Jae-Hyun today, but they were especially polite to him.

“Please drink it while it’s still hot, sir,” Kang Chan suggested.

“Alright. You have a mug too, Manager Kim,” Go Gun-Woo said.

“Yes, sir.”

The three sipped their hot instant coffee.

“I didn’t expect you to immediately issue an anti-terrorism emergency decree at the Blue House, Director,” Kang Chan said afterward.

“I trusted the look in your eyes. I also believed in the capabilities that you’ve shown us time and time again.”

As the three thought about different matters, a brief silence fell upon the lounge.

“Director,” Kang Chan called. “I made a promise to the agents and the attendants that were killed today.”

Go Gun-Woo turned to him with a heavy expression.

“Today, we begin waging war against the enemy who dared target the President,” Kang Chan declared.

Go Gun-Woo looked up from the mug in his hands. “Assistant Director.”

“Sir.”

“I know it’ll be strenuous and difficult, but I ask that you take command of this war. In your hands, I’m sure South Korea will emerge victorious.”

Judging by the look in his eyes, Go Gun-Woo seemed to have perked up again.

“If the God of Blackfield himself leads our men to battle, this war is as good as ours,” Go Gun-Woo added.

Kang Chan never imagined this man to say something so embarrassing. Nevertheless, Go Gun-Woo remained stoic before Kim Hyung-Jung, who was looking back at him.

Chapter 375: The Beginning of the War (2)

Once Kang Chan had returned to the office, he called Lanok and explained the situation to him.

- Have the South Korean government request an investigation from the UN. In the meantime, I'll call Sherman and get his cooperation.

“Thank you, Mr. Ambassador.”

- Our enemies are acting bolder than expected.

“I agree. I didn't expect them to act like this. As soon as the UN finishes its investigation, we plan on sending peacekeeping forces to Malawi to show our enemies our resolve.”

- I never thought the day would come when France would have to share Africa with South Korea.

“I haven't thought of it that way. If this causes trouble for you, then I'll stop South Korea from sending their soldiers to Malawi.”

Kang Chan didn't want to put Lanok in a predicament, so he immediately told him his intentions.

- You don't have to do that. However, you should begin to consider how to balance things when you're deciding your next move. While we trust and follow you, if it seems like South Korea is getting everything it wants, then the intelligence agents and representatives of other countries will be put in a difficult position.

“Yes, sir.”

- Alright. I'll contact you again after talking with Sherman.

After hanging up, Kang Chan looked outside the window.

Since France was very powerful and already controlled many countries, he thought that it wouldn't be a problem for South Korea to take control of Malawi.

*I do understand why Lanok said that, though. South Korea is basically just taking the credit for France's work.*

France definitely wouldn't be happy that he was suddenly sending South Korean soldiers to one of their territories.

Kang Chan stared at the cars that filled the roads below him.

*What's going to happen now? What am I missing?*

The uneasy feeling that took up a part of his thoughts still hadn't gone away.

Kang Chan suddenly thought of Seok Kang-Ho, causing him to smirk. That man definitely wouldn't be attacked so easily.

\*\*\*

“You should head home now.”

Despite saying that he should go, Um Ji-Hwan's old mother couldn't let go of Seok Kang-Ho's hand.

“You wrote the correct address, right?”

“Yes, I did, but you better not get injured over something silly or useless. If you do, I’m never going to see you again,” Seok Kang-Ho said.

“Don’t say that. I’m just going to send you my harvest once I go down to Jangseong,” she said. Soon after, she suddenly burst into tears.

“No, don’t cry. Ji-Hwan won’t be able to rest in peace if you keep holding onto him.”

Seok Kang-Ho wiped her tears away with his rough hands.

“Thank you. I will never forget you staying with my Ji-Hwan until the very end so that he wouldn’t be lonely. I’ll keep that act of kindness in my mind for the rest of my life.”

“You’re saying nonsense,” Seok Kang-Ho responded.

Now that it was time for her to go, he walked the old woman to the bus.

Once in front of it, he held out an envelope to her. “Here. Get whatever you want to eat on your way home. Use it to support your expenses and buy everything you’ll need in Jangseong, too.”

Startled, Um Ji-Hwan’s mother waved her hand in refusal. “No! I can’t accept this!”

“Take it. Didn’t you agree to be my mother? Unless you take this, you don’t truly consider me your son.”

The old woman had barely calmed down when she burst into tears again. Sniffling, she accepted the envelope. She then raised her dress and placed the envelope into a pocket near her thigh.

“I wish you good health, sir,” the mother said.

“Don’t overdo it, okay?”

“Okay.”

“Now, get on the bus.”

Overwhelmed by how scary Seok Kang-Ho looked, the bus driver gauged Seok Kang-Ho’s mood.

“Then I’ll get going,” Um Ji-Hwan’s old mother said.

Seok Kang-Ho hugged her. “Please cheer up. I’ll visit you there once I’m done with work.”

“Don’t worry about me. You should head back now.”

The old mother stepped away from Seok Kang-Ho and then headed toward the entrance of the bus. However, before she could board it, she turned around again.

*Does she have something to say?*

Seok Kang-Ho looked at her as if to ask, “What’s wrong?”

The old mother respectfully bowed.

“I won’t forget about what you’ve done for me.”

Her words and actions conveyed everything that she wanted to tell Seok Kang-Ho but couldn't.

Holding onto the railing, the old woman struggled up the bus, taking one step at a time. She then walked down its aisle.

She was so small that Seok Kang-Ho could only see half of her face through the windows.

*Chkk.*

Soon, the bus closed its doors and drove away from the boarding area.

\*\*\*

Vasili got out of the car, looking extremely uncomfortable.

He always felt displeased whenever he had to go to the President's palace, especially after what happened with Shevchenko last time.

Holding onto the rear passenger's door, he sharply glared at the palace's entrance.

No agents or attendants had come out to greet him yet. Since he had come at Alexei's request, his staff should have been informed that he was coming. At the very least, they would have known that he had arrived.

Why hadn't any of the security guards and attendants from the KGB under his command come over to greet him?

'Is this a trap?'

Vasili's heart sank.

*Whoosh!*

He quickly went back inside the car.

*Pew! Pow! Pew! Pow!*

However, at the same time, gunshots rang out. Blood splattered roughly from Vasili's back.

*Screech!*

He couldn't even close the back door. Nevertheless, the car quickly drove off.

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

The bulletproof glass and doors were riddled with bullets.

*Screech! Screech! Screech!*

As Vasili collapsed on the back seat, his navy blue suit drenched in blood, a black van drove into view from the back of the President's palace and followed Vasili's car. Unable to hold himself up, he was helplessly tossed around as the car sharply and roughly swerved and turned through the roads.

*Vroom! Rattle! Screech!*

Soon, the car left the premises of the President's palace and closed in on an intersection. Nevertheless, the driver just kept driving straight ahead.

*Screech! Beep! Beep beep!*

As they crossed the intersection as if they were crossing a sidewalk, another car that had also been crossing the intersection roughly changed directions to avoid crashing into Vasili's car. Right after, it slammed into a building and the van that had been following Vasili.

*Crunch! Crack!*

\*\*\*

Yang Bum sat at a circular table in the octagonal pavilion of a closed airport. He had met Kang Chan here some time ago.

Soon, he lit up a cigarette.

*Chk chk.*

“Hoo.”

Behind him stood more than ten agents from China's intelligence bureau, guarding him.

“I can't believe so many people are more interested in their personal gain than the growth and development of the People's Republic of China,” Yang Bum muttered to himself. He then sharply looked at the agents that were lined up behind him. “Tell me right now if any of you need to kill me.”

Agents with square chins, sharp eyes, and stocky builds looked back at Yang Bum. They kept quiet.

These agents were considered veterans even among the White Wolves. Yang Bum had basically taught and led them himself, so they wouldn't think about betraying him. However, humans could be quite unpredictable.

“What weapons do we have?” Yang Bum asked.

“Machine guns, pistols, and live ammo,” one of the agents answered.

“We'll head to South Korea's base in Mongolia.”

“We'll accompany you there.”

After exhaling cigarette smoke, Yang Bum crushed the cigarette into the ashtray. “I understand that the Star of David acting for their personal interests—they're our enemies, after all. Still, we have to do whatever it takes to eliminate those who sympathized with them and sold our nation out.”

It was unclear who Yang Bum was speaking to.

As he stepped down from the octagonal pavilion, he saw a car kicking up dust in the distance.

The agent who had been standing right behind Yang Bum turned to the two agents at the very left of their formation. “Stop that vehicle!”

“Wait. How will those two escape?” Yang Bum asked.

“We don't have time for this, sir! We need to get you out of here!”

“You’re sending them to their deaths!”

“Get revenge for them later.”

Three agents rushed toward Yang Bum and dragged him away as if they were kidnapping him.

“They’re going to die!” Yang Bum shouted.

The two agents looked back at Yang Bum. While being taken away, he desperately yelled for them. Honored by how important they seemed to him, the two agents held up their machine guns.

*Click! Click!*

The cloud of dust was getting closer.

“Let go! I said let go! They shouldn’t have to sacrifice themselves like—!” Yang Bum’s shout was cut off by the sound of a car door closing.

*Vroom! Vroom! Vroom!*

Behind the octagonal pavilion, they heard a car driving off.

“We met a wonderful superior, didn’t we?” one of the agents who stayed behind asked the other agent.

“He’s the reason I won’t have any regrets even if I die.”

The cloud of dust continued to approach until it was right in front of them. The car then came into view.

“Baekrang!”

*Click!*

Yelling the name of their special forces like a chant, one of the agents held up his gun.

“For our people!”

*Click.*

The agent beside him yelled their chant and held up his machine gun as well.

*Pow pow pow pow pow pow ! Pow pow pow pow! Pow pow pow pow pow!*

*Screech! Screech!*

Without any hesitation, the two agents shot the car in front of them as it changed directions.

\*\*\*

*Ding.*

The elevator in the basement parking lot opened, and Vant got out of it with the agents, They walked toward the car that was waiting for him.

The agents examined their surroundings as Vant got in the backseat. The agent holding the backdoor then closed it and nodded. At the same time, a car that had been parked facing the left side of Vant’s vehicle rushed toward them.

*Vroom! Screech!*

It was too close for them to avoid it. Hence, by the time they had noticed the car, it was already too late. It sped up and slammed into the driver's seat.

*Crash!*

Right after the collision, the car exploded.

*BOOM!*

Fragments of the car dropped around the area. Soon, another explosion occurred, causing even more fragments to shoot out and drop all over the place.

\*\*\*

Jeong Won-Min and the 606 knew Kang Chan very well.

Hence, when Kang Chan called him and told him to be on high alert, Jeong Won-Min immediately tightened the security of the embassy. Moreover, when they heard about the attempt to assassinate the President, they bolstered their defenses even further.

*Click.*

Just before the night fell, the doors opened, and more than ten French agents rushed outside.

*Clank. Clunk.*

Jeong Won-Min guarded the front of a car with another soldier.

They didn't speak the same language, but they easily understood what they were trying to do.

The 606's training included executive protection. Hence, they knew how to act without disturbing the French agents.

The 606 wore a black beret, dark sunglasses, and the black uniform for the 606's counter-terrorism team, which had the taegukgi on their left arm. They were armed with an MP5 sub-machine gun slung over their back, pistols, bayonets, and magazines.

One agent nodded briefly at Jeong Won-Min, acknowledging the 606's service. He was silently thanking them for the reassurance they felt from being guarded by heavily armed soldiers.

While Jeong Won-Min was fiercely staring ahead, Lanok went outside the embassy with Anne.

The worst they could do was be distracted at times like this. While the French agents, who were in full uniform, surrounded Lanok and Anne as if to cover them from sight, someone had to examine the areas that their enemies could shoot them from.

As Jeong Won-Min instinctively scanned the buildings nearby, gunshots suddenly rang out.

*Pew! Pow!*

An agent's nape exploded.

“Bouge![1]”

Yelling, the French agents pounced on Lanok and Anne.

“You three! Secure that building!” Jeong Won-Min yelled as he fired back.

*Pew! Pew! Pew!*

More French agents fell to the floor as the enemies continued shooting at them from the rooftop of a five-story building. Right now, only their muzzles were visible.

*Pew! Pew! Pew! Pew! Pow pow! Pew! Pow!*

The soldiers and agents returned fire as their enemies shot them with seemingly no regard for their lives.

*Pew! Pow pow! Pew! Pow! Pew! Pow!*

Lanok and Anne had fallen to the ground as well. They couldn't move, much less get back inside the embassy.

Bullets seemed to have pierced through an agent and hit them. At this rate, they would end up dying.

“Protect the VIPs!” Jeong Won-Min yelled.

*Whoosh!*

Jeong Won-Min then rushed toward Lanok and grabbed him by his upper body. Jeong Won-Min had positioned himself in a way that his bulletproof vest was blocking their enemies' view of Lanok.

Lanok was unconscious, and his shoulder and chest were soaked in blood.

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

‘Ugh!’

Jeong Won-Min was shot in the leg and the back of his bulletproof vest.

His leg hurt like crazy. Nevertheless, he still kept Lanok's head and upper body hidden by his bulletproof vest as he dragged him to the door.

Another soldier held and dragged Anne toward the door in the same way.

*Pew! Pow! Pew! Pow!*

He felt horrible pain that felt as if he was being stabbed with a skewer at his back again.

“Argh!”

Yelling, Jeong Won-Min pushed Lanok inside. In response, the attendants inside the embassy dragged him in. Afterward, the soldier who had been dragging Anne handed her over to those inside the embassy. She was also soaked in blood and unconscious.

It was unclear if it was because they could no longer see their targets or the soldiers that Jeong Won-Min had sent over to their position had subdued them, but the enemies soon stopped shooting.

*Thud.*

Jeong Won-Min sat next to the door of the embassy, his back against the wall. Looking out the yard, he found more than ten French agents on the floor, unmoving.



He then looked down, finding two holes in his thigh, which was soaked with blood.

“Cough.”

Jeong Won-Min was out of breath. For some strange reason, he felt like the air wasn't going into his lungs.

“Captain!” one soldier yelled.

*Cough! Cough!*

A soldier ran toward him and put pressure on Jeong Won-Min's neck. “An ambulance is on its way! Just stay with me!”

“Hey—cough!”

“Don't talk! Just hold on, okay?” the soldier then turned to his colleague. “Hey! Where's the fucking ambulance!”

“We're... cough! kegh!”

Blood spurted out of Jeong Won-Min's mouth.

“I said don't talk!”

“The 606 is... ugh...”

“I know! Stay with me! You still have to train us and make us suffer!” the soldier yelled desperately.

*Weeeooo! Weeeooo! Weeeooo! Weeeooo!*

Finally, they heard the sirens of an ambulance.

“The 606 is South... Korea's... bastion...”

With his vision already blurry, the only thing Jeong Won-Min could make out was the taegukgi on the arm of the soldier who was putting pressure on his neck.

*I don't think I was very close with him, but...*

Strangely, even though he should be missing his wife and kids, Jeong Won-Min missed Kang Chan instead.

‘South Korea will get stronger, right?’

Jeong Won-Min really wanted to hear the answer to that question.

\*\*\*

When Kang Chan arrived at the hospital, he found Kang Myung-Gu of the counter-terrorism team guarding the hallway with other agents.

“This way, sir.”

Kang Myung-Gu led Kang Chan down the hallway. The rifle slung around his shoulders clunked as they walked.

*Rattle.*

They soon stopped in front of a room. Yoo Hun-Woo exited it soon after, his expression grave.

“Mr. Kang Chan,” Yoo Hun-Woo greeted.

“How are they doing?”

Yoo Hun-Woo glanced at the room, then answered, “They’re both in a coma, but the female patient is in a more serious condition.”

“Director,” Kang Chan called but didn’t say anything else. The look in his eyes should be enough for Yoo Hun-Woo to know what he wanted.

“Alright. Please come this way.”

He led Kang Chan to the treatment room on the fifth floor.

“Lie down here,” Yoo Hun-Woo said afterward.

Without complaints, Kang Chan rolled up his sleeve and sat on the bed.

Instead of insisting that Kang Chan should lie down, Yoo Hun-Woo just silently inserted a needle into Kang Chan’s arm. He then gently shook the bag that was being filled with Kang Chan’s blood.

After three minutes, he pressed a cotton ball against Kang Chan’s skin and pulled out the needle. He then hurriedly left the treatment room, which only evidenced how critical Lanok and Anne’s conditions were.

Kang Chan rolled down his sleeve and headed to the room that Yoo Hun-Woo entered.

Chapter 376: We Are Not a Nation That Bows (1)

Lines from the complex machinery were connected to Anne. The nozzle, bubbling with air, was linked to Anne's breathing mask. She was clearly in bad condition.

"We have removed the bullets, but both patients might need further surgery."

Although Anne already had an IV and blood transfusion going, Yoo Hun-Woo still connected the additional blood that he had gotten from Kang Chan.

While hooking up the blood transfusion, Yoo Hun-WOO turned to Kang Chan. "Is there any way we could get help from Dr. Kim Ji-Hoon of the Hannam Hospital? Given the conditions of this lady and the patient in the next room, our hospital's staff alone can't handle it."

*Dr. Kim Ji-Hoon?*

Seeing Kang Chan’s puzzled look, Yoo Hun-Woo added, "In the field of surgery, he's one of the best in the world. Abroad, they even call him 'Great Kim,' a play on 'great surgeon.' Right now, we desperately need his help."

"I'll request his assistance and get back to you."

"His surgery schedule is extremely tight, so I’m not sure if he can make time. I have no doubt that he’ll be a tremendous help, though. If he can come, it will give us a lot more hope. "

Kang Chan nodded.

Yoo Hun-Woo then took the remaining blood pack and headed to Lanok's room, which was just right next door.

Upon entering, Kang Chan was greeted by a similar scene to Anne's. Lanok was lying on the bed, his high nose and thin face just as pale as his daughter's.

Long ago, Lanok's wife was shot to death. Now, it seemed as though he was about to lose his daughter for the same reason.

Yoo Hun-Woo connecting the blood pack made Kang Chan a bit relieved.

Standing beside Lanok, Kang Chan began to talk to Lanok in French.

"Mr. Ambassador. I've given you and Anne my blood."

Yoo Heon-Woo and the nurse turned to Kang Chan, unable to understand what he was saying.

"I believe you'll wake up. I'll be waiting."

Kang Chan carefully held Lanok's hand, which had an IV line connected to it. It was cold.

"Just as you said, the enemy has started moving, but don't worry. I'll fight this war my own way. I'll be back."

Kang Chan let go of Lanok's hand and left the room.

*Clang. Clang.*

The weapons and equipment attached to Kang Myung-Gu and his team made a reassuring noise with each step they took.

Kang Chan pulled out his phone and called Kim Hyung-Jung.

- Kim Hyung-Jung speaking.

"This is Kang Chan. Two patients admitted to the Bangji Hospital need surgery, and they require the assistance of Dr. Kim Ji-Hoon of the Hannam Hospital."

- He's the President's surgical doctor. I'll contact him immediately.

Despite his heavy workload, Kim Hyung-Jung still sounded sharp and resolute.

"I'm heading to the hospital where Sharlan and Abibu are," Kang Chan said.

- I'll notify them accordingly.

"I'd like to speak with the director as well. Can you send me his number?"

- Understood.

Kang Chan hung up and walked toward the elevator. Kang Myung-Gu and another agent accompanied him.

*Clang. Clang.*

"Take care."

"Don't worry, sir. "

*Ding.*

Kang Chan took the elevator down. It was already dark, so there were no outpatients around.

*Ding.*

On the first floor, Choi Jong-Il, Woo Hee-Seung, Lee Doo-Hee, and armed soldiers filled the hospital, making it feel like they were in the middle of a battlefield.

"We're heading to the Police Hospital."

"Yes, sir."

The security had been tightened so much that Kang Chan's sedan was now surrounded by six vans. As the car started, Kang Chan called Seok Kang-Ho.

- It's me.

"Come to the Police Hospital with Gérard," Kang Chan said.

- Got it.

Kang Chan hung up and looked out the window, realizing once again that he should not underestimate his enemy. Even so, he was not afraid.

*Why are they doing this? Everything is fine, but...*

If they really wanted the next-generation power facility, they should have appealed to Lanok and negotiated with him. If they couldn't stand seeing Korea grow more powerful, they should have tried harder themselves. Targeting the President of Korea, assassinating the President of a powerless African country, and shooting Lanok and Anne—their methods were simply unacceptable.

*Korea no longer bows down when hit.*

How many times did the Jeungpyeong special forces team, the 606, and the counter-terrorism team have to prove that Korea had become stronger?

Every time the car stopped at a signal, the vans completely surrounded Kang Chan's sedan. The large vehicles had their windows painted black, giving off a very strong and intimidating presence. Pedestrians and drivers nearby glanced at them with wide eyes.

Just as they were about to reach the hospital, Kang Chan's phone rang.

*Buzz. Buzz. Buzz.*

It was Gérard.

"It's me."

- Vasili was shot by a sniper as he arrived at the presidential palace to meet President Alexei. His location and condition are currently unknown.

Kang Chan exhaled slowly.

- And...

"Go on."

- Yang Bum is reportedly fleeing to the Mongolian base. Contact has been lost, so his location and condition are also unknown.

"Anything else?"

- Vant, the Director of the Swiss intelligence bureau, died in a car explosion in an underground parking lot.

Oddly, the more Kang Chan heard, the calmer he felt.

"Where are you now?"

- We're almost at the hospital. The satellite soldiers had to urgently relay this information to me first.

"Got it. I'll see you at the hospital entrance."

- Yes, sir.

Kang Chan put the phone in his pocket and scratched his eyebrow. The Directors of the Russian and Chinese intelligence bureaus guarding the Mongolian base had been taken out. Naturally, this meant their next target would be the Mongolian base.

Kang Chan's phone vibrated shortly, signaling a new message. Two vans entered the hospital entrance as two more blocked the surrounding area. The remaining pair covered the rear of the sedan.

*Whoosh! Whoosh!*

Soldiers in black suits and sunglasses quickly spread out to secure Kang Chan's path to the hospital entrance. Choi Jong-Il, who had been in the back seat with Kang Chan, and Woo Hee-Seung, who had been in the front seat, stuck closely to Kang Chan.

Despite the cumbersome and troublesome situation, there was no room for complaints. With security tighter likely due to the assassination attempt on the President, the entrance was guarded by well-armed soldiers from the 35th Brigade.

Fortunately, there were no outpatients around due to the late hour.

As Kang Chan walked to the empty waiting room, Seok Kang-Ho, Gérard, and the interpreter entered through the main entrance.

"Let's sit for a moment before heading up."

"Yes, sir."

Kang Chan took out his phone, finding a message from Kim Hyung-Jung. He dialed the number it contained.

- Hello?

"Mr. Director, this is Kang Chan. Is now a good time to talk?"

- I have about fifteen minutes.

Kang Chan first relayed Gérard's report to Go Gun-Woo.

"The satellite agents will report separately to the NIS, so Manager Kim Hyung-Jung should also be aware of this by now."

- I see.

Go Gun-Woo sounded calm.

"I intend to fight this war my way, Director. To start with, I need the authority to eliminate Sharlan and Abibu."

A stunned silence filled the line.

"Ambassador Lanok provoked the enemy, leading to this reaction. Even so, we still don't fully understand the enemy's identity. Although we'll be wording the announcement differently, the enemy will surely know that I eliminated Sharlan and Abibu."

- Are you trying to become a direct target?

"Yes."

- Even if you don't do this, you are already a target. No matter how hard we consider this a war, eliminating captives is...

Go Gun-Woo let out a deep sigh.

"This is no different from eliminating Alman bin Jibril, whom we assume to be the enemy's leader, sir."

- I understand your anger over all the attacks, but—

"Sixteen soldiers and staff lost their lives to the assassination attempt on the President. Jeong Won-Min, the commander of the 606's Special Operations Unit, was killed during the attack on the embassy," Kang Chan interjected.

After a brief pause, he added, "Killing those two announces that we will be launching merciless attacks on the enemy. It might seem unethical, but it will be the clearest warning we can give them. Think of us as the DGSE but under the NIS, sir, not just a counter-terrorism team."

Gérard, Seok Kang-Ho, Choi Jong-Il, Woo Hee-Seung, and the interpreter listened to Kang Chan's conversation closely. Once the interpreter had relayed it in French, Gérard nodded.

- Are you asking me to turn a blind eye to this?

"If that were the case, I wouldn't have reported it in the first place."

Kang Chan heard another heavy sigh from the other end of the line.

"I'm not asking you to take responsibility either. I'm merely stating that if we are to fight an invisible war, we must do so appropriately."

- You'll still proceed with this even if I don't approve of it, won't you?

"No, I won't," Kang Chan responded without hesitation. "When I referred to us as the National DGSE, I also meant that I would seek the NIS' approval first before taking action."

- Hmm.

Silence followed the deep groan.

Given his lack of experience with the brutal battles in Africa and the operations that Kang Chan and his men had conducted so far, it was only natural for Go Gun-Woo to have trouble approving Kang Chan's request. Even so, it wasn't a matter he could handle alone or take responsibility for by himself.

Finally, he broke the silence.

- Assistant Director, your work is the work of the National Intelligence Service. From now on, I will consider our counter-terrorism team as the National DGSE.

Go Gun-Woo spoke with unprecedented firmness.

- As the Director of the NIS, I give you permission to proceed with this operation. Use any means necessary to win this war.

"Thank you, sir."

Something stirred within Kang Chan. Gazing down the dark hallway, he hung up the phone.

*Bastards. You messed with people who have a lot of responsibilities yet are ready to sacrifice themselves for their country. You should never have touched South Korea.*

"Let's head up."

Kang Chan walked toward the elevator and boarded it. Seok Kang-Ho, Gérard, the interpreter, Choi Jong-Il, and Woo Hee-Seung all followed him in silence, causing the atmosphere to grow heavy and sharp.

*Ding.*

The elevator opened its doors on the sixth floor. As expected, the elevator was guarded by agents in uniforms and soldiers from the 35th Brigade.

"Where's Sharlan?"

"This way, sir."

*Clang. Clang.*

The soldiers led Kang Chan and his team to a room on the right side of the corridor.

*Creak.*

When the door opened, they saw Sharlan lying on the bed like a skeleton. IVs, machines, and a respirator were connected to him. He looked almost as if he were already dead.

"Sharlan," Kang Chan called as he stood beside the man. "I only wanted one thing."

The interpreter quickly relayed Kang Chan's words. Behind Kang Chan were Choi Jong-Il and Woo Hee-Seung; opposite them stood Seok Kang-Ho, the interpreter, and Gérard.

"It's fine to be greedy, but you should never take away someone else's most precious wish or only hope."

Staring at Sharlan as if he could hear him, Kang Chan added, "When you go to hell, be sure to relay my words in every language you know. Interpret my words. Tell them it's about to get a bit more crowded."

At that moment, Seok Kang-Ho glanced at Kang Chan.

"Tell them that it's because the God of Blackfield has started a war."

*Crack!*

In an instant, Sharlan's head was twisted almost a full circle to fully around to face Kang Chan.

When the machines started beeping loudly, Seok Kang-Ho yanked out the machine's cords, allowing silence to envelop the room again.

The interpreter was stunned. After a long, long fight, one of their battles had finally ended.

"Gérard."

"Oui."

"Only the victors will survive this war. We will use any means necessary to win."

"Understood."

The interpreter stammered as he relayed Kang Chan's words in Korean.

Kang Chan then turned to Seok Kang-Ho. Seok Kang-Ho's eyes gleamed, and his lips curved into a sinister smile, terrifying the interpreter.

Afterward, Kang Chan looked at Choi Jong-Il and Woo Hee-Seung. They looked like they wanted to say something but couldn't find the right words. Their eyes, however, showed they understood.

"If you want out, say it now."

"Absolutely not, sir."

Kang Chan and his team left the room. Two doctors and a nurse hurried toward them.

"Call Manager Kim and have him handle this."

"Yes, sir."

Choi Jong-Il blocked the entrance to the room.

"We'll take care of it."

The doctors and nurse, sensing the tense atmosphere, quietly turned back.

"Where's Abibu?"

"He's inside."

*Clang. Clang.*

As they approached, the soldier guarding the room opened the door. Abibu and his attendant were sitting in chairs in front of the bed. Startled, the attendant stood up quickly, but Abibu remained still, his head tilted up as if frozen. Kang Chan stood directly in front of him.

"Abibu."

Abibu swallowed dryly but still showed a hint of concealed arrogance. Right now, he had neatly tied hair, a beard, and curly sideburns that connected to his jaw.



Kang Chan slowly looked over at the attendant and noticed the remote control in his hand.

He then turned to the TV mounted to the wall in front of Abibu. It seemed they had just watched the news about the death of the President of Malawi, the assassination attempt on Moon Jae-Hyun, and Lanok's injury.

"Ambassador Lanok and his daughter were shot," Kang Chan began as he watched Abibu's eyes shake. "Vasili was also shot, Yang Bum is on the run, and Vant was killed on site."

Abibu quickly glanced at his attendant. It was unclear whether he was interpreting Kang Chan's words, finding the situation advantageous, or both.

"Here's the thing."

Abibu returned his gaze to Kang Chan, swallowing dryly again.

"Our war has officially begun. The first thing I did was snap the neck of the man who tried to kill me. He was staying right next door."

*In this situation? Did he really?*

Doubt filled Abibu's trembling eyes.

"You know Alman bin Jibril, don't you?"

While trying to maintain a facade of calmness, Abibu offered him a reply.

"He said he does," Seok Kang-Ho quickly interpreted, slightly startling Abibu and his attendant.

"I have a request," Kang Chan said.

After a glance at Seok Kang-Ho, the attendant relayed Kang Chan's words back into Arabic.

'I knew it! He came here to beg me for something!' Abibu thought. A smile crept onto his face.

At that moment, Kang Chan reached out and grabbed both sides of Abibu's head.

"I'm going to kill Alman bin Jibril, but before I do, I need to send whoever ordered this attack a proper warning—one that will surely insult them."

Unable to fully grasp Kang Chan's intentions, Abibu's expression filled with shock and confusion. The moment he raised his bewildered gaze and met Kang Chan's fiercely gleaming eyes, he suddenly began to tremble.

This was a typical reaction. No matter how tough they pretended to be or how much they possessed, when faced with unimaginable fear, people normally lost all their will to resist, causing them to simply await their fate.

Those same people became incredibly cruel when they trampled on others. After all, it made them feel as though they could kill anyone they didn't like at any time without feeling any guilt.

With that in mind, Kang Chan hardened his resolve.

"Go to hell and wait for Jibril. When he arrives, tell him that messing with the God of Blackfield was a grave mistake. Make sure to apologize to the soldiers who lost their lives because of you as well."

*Gulp.*

*Why is this bastard swallowing so loudly?*

As if he had swallowed his saliva so quickly that it got caught in his throat, Abibu started hiccuping. Nevertheless, he tried to speak out of desperation.

"He said he'll tell you how to capture Jibril. If you spare his life, he will give you all his wealth and reveal the location of the next-generation power facility being built in Saudi Arabia..."

Seok Kang-Ho tilted his head, glaring at Abibu. Due to his fear and Kang Chan holding his head, Abibu's Arabic pronunciation began to sound terrible even to someone who didn't understand the language.

"He just swore loyalty to you, Captain."

"Malbon dalki!" Abibu pleaded.

"He begs you to accept it."

In the face of death, some remained steadfast, while others threw away their pride. Even in the Foreign Legion, terrified recruits often pulled the trigger on themselves just before a melee began. Fear did things to people, and Abibu was no exception.

Kang Chan nodded.

*This is why you should behave properly when you have wealth, power, and a high position.*

*Before the war, I might have felt some sympathy for you. If you had shown remorse when I entered the room, maybe—just maybe—the outcome of this meeting would have been different.*

"Next time, try being more generous."

The attendant quickly interpreted Kang Chan's words, nervously watching him.

"You can't even use all that stuff anyway, so why be so greedy for other people's belongings?"

*Snap! Crack!*

Abibu's neck was twisted grotesquely.

*Thud!*

As Kang Chan released his grip, Abibu slumped lifelessly to the floor. Simultaneously, the attendant let out a wail.

*You bastards kill others so easily. Whether they have much or little, death is the same for everyone. You might regret the unused wealth, but those who never got to live a proper life will be filled with bitterness.*

"Aaaaah!"

*Thwack!*

The moment the attendant lunged at Kang Chan, Gérard landed a solid kick to the man's solar plexus.

"Ugh! Gah!"

While the attendant writhed in pain, Kang Chan turned and left the room.

Chapter 377: We Are Not a Nation That Bows (2)

"Choi Jong-Il, call Manager Kim and have him handle this, then join us at the office," Kang Chan ordered.

"Yes, sir," Choi Jong-Il, who would usually never leave Kang Chan's side, answered without hesitation. He knew that eliminating Sharlan and Abibu was a response to the enemy's provocation and an equally important task.

"Gérard, head back to the office first. Squeeze Alman bin Jibril's location and details out of the agents analyzing the intel from the satellite."

"Oui!" Gérard quickly responded. He then exited through the main entrance with the interpreter and agents assigned to him.

"Daye, you and I will stop by the hotel before heading over."

"Got it."

Kang Chan hopped into a car. Seok Kang-Ho followed him, taking the seat that Choi Jong-Il had usually occupied in the back. They then headed to the hotel where Kang Chul-Gyu was staying.

Just as the car was about to leave the hospital, Kang Chan's phone rang.

*Buzz. Buzz. Buzz.*

"Hello?"

- Monsieur Kang, this is Ludwig.

Ludwig, usually kind and relaxed, sounded as stiff as a piece of wood.

- I heard the news. I was lucky to survive because the car they blew up was the one my son was in.

Expressing the death of his son so positively—Westerners really were different.

- What can I do to help?

"I just eliminated Abibu, Ludwig."

A deep sigh immediately followed.

"I would like to have Romain transferred from the US to Korea. If possible, I'd also like to get Josh."

- What do you plan to do with them?

"I plan to eliminate them."

- That would mean war.

"Our strategy to drag out the enemy's core members has worked. Now, we have to fight this war until only one of us remains."

- Understood, Monsieur Kang.

The call ended abruptly. Ludwig had tried to sound composed, but he was clearly furious. His uncharacteristically stiff tone and the abrupt end to the call made that obvious.

Right after the call dropped, Kang Chan's phone rang again.

- This is Kim Hyung-Jung. The President will make an announcement in twenty minutes.

Things were progressing rapidly on all fronts.

- The director is in a meeting, so I don't have all the details. We plan to announce that Abibu and Sharlan attacked our agents, forcing them to kill the two.

"Copy."

- I'll call you again if anything comes up.

As soon as Kang Chan hung up, the phone rang once more.

"Hello?"

- Sherman, Monsieur Kang.

*Why did this bastard call?*

Kang Chan looked out the window. "It's been a while."

- I just got a call from Ludwig. We can transfer Romain and Josh to Korea, initiate a UN investigation into the Malawi President's assassination, deploy UN peacekeeping forces to Malawi, and fully support the Korean President's upcoming announcement.

Someone offering so much would always want something in return.

"Tell me what you want," Kang Chan said.

Sherman remained silent for a moment.

- The construction of next-generation energy facilities in the US, the officialization of the US-Korea alliance, and the acknowledgment of the US influence in the Asian region. That's about it.

"Sherman, aside from the next-generation energy facilities, your other demands aren't within my power to decide," Kang Chan said.

Seok Kang-Ho glanced at Kang Chan and then looked out the window, seemingly uninterested in the French conversation.

- Monsieur Kang, if we win this war, you'll have all the power to fulfill those demands. All we ask from you is that you promise on your honor to keep your end of the bargain. If you lose, we'll take responsibility for the failed investment.

Kang Chan thought about the proposal for a moment.

Sherman, currently in a bind for playing both sides, was clearly trying to take advantage of this opportunity. He was undoubtedly keeping another option open on the other side, so fully trusting him right now would be foolish.

Kang Chan smirked.

*I need to hold onto as many allies as possible right now, though.*

"Alright, Sherman. I'll do my best to meet those conditions."

- Excellent choice. We will start by informing the Korean Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the NIS of our support.

The call dropped. The fact that everyone, even these guys, was too busy to exchange proper farewells showed just how hectic things had become.

The car drove through the brightly lit streets and reached the hotel. As if there were not enough agents with Kang Chan, he was now being escorted by six SUVs in total. Their black suits, fierce expressions, and sturdy builds were bound to draw attention.

"Move the SUVs to the underground parking lot. We need to stay on the alert for prying eyes," Kang Chan ordered.

"Let one SUV stay with us, sir."

Kang Chan agreed, concluding that arguing about this would be too much.

"Let's smoke before we go up," he suggested afterward.

"Sounds good," Seok Kang-Ho replied.

They got out in front of the smoking area by the entrance. As Lee Doo-Hee drove to the parking lot, Kang Chan, Seok Kang-Ho, and Woo Hee-Seung lit their cigarettes.

"Hoo."

Kang Chan felt a bit relieved now that he finally got to smoke.

Kang Chan pointed to the SUV blocking their path. "Why aren't the agents in that SUV coming out?"

They had to be feeling cramped in there. Wouldn't it be better for them to join Kang Chan and his group and just pretend to be on close protection duty?

Woo Hee-Seung looked at the vehicle. "Heavily armed counter-terrorism team members are aboard that car. Determined not to fail at their job again, Captain Kang Myung-Gu requested to be deployed, and Manager Kim approved."

Kang Chan could only nod in response.

"Contact the agents in the hotel and have them check on Director Kang's room."

"Yes, sir."

Woo Hee-Seung issued instructions through the radio attached to his sleeve.

"You didn't notify him?" Seok Kang-Ho asked.

"Where else would that old man go? He's probably tidying up his room. Besides, it's not a good time to wander around aimlessly."

Just as Kang Chan finished his cigarette, the radio buzzed.

*Chk.*

"He's in room 1109, sir."

"Got it. I'll be heading up. Have some tea with the agents here until I get back."

"I'll come with you, Cap. I know you can handle yourself, but it won't hurt to be cautious," Seok Kang-Ho suggested.

Kang Chan nodded. They then walked into the hotel and took the elevator to the 11th floor, where agents were already stationed in the hallway. After exchanging glances with them, Kang Chan headed to room 1109.

*Ding-dong.*

"Who is it?"

*Click.*

As always, Kang Chan wondered why Kang Chul-Gyu asked when he would open the door without checking anyway.

"I've got something to discuss," he answered.

Kang Chul-Gyu stepped aside.

Seok Kang-Ho and Woo Hee-Seung bowed to him. "We'll be downstairs. Let's save our conversation for later."

The two then turned to the elevator.

The room was tidy, as expected. Apart from a chair facing the TV beside a round table, it looked unused.

Kang Chan and Kang Chul-Gyu sat at the table.

"Have you watched the news?" asked Kang Chan.

Kang Chul-Gyu nodded. With sharp eyes, he said, "Based on the information we've received, two key supporters from Russia and China were attacked. The director of the Russian intelligence bureau is missing, and the director of the Chinese intelligence bureau is heading to Mongolia."

"That's right. Unfortunately, that means the outer defenses protecting our base in Mongolia have vanished. Taking that into consideration, it's safe to assume they'll target that base, don't you think?" Kang Chan asked.

"They're targeting the heads of the Russian and Chinese intelligence bureaus, huh? Seems like we're up against a formidable enemy this time."

Kang Chan nodded. "I'm planning to eliminate their leaders with the team here. Until I'm done, our base in Mongolia has to hold out. I'll send additional troops from Jeungpyeong soon, possibly even tomorrow."

His eyes conveyed how dangerous the situation was.

"Should we move your parents elsewhere?" Kang Chul-Gyu asked.

"I was considering bringing them back to Korea."

Meeting Kang Chan's gaze, Kang Chul-Gyu replied, "In that case, there's no need to send additional troops. Focus on guarding our key figures and preventing terrorist attacks here instead. The enemy

might be targeting the base in Mongolia to scatter our special forces, so we shouldn't spread ourselves thin."

*That makes sense.*

"Assistant Director," Kang Chul-Gyu called. "Dong-Sik went to meet his daughter in Sinwol-dong with Il-Gyu yesterday, but they haven't returned yet. Unfortunately, we don't carry phones or know the address. Can you check on them? Her name is Yang So-Mi."

Thinking that wasn't a problem for him, Kang Chan immediately called Kim Hyung-Jung to ask for the details.

"Do you think they've had an accident?"

Watching Kang Chul-Gyu sigh quietly, Kang Chan pressed his lips together. If Yang Dong-Sik had impulsively harmed his son-in-law or given him a grand tour of Seoul, then they'd be in huge trouble.

Soon, Kang Chan received a text from Kim Hyung-Jung.

"I have the address. What should we do?"

"Mind if I go?"

"I'll come with you."

The two left the room.

If there had been a fight, Kang Chan intended to resolve it somehow. Once in the lobby, he called Choi Jong-Il and Woo Hee-Seung.

"We need to stop by the Sohee's Noodles in Sinwol-dong."

"I'll have a car prepared," Woo Hee-Seung replied.

Kang Chan nodded. Right after, Woo Hee-Seung issued an instruction through his sleeve radio.

"The car's waiting up front, sir."

Kang Chan, Kang Chul-Gyu, Seok Kang-Ho, and Woo Hee-Seung got into the SUV driven by Lee Doo-Hee.

"Why are we going to Sinwol-dong?" Seok Kang-Ho asked.

"Yang Dong-Sik's daughter runs a restaurant there. He went to meet her yesterday, but he hasn't been in touch since," Kang Chan explained.

An awkward silence then filled the van. Fortunately, spending a day at the pension house had lessened Kang Chul-Gyu's unease.

"We haven't even had dinner yet," Seok Kang-Ho said.

"We'll eat after we see what's happening in Sinwol-dong," Kang Chan replied.

Seok Kang-Ho was probably really hungry.

Soon, Woo Hee-Seung turned around. "The President is making the announcement. Would you like to watch it?"

"This car has a TV?"

"No, but you can watch it on this."

Woo Hee-Seung handed a tablet to Kang Chan. It showed a conference room with an extremely heavy atmosphere.

"What about the volume?"

"You can adjust it with this button."

Woo Hee-Seung pressed a button, and a circle icon appeared under the speaker symbol, indicating the volume.

As the screen showed a swarm of reporters and broadcasting cameras, a newscaster said, [Following the sudden death of the Malawian President and the attack on the French Embassy, a large number of domestic and international journalists have gathered.]

Right after, the sound of shutters clicking filled the air.

*Click-Click. Click-Click.*

[President Moon Jae-Hyun is now entering the conference room. We will broadcast his statement and then continue with our report.]

As Moon Jae-Hyun stood at the podium, a barrage of camera flashes went off. He placed his speech on the podium and looked up.

[Dear citizens, members of the press, both domestic and international.]

*Click-Click. Click-Click.*

[It is with my deepest regret to announce that during our meeting, Malawian President Muritaka was poisoned by a cyanide capsule hidden in his cigarette.]

*Click-Click. Click-Click.*

[President Muritaka, five of his aides, and sixteen of our aides and security personnel perished in this incident.]

Moon Jae-Hyun paused briefly. The heavy silence, punctuated by the sound of camera flashes, flowed through the screen.

[We mourn the loss of President Muritaka, his aides, and our own personnel and security officers,] he said.

Gritting his teeth, Moon Jae-Hyun refocused on the screen.

[Furthermore, earlier today, the French Embassy was attacked. Our 606 Special Operations Unit managed to neutralize the two assailants, but not before several French security personnel were killed in action along with one of the 606 members. We extend our condolences for their sacrifices.]

*Click.Click-Click. Click.*

The camera flashes now seemed to burst cautiously.



[I come bearing one last piece of regrettable news. Abibu, the Saudi prince responsible for the International Building terrorist attack, and Sharlan, the mastermind behind the Nonhyeon-dong terrorist attack, put our agents in danger, forcing our men to take them out.]

*Click-Click. Click-Click.*

A murmur of surprise and astonishment arose among the reporters.

[In light of all this, the South Korean government has requested that the UN conduct a fair investigation into President Muritaka's death. Naturally, we will offer full cooperation.]

Moon Jae-Hyun, who had been looking down at his speech, raised his head again.

"After this investigation, we will deploy our military to Malawi along with UN peacekeeping forces to find and punish those responsible for assassinating the Malawian President within our country."

The murmur among the reporters grew louder, nearly drowning out the sound of the camera shutters.

"From this day forth, South Korea will no longer compromise with any terrorist forces threatening our sovereignty, territory, and citizens, no matter who they are!"

With a stern expression and steely gaze, Moon Jae-Hyun added, "We will stop at nothing to punish and retaliate against anyone who does."

*Click-Click. Click-Click.*

Moon Jae-Hyun's determination made the reporters look completely overwhelmed.

"That is all."

*Click-Click. Click-Click.*

The reporters eagerly raised their hands to ask questions, but Moon Jae-Hyun immediately left the press room. As the newscaster began to talk again, Kang Chan handed the tablet back to Woo Hee-Seung.

Amid the silence that fell in the car, Seok Kang-Ho softly asked, "Maybe not us, but don't you think ordinary people will be scared by all this?"

Kang Chan just nodded and turned his gaze to the window. Assassinations, shootings, and the series of events that unfolded right after the International Building terrorist attack would naturally make the general public feel anxious and fearful.

*Are Vasili and Yang Bum safe?*

*In this world, while bright lights are already enough to make some people anxious, others are putting their lives on the line at this very moment. I wonder how many think about or are even aware of the ones who risk their lives.*

"We're here," Woo Hee-Seung said, bringing Kang Chan back to reality.

They had arrived at an ordinary restaurant halfway down a side street. The old sign hanging above the entrance read "Sohee's Noodles."

\*\*\*

After making the announcement, Moon Jae-Hyun returned to his office. The Chief of Staff, Head of Security, and Director of the National Intelligence Service accompanied him.

"It's ironic, but moments like this make me crave a cigarette more," Moon Jae-Hyun said as he sat at his desk.

A staff member quickly walked over to him.

"Mr. President, the President of the United States wishes to speak with you."

"Now?" the Chief of Staff asked.

"He's on the line."

Moon Jae-Hyun turned his head.

"Take the call. They've expressed their intention to support us. Maintaining a friendly relationship with the US is crucial right now," Go Gun-Woo said.

Following his advice, Moon Jae-Hyun reached for the phone.

*Click.*

"Hello? This is Moon Jae-Hyun, President of the Republic of Korea."

- Mr. President.

The simultaneous interpreter's voice overlapped in the background.

- I express my deep condolences and regrets for what Korea and its President have experienced.

The interpreter conveyed the message in a flat tone.

- The United States fully supports Korea's position on this incident and will cooperate to the best of its abilities as a blood ally.

The unexpectedly strong response left President Moon Jae-Hyun feeling somewhat bewildered.

- As soon as this call ends, I will announce the United States' and my position regarding Korea. I hope the strong alliance between the United States and Korea continues.

"I feel the same way," responded President Moon Jae-Hyun.

- May God bless the Republic of Korea.

"Thank you."

When the call ended, Moon Jae-Hyun placed the receiver down and looked at Go Gun-Woo with a puzzled expression.

"What is it, sir?" asked Go Gun-Woo.

"Why is the US President taking such a proactive stance?"

Go Gun-Woo, who hadn't heard the call, found the question difficult to understand. Fortunately, the call had been recorded.

Moon Jae-Hyun was searching the records section on his computer when a staff member entered the office even more quickly than before.

*What is it this time?*

“Mr. President, the Presidents of France and Germany wish to speak with you. The Prime Minister of Malawi has also held an emergency press conference, expressing his regrets about the incident. He stated that he trusts the Korean government's announcement and has requested our military's deployment to track down the culprits.”

*What is going on?*

The US was showing strong support, the Presidents of France and Germany were waiting for him to call, and Malawi had requested South Korea to deploy its military.

*Has South Korea's status risen this much?*

Moon Jae-Hyun felt an odd lump in his throat.

“Mr. President, the Presidents of France and Germany are waiting.”

“Then let's speak with the French President first.”

The staff member pressed the button for Line 1. The conversation would begin as soon as he picked up the receiver.

At that moment, Moon Jae-Hyun thought of Kang Chan.

‘Assistant Director.’

This fight started with the Eurasian Rail. Without Kang Chan and his efforts, they wouldn't have managed to come this far. He faced France, Russia, China, the United Kingdom, and the United States alone. He then returned victorious from the brutal battles in Afghanistan, Africa, and Libya.

*Click.*

Moon Jae-Hyun picked up the receiver, firmly resolving not to miss the opportunity that Kang Chan had created.

Chapter 378: A Sad Goodbye (1)

Kang Chan got out of the car with Kang Chul-Gyu and Seok Kang-Ho. He then looked inside Sohee's Noodles, a Chinese restaurant, through the glass door.

Even though it should've smelled like food and they should've been busy fulfilling deliveries at this hour, only a small light—that was barely enough to light up the hallway—was turned on.

They didn't know what Yang Dong-Sik did to his son-in-law. For all they knew, he could have already given his son-in-law “a tour around Seoul” and left his head hanging somewhere in the dark hallway. Taking that into consideration, they had to figure out what happened.

“Yoo Hee-Seung, have our men stand by. Keep a low profile,” Kang Chan ordered.

“Yes, sir,” Yoo Hee-Seung answered, then gestured at the SUV.

Kang Chan pushed the entrance door open.

*Screech.*

Fortunately, the door wasn't locked. Upon entering, Kang Chan saw six neatly arranged tables. Each one had four chairs under it.

Nam Il-Gyu stood up from his seat at the table furthest away from the entrance. With a frustrated, sorry, and upset expression, he bowed to Kang Chan and Kang Chul-Gyu.

“What happened?” Kang Chul-Gyu asked, glancing further down the hallway.

There was a kitchen in front of the entrance and a door that likely led to a room to the left.

*Rattle.*

Likely having heard Kang Chul-Gyu, Yang Dong-Sik quickly came outside. When he saw Nam Il-Gyu, Yang Dong-Sik's expression darkened as quickly as an egg would fall to cover an omurice.

Nevertheless, he didn't forget to bow to Kang Chul-Gyu and Kang Chan.

Kang Chul-Gyu didn't ask why they looked upset; his sharp stare at Yang Dong-Sik already made it clear enough that he wanted answers.

“I'm sorry, sir. I was already thinking of leaving in a little bit,” Yang Dong-Sik said.

Kang Chan, Kang Chul-Gyu, and even Seok Kang-Ho gave Yang Dong-Sik a puzzled look. He sounded completely different from usual.

“Dong-Sik,” Kang Chul-Gyu called in a much softer tone. At the very least, he clearly understood the emotions that Yang Dong-Sik's voice carried.

“Sir.”

“Is something wrong?”

“That's...” Yang Dong-Sik trailed off, still unable to bring himself to explain.

Kang Chul-Gyu waited for a moment. When Yang Dong-Sik remained silent, he turned to Nam Il-Gyu.

Nam Il-Gyu could never disobey Kang Chul-Gyu when he was looking at him like that.

“Dong-Sik's daughter has end-stage stomach cancer. At most, she only has a month to live. Her husband ran off with everything, including her insurance money, leaving her to die here alone.”

Yang Dong-Sik hung his head as Nam Il-Gyu explained the situation with difficulty. As if time itself had stopped, everyone in the hallway froze—even Kang Chul-Gyu.

Not long after, Kang Chul-Gyu walked over to Yang Dong-Sik.

“Dong-Sik,” Kang Chul-Gyu called gently, his voice seemingly embracing his subordinate. “I'm sorry.”

“You don't have to be, sir...” Yang Dong-Sik barely managed to answer.

He tried his best to contain his emotions, but he still burst into tears. It was as if the sorrow that he had been suppressing exploded the moment he saw Kang Chul-Gyu.

Yang Dong-Sik was in his mid-forties. He was an outspoken fool who acted without hesitation—like an older Seok Kang-Ho. Still, all he could do in the face of his daughter’s impending death was cry his heart out.

Upon learning what had happened, Seok Kang-Ho looked outside the restaurant, sniffing.

In combat, these remarkable soldiers were second to none. However, outside the battlefield, they were completely different. Yang Dong-Sik, who had come out unscathed from even the most dangerous operations, was so powerless that all he could do now was cry, and Nam Il-Gyu, who could easily infiltrate enemy bases, could only stand beside him and watch. Even Kang Chul-Gyu, their commander, felt so helpless that he was looking at Kang Chan for help.

*Why can't they confidently ask for help? Considering they've put their lives on the line for the nation, Yang Dong-Sik should be yelling at the government, demanding they save his daughter! Instead, all Kang Chul-Gyu can do is look at me for help like a dispirited and powerless father. Was this how South Korea treated its soldiers in the past?*

These soldiers were not only appointed members of the NIS’ counter-terrorism team. They had also fought desperate battles in Libya and Afghanistan.

Yet even Kang Chan couldn’t look after them properly.

“Let’s take her to the hospital,” Kang Chan said.

Yang Dong-Sik looked up in response, his eyes filled with desperate hope. He seemed to be pleading for Kang Chan to save his daughter.

Kang Chan immediately took out his phone and called Yoo Hun-Woo.

- Hello?

“It’s Kang Chan.”

- Ah! Mr. Kang Chan, we were able to set up an appointment with Dr. Kim Ji-Hoon. The surgery is going to take place tomorrow.

Once Yoo Hun-Woo was done speaking, Kang Chan said, “Director, I have a woman here with end-stage stomach cancer. She hasn’t been able to get proper treatment for it, so I want her to receive the best treatment.”

Although Yoo Hun-Woo could just recommend a different hospital, Kang Chan trusted that Yoo Hun-Woo would understand and accept his request.

- How old is the patient?

“She’s in her thirties.”

Kang Chan glanced at Yang Dong-Sik, who nodded in affirmation.

- Please send me her address. I’ll send an ambulance.

“I’ll text it to you right away.”

- Alright.

After hanging up, Kang Chan forwarded Kim Hyung-Jung's message earlier to Yoo Hun-Woo.

"An ambulance is on its way. Let's entrust her to the Director of the Bang Ji Hospital," he then said.

"Thank you, Assistant Director," Yang Dong-Sik answered, his eyes still teary.

Nam Il-Gyu pulled out a chair from the table at the front and offered it to Kang Chan.

"Please have a seat, sir."

"Dong-Sik, get ready to take your daughter to the hospital," Kang Chul-Gyu instructed. "You don't have your phone with you, so we decided to come here to have dinner and let you know that we've decided to delay our departure by three days. Who knew it'd turn out like this."

Yang Dong-Sik wiped his nose with his sleeve and looked at Kang Chul-Gyu.

"Go. Be quick," Kang Chul-Gyu added with a nod.

"Yes, sir."

Knowing he had to tend to pressing matters first, Yang Dong-Sik went inside the room.

\*\*\*

Ziegfeld, who was wearing a luxurious blue shirt with a floral pattern and gray shorts, laughed out loud.

"I can't believe we only managed to kill Vant even after all that planning. Even you aren't as good as you used to be, huh?" he asked.

"I apologize, sir," Xairo replied.

Ziegfeld nodded, then drank his strong Indonesian coffee. The ground coffee had sunk to the bottom of the cup.

*Click.*

"Is that carpenter ant, that Kang Chan, actually competent? Or did you just not do your job properly?" he asked afterward.

"We made an unexpected mistake when we tried to kill Lanok and Vasili. Moreover, Kang Chan most likely interfered in our attempt to assassinate Moon Jae-Hyun."

"Hmm."

Ziegfeld looked at the blue sea in the distance, finding surfers riding the white crests of the waves. Further back, people on yachts were enjoying their free time.

“What about Mongolia?” Ziegfeld asked again.

“We have already finished all preparations.”

“What about the reinforcements that South Korea will send soon?”

“We’re planning to shoot down the helicopter they’ll be riding from the airport in Mongolia to their base.”

Ziegfeld tilted his head in contemplation as he examined Xairo’s strong chin, yellow sclerae, and thin lips.

“How will you get to their base and the factory they’re building?” Ziegfeld asked afterward.

“Through Russia.”

“We paid Ivan a lot of money for that missile. Make sure you don’t make mistakes this time.”

“We’ll take care of them all as soon as Yang Bum and Vasili arrive in Mongolia.”

“Alright. I’ll leave that to you,” Ziegfeld said, then looked at the sea again almost as if it was out of habit. “The problem is Moon Jae-Hyun. Now that we’ve missed our golden opportunity, how do we draw out an ant hiding deep in a hole?”

He looked like he was solving a difficult quiz.

“Since the United States and Japan are catering to South Korea to win their favor, we can’t use the forces trying to divide South Korea right now. The economy is also stable, which means the wrong people will suffer if the United States raises its interest rate...”

Ziegfeld smiled. After a moment of silence, he added, “Kang Chans cold-hearted enough to kill Abibu. Considering those keeping an eye on us are now suspicious, does this mean they’ve found dirt on us? That carpenter ant even sent us a warning.”

As Ziegfeld muttered to himself, Xairo stood firmly before him, enduring Indonesia’s intense heat.

“A Japanese prime minister once said that South Koreans scatter like grains of rice because their staple food is rice. He also said that South Koreans should never be allowed to unite and that they should be belittled and manipulated to be at each other’s throats.”

Xairo remained still as he listened.

“Moreover, he mentioned that if a talented person ever appears in Korea, the others have to be manipulated into killing that individual with their own hands. It does seem like he’s right. Hmm. If so, then we should take care of that carpenter ant first, shouldn’t we?”

Ziegfeld took his time pondering the issue at hand. Neither he nor Xairo moved.

“Hm, I promised to capture that carpenter ant alive, though... What should I tell Parthal?”

Ziegfeld frowned as if coming up with an excuse to give Parthal was a bigger problem than finding a way to kill Kang Chan.

“Using Gabriel won’t give us problems, right?” he asked.

“That’s correct, sir.”

“I’ll have to give this issue with that carpenter ant a bit more thought. Anyway, be sure to reassure our allies and prevent Abibu’s death from shaking them. Don’t forget that we already used the old South Korean soldiers as an excuse for why our plan in Libya failed.”

“Copy, sir. I’ll bring back good results.”

When Ziegfeld nodded and looked away, Xairo turned around and left.

The scenery in the distance was still peaceful. The sky was clear, the sun was intense, and the sea was frighteningly blue. More waves rushed toward the shore, breaking into white foam.

“Moon Jae-Hyun and Kang Chan, huh?” Ziegfeld shook his head. “They work well together, but it’ll be more interesting to have them clawing each other’s throats out.”

As if coming to a realization, Ziegfeld’s eyebrows rose. Mischief filled his expression.

\*\*\*

Soon, an ambulance from the Bang Ji Hospital arrived at the restaurant. The medical team entered and transferred Yang So-Mi to the vehicle.

She used to be chubby, but now, she was nothing but skin and bones. The people who were holding her hand couldn’t help but feel bad for her.

The medics used a blanket to place her on the stretcher, which they then pushed into the ambulance.

“Dad,” Yang So-Mi weakly called.

Yang Dong-Sik pitifully walked over and stood next to her.

“I’ve already forgiven you. Please don’t waste your money on things like this.”

Yang Dong-Sik could only cry in response.

*Don't be a fool, you should at least tell her not to worry about money? I get that you can't be as rowdy right now as you were in Afghanistan, where you were running like a wolf amid a flock of sheep. Still, you should be boasting even if they're just empty words, shouldn't you?*

Kang Chan immediately walked over and stood across from Yang Dong-Sik. He then looked at Yang So-Mi.



“I’m Kang Chan, the Assistant Director of the National Intelligence Service. You don’t need to worry about hospital bills. We’ll pay all of the fees required for your treatment.”

What else would he use his savings on if not for occasions like this?

Yang So-Mi looked back at Kang Chan, the light fading from her eyes. She was forcibly suppressing her hope and wish to cling to her will to survive. For her and her father, it seemed like life meant that they shouldn’t give up.

“Don’t worry about anything and just focus on getting better,” Kang Chan said.

With parched, white lips that looked as if glue had been applied to them, Yang So-Mi called Kang Chan with difficulty.

“Assistant Director.”

“Yes?”

She smelled nauseating. However, to Kang Chan, her scent was a slap that made him realize how much he failed to look after his people.

“I’m going to die anyway, so please don’t let my dad drown in a mountain of debt because of me. I’m going to die anyway. I’ve really forgiven him for everything.”

“What are you saying? I-I’m fine! There’ll be enough to cover your hospital bills when I die in the next operation,” Yang Dong-Sik said in between sobs.

*Why do you have to keep acting like this?*

Kang Chan sighed softly. He had seen many soldiers wounded in battle. Even if they were already as good as dead, their survival remained their biggest wish.

It was childish and very embarrassing, but Kang Chan decided to make sure that Yang Dong-Sik—who had spent the majority of his life in service—and his daughter wouldn’t have to worry about hospital bills.

He wanted to give them hope even if it meant behaving immaturely.

Kang Chan turned to the medical team. “I need about three minutes with the patient, alone.”

The medical team stepped back, overpowered by the atmosphere.

“Woo Hee-Seung!” Kang Chan yelled.

“Sir!”

“Have everyone stand in front of the ambulance, including the counter-terrorism agents.”

“Yes, sir.”

The look in Kang Chan's eyes and the way he talked made Woo Hee-Seung hurriedly hold up his sleeve and radio in Kang Chan's orders.

*Whoosh. Clank. Clank. Clank.*

Right after, agents in suits rushed toward the ambulance. Counter-terrorism agents armed with rifles, pistols, and bayonets quickly gathered as well. They were wearing black helmets, bandanas, black uniforms with taegukgi on the left sleeve, and bulletproof vests.

*I'm sorry. I'm really sorry that I'm doing this when you all are already having a hard time guarding us. However, I hope you all know that I would do this and maybe even more for any of you if you were in Yang Dong-Sik's position. So, just this once, let me put a bit more burden on your shoulders for the sake of our old hero, who's been serving South Korea for so long that he hasn't even had the chance to look after his daughter properly.*

Kang Chan glanced at the medical team waiting inside the ambulance.

*Screech.*

They folded the upper part of the stretcher that Yang So-Mi was lying on, lifting her head upward. Not long after, she burst into tears.

*Why is she reacting like that?*

"These NIS counter-terrorism agents risk their lives to protect South Korea," Kang Chan began.

Yang Dong-Sik and his daughter cried in each other's arms.

"We respect your father. I know this is a long time coming, but from now on, we'll keep you safe. In front of all these men, I promise that I won't just take responsibility for your hospital bills but also every other expense until you're all better, so please focus on your recovery and give our agents hope."

"D-Dad!" Yang So-Mi cried out.

"Sniff... Sniff... Live. Please live," Yang Dong-Sik muttered.

Nam Il-Gyu, who was watching from the front of the ambulance, wiped his tears away with the palms of his hands.

"I'm so sorry, Dad... I-I didn't know you were doing that kind of work..."

She was crying so pitifully that Kang Chan had to turn his gaze to the medical team.

"Please go to the hospital with her," Kang Chan told Yang Dong-Sik.

"Thank you, Assistant Director."

As Yang Dong-Sik held back his tears and sniffled, Yang So-Mi reached out with her frail hand and held Kang Chan's.

*Only an idiot wouldn't understand the meaning behind her gaze.*

When Kang Chan looked up, Kang Chul-Gyu nodded.

“Your father won’t go on the next operation, so please don’t worry. He’ll stay with you at the hospital,” Kang Chan said.

Yang Dong-Sik quickly looked at him as if to ask, “What are you saying?”

If Seok Kang-Ho acted this way, Kang Chan would’ve smacked him in the head before sending him off.

“The situation at the base has changed, so our departure has been moved back by three days. For now, please just stay with your daughter,” Kang Chan explained.

Once Kang Chan got out of the ambulance, Yang Dong-Sik tried to get out of the ambulance with him.

“We’ll also be going to the hospital. We’ll see you there,” Kang Chul-Gyu said.

In response, Yang Dong-Sik sat back down inside the ambulance and bowed.

*Click. Vroom.*

When the ambulance left, Kang Chan turned around and faced the agents.

“I know I made it harder for you all to fulfill your duties, but we wouldn’t be here if these people didn’t serve our country.”

Woo Hee-Seung’s lips quivered.

“Return to your positions,” Kang Chan ordered.

As commanded, the agents quickly headed to their respective cars. Likely motivated by what had just transpired, they bowed to Kang Chul-Gyu and Nam Il-Gyu one by one despite not being told to.

“Please cheer up, sunbae-nim,” they said before walking past them.

As the agents got in their SUVs, the SUV assigned to Kang Chan drove toward him.

Since Nam Il-Gyu still had to lock up Sohee’s Noodles, they had a moment to spare.

Seok Kang-Ho walked over to Nam Il-Gyu. “Do you need help with anything?”

Meanwhile, left alone with Kang Chan, Kang Chul-Gyu said, “Assistant Director, can you tell my son that I’m very proud of him and that I’m thankful for what he’s done?”

Kang Chan stared at Kang Chul-Gyu.

*Why does he sometimes act like an old man out of nowhere?*

“I’m hungry,” Kang Chan grumbled.

“Let’s go get something to eat, then,” Kang Chul-Gyu answered.

Chapter 379: A Sad Goodbye (2)

The extremely long and busy day was ending.

After they had a light dinner, Kang Chul-Gyu and Nam Il-Gyu headed to the hospital. Meanwhile, Kang Chan and Seok Kang-Ho headed to the office.

When they arrived, they found Choi Jong-Il waiting for them. Choi Jong-Il quickly greeted Kang Chan.

“Great work today,” Kang Chan said.

“The manager helped us, so we didn’t really have to do too much.”

“Got any urgent matters for me? Otherwise, I’ll go and wash up.”

“Go ahead, sir.”

Kang Chan took off his jacket and headed to the bathroom.

*Swish.*

The cold water running down his skin refreshed his mind.

“Phew!”

Instead of immediately drying himself off, he looked into the mirror.

Kang Chan then thought about his duties, which included talking about the world as if he were simply turning a globe and discussing the possibility and dangers of World War III, fully aware that his decisions could dictate the dynamics of the world for the next five hundred years. At the end of the day, though, he was just like every other person out there. He, too, took a shower in the office and slept on a couch.

A powerful South Korea? Making a new world order?

*Damn it! How am I supposed to make that happen when I didn’t even know that Yang Dong-Sik’s daughter was dying from stomach cancer?*

Although he promised to protect the people he genuinely cared about, all he had done was act out and do whatever he pleased.

Drying his hair with a towel, Kang Chan thought of Kang Dae-Kyung and Yoo Hye-Sook, who were in Mongolia. He also thought of Kim Mi-Young, whom he hadn’t talked to today.

Kang Chan smirked. As always, instead of feeling frustrated and helpless, moments like this just made him determined to kill the people plotting behind his back.

When Kang Chan went out of the bathroom, Seok Kang-Ho placed a coffee on a table for him.

“Where’s Gérard?” Kang Chan asked.

“I haven’t seen him,” Seok Kang-Ho replied.

As Kang Chan sat down, Choi Jong-Il went into one of the rooms. A moment later, he returned with the army interpreter.

“Gérard came in and then left right after checking the satellites,” the interpreter reported.

“Where did he go?”

“I think he went to meet a person named Michelle.”

Kang Chan smirked.

At the same time, Seok Kang-Ho looked displeasingly at the innocent army interpreter. “That fucking idiot.”

“Why are you mad?” Kang Chan asked.

Seok Kang-Ho turned to him. “Should we not be? This isn’t the time for him to be meeting girls. More importantly, you ordered him to find Jibril, but he sneaked out to meet a girl instead. Does that make sense?”

Holding up his mug, he grumblingly added, “That son of a bitch! He’s still doing stupid shit like this even after seeing what happened to Smithen!”

Still smirking, Kang Chan brought up his mug to his lips.

While watching Seok Kang-Ho kick a fuss, Kang Chan wondered, ‘Maybe I should meet Kim Mi-Young in secret?’

He also believed that Gérard wasn’t that stupid.

Even if Seok Kang-Ho was right, and Gérard had truly fallen for Michelle, it didn’t really matter. Rather than looking like a lovesick fool, it wasn’t a bad idea for him to have a quick meeting with her. That would allow him to focus on work once he was back.

“You should also go home and visit your family,” Kang Chan suggested to Seok Kang-Ho.

“Hey! I told you who I respect.”

“It doesn’t fucking matter! You should check in on your family and stay a day at your house, you stupid motherfucker. Why do you even sleep here when nothing’s going on?”

“Right now, you need me by your side. Let’s not say otherwise.”

When Kang Chan turned to look outside the window, Seok Kang-Ho headed to the bathroom, still grumbling.

\*\*\*

Gérard huffed, his eyes bloodshot.

“Let’s stop here,” Michelle said.

“I’m fine. Let’s try again.” Ignoring Michelle’s worried expression, Gérard gritted his teeth. “I’ve almost got it, so I know this will work.”

“Why don’t we ask for help instead?”

“I said just do it!”

Gérard spitefully glared at Michelle. The look in his eyes was so intense that he looked as if he should be on a battlefield.

They were in a secluded place in Yangpyeong. Gérard and the chair he was sitting on was tied to a tree.

“The captain will never allow me to do this, so please! I don’t want to hurt him. If this works, then I might be able to identify the people targeting him!” Gérard exclaimed.

Although his eyes were filled with spite, he also looked quite desperate.

“I know you won’t understand this, Michelle, but if it weren’t for the captain, I would’ve either died already or become a crazy mercenary who enjoyed killing people.”

Michelle really couldn’t understand what he was saying.

*Is he mentally ill? Deranged? Maybe he has delusions of grandeur?*

Michelle knew that Kang Chan was very competent, and she had seen him accomplish unimaginable things. Still, she couldn’t understand when and where Kang Chan had met Gérard and formed such a solid relationship with him.

“Michelle...”

Looking into Gérard’s eyes, she realized that he had the same look as when he had been about to cry in Apgujeong-dong sometime ago. Hence, she made up her mind.

“This is the last time I’m doing this.”

“Alright,” Gérard answered through gritted teeth.

Michelle dragged the scooter in front of Gérard and then down the hill. She hadn’t realized it at first, but Gérard was calculating the distance between him and the scooter.

She stopped about twenty meters away from him. From this distance, the scooter’s engine would still be fairly loud to him.

Michelle started the scooter, making its engine growl.

*Vroom. Vrooomm.*

“I’m going!” she yelled.

Gérard relentlessly glared at the scooter. Everything started from the day he attacked the delivery driver on the scooter in Apgujeong-dong.

He initially thought he was just having nightmares. After all, his sister died when she was hit by a motorcycle. However, behind those nightmares were very faint memories, and he had started to remember them.

One of those memories vaguely reminded him of the place where he had spent the year in his life that he had no records or recollection of. That was why he devoted himself to the satellites and searched all over.

He couldn't even tell Kang Chan about that time in his life because he couldn't remember anything about that year. Still, the red jjampong broth that had spilled on the ground when the delivery guy had fallen continued to provoke him.

*If I try a little bit more, if I can just glimpse through this damn fog, then...!*

*Vroooooom!*

The scooter's engine let out a loud noise.

'Urrgh!'

He stiffened as he endured the scooter's engine sound. Watching the scooter rushing toward him was frightening and arduous.

However, this was just the beginning.

As if it had been waiting for the perfect timing, his head began to ache. It was like someone was forcibly prodding and rummaging through his mind.

'Gabriel.'

'Yes, sir.'

Gérard grabbed at the memory, begging himself to remember where that was and what he was doing.

'What color did I say it was?'

'Red, sir.'

'The person who killed your family will appear with that color.'

Gérard saw someone in his memory, looking at him. Although it was all a blur, he remembered their eye color frightening him.

'What should you do to that person?'

'Kill him, sir.'

Gérard's blood boiled upon remembering some stranger telling him to kill someone. Only the captain could order him to do something like that.

"Urgh!"

The scooter was now only five meters away.

His face crumpled from the pain, yet he remained focused on the red scooter.

*Captain! Help me endure this! You would've endured this!*

Gérard glared as horrible pain pierced through his brain.

*I just need to know the location or identify the person who issued that order!*

*Vrooommm.*

While glaring at the red paint of the scooter, Gérard smelled burnt gasoline and heard rough engines.

“Aaggghh!”

Soon, the scooter went past Gérard.

“Let go! Let go of me! I’ll kill him, so let me go!” he yelled.

‘Gabriel, you remember where Gérard Gee hid the nuclear warhead, don’t you?’

‘I don’t! I didn’t even know that something like that existed.’

‘You’re going to remember if we search through your memories a bit more. If you remember where Gérard hid the nuclear warhead, you’ll become our amazing weapon. If you can’t, then you’ll have to live as a fool for your entire life, so don’t defy us.’

Unable to endure the pain anymore, Gérard’s head dropped to the side.

The outskirts of Yangpyeong were already very dark.

\*\*\*

*Weeeooo. Weeeooo. Weeeooo. Weeeooo.*

With a police car escorting them, Kang Chan drove at a breakneck speed to get to Gérard.

When they reached the location that Michelle had sent to them, they found Gérard lying on the dirt floor.

“Channy...” Michelle trailed off.

Kang Chan immediately ran to Gérard. Blood was seeping out of his eyes, nose, and ears.

“Daye! Get this fucker on my back!” Kang Chan yelled.

“I’ll carry him!”

“Just do as I fucking say!”

Seok Kang-Ho and Choi Jong-Il rushed toward Kang Chan and lifted Gérard onto his back.

Kang Chan then ran back to the SUV.

*You son of a bitch! You stupid motherfucker! I don't know what's going on, but how dare you suffer like this on your own, you stupid fucking son of a bitch! Do I fucking mean nothing to you, huh?*

Kang Chan flew into a rage, making it difficult to hold back his anger.

A red scooter, a chair, and a rope.

Kang Chan wouldn’t have been this angry if they had caught Gérard while he was doing something risqué with Michelle instead.

Kang Chan breathed heavily. “Huff huff! Huff huff!”



*What were you thinking while you were coming up all the way here? Why did you endure something like this by yourself?*

Running down the hill, he looked as if he could barely stop himself from falling forward.

Just as their SUV came into view, agents rushed toward him.

*Whoosh! Swish!*

He had built up so much momentum that if they didn't stop him, he would slam into the vehicle.

*Bam. Crash.*

Nevertheless, even though three agents caught him, Kang Chan still crashed into the SUV.

Two of the agents took Gérard from Kang Chan and put him in the SUV.

Seok Kang-Ho and Choi Jong-Il arrived soon after.

“Huff huff! Huff huff! Get in the car! We’re leaving!” Kang Chan ordered. He then jumped in.

*Vroom!*

The engine roared awake.

“I’m going with you guys!”

Michelle was running toward them. She was covered in dirt, perhaps because she fell.

When Kang Chan nodded, Michelle got in the SUV as well.

*Slam.*

Once all doors were closed, they immediately drove off.

“What happened?!” Kang Chan asked.

Kang Chan’s expression surprised Michelle. Nevertheless, she still explained the situation.

“Gérard visited me not too long ago and asked me to have dinner with him. While we were eating, he suddenly said that he would buy a scooter. That same day, we tried this for the first time.”

Kang Chan couldn’t understand what they tried since she didn’t explain that part.

Michelle continued, “Remember when Gérard hit a delivery guy in Apgujeong-dong? Since then, Gérard had been saying that thinking of the color red and the sound of the scooter engine made him feel like he was on the verge of remembering something. However, it put him in a lot of pain.”

“Why was he tied up?”

“Gérard said seeing the color red made him want to kill me.”

Kang Chan gritted his teeth, then looked at Gérard. They had reclined the chair so that he could lie down.

Seok Kang-Ho was wiping away the blood smeared all over Gérard’s face.

“Gérard said that if it wasn’t for you, he would’ve either died already or become a crazy mercenary who killed people for fun. He also said that if he didn’t do this, then he might end up hurting you, and that if this worked, then he might be able to identify the enemy...”

Kang Chan never thought he would ever see blood seeping out of Gérard’s ears, eyes, and nose.

*Weeooo! Weeooo! Weeooo! Weeooo!*

The siren of the patrol car escorting them blared. At the same time, its driver repeatedly asked people to move out of the way through the speaker.

Kang Chan wanted to tell the agents to drive a little faster.

They decided not to drop by the hospital in Yangpyeong. Rather than wasting time in a small hospital, he believed it would be better to go to the Bang Ji Hospital as quickly as possible.

Seok Kang-Ho continued to wipe the blood from Gérard’s eyes, nose, and ears. However, more blood kept seeping out.

“Captain!” Seok Kang-Ho yelled urgently.

Gérard’s eyes had opened blearily. Kang Chan urgently rushed toward him.

“Captain...”

“Everything’s going to be fine. I’ll handle everything, so just rest. Don’t worry about anything,” Kang Chan said.

“Captain, it’s Luxembourg... in Garnich. I found a suspicious location in the satellite images...”

“Don’t talk!”

“A guy with yellow eyes is in charge of that place.”

Blood continued to seep out of Gérard’s bloodshot eyes.

Hearing Gérard’s voice suddenly becoming clear and watching blood seep out of his eyes like tears made Kang Chan fear death for the first time.

He wasn’t distressed or heartbroken—he was genuinely afraid.

“Captain! He started everything! The nuclear warhead! He knew me and my adoptive parents—”

“I got it, so stop talking!”

“That fucker is...!”

Gérard trailed off. His eyes widened enough to make Kang Chan even more afraid.

*Blood transfusion! I need to give Gérard my blood!*

Kang Chan held up his right hand and bit off the skin on his wrist. He gritted his teeth when he immediately felt a horrible pain.

He spat out his skin. At the same time, blood dripped out of his hand like a shower on a summer day.

“You son of a bitch! Don’t you dare die on me! Hold up this bastard’s head!” Kang Chan shouted.

Seok Kang-Ho placed Gérard’s upper body on his thighs.

With his left hand, Kang Chan pressed Gérard’s cheeks to part his lips. He then placed and clenched his right hand over his mouth, making his blood drip into Gérard’s mouth.

“Hey! Gérard!” Kang Chan yelled.

*Vroom!*

While Lee Doo-Hee drove like a madman, Kang Chan continued giving Gérard a blood transfusion.

Whenever the SUV shook, the blood aimed at Gérard’s mouth splattered all over his face instead, making him look like the main character of a horror movie.

“Lee Doo-Hee! Floor it! Please!” Kang Chan yelled.

*Vroom! Screech! Screech!*

Although it was frighteningly dangerous, they swerved in and out of the narrow gaps between vehicles.

\*\*\*

Yang Dong-Sik stood in front of Yoo Hun-Woo looking as if he couldn’t believe what he was hearing.

“It looks like she was severely assaulted. Unfortunately, she’s so weak now that it’s impossible for her to receive surgery,” Yoo Hun-Woo said.

Yang Dong-Sik couldn’t look at her chest and the area below her stomach because she was his daughter. That was why he couldn’t believe what Yoo Hun-Woo was saying.

Yoo Hun-Woo continued, “You should go inside and say your final goodbyes. If she loses consciousness, she won’t be able to wake up again.”

He was saying something more cruel than a dagger to the heart, yet he looked surprisingly calm.

“All of our medical personnel are on standby since Mr. Kang Chan asked me to take care of her. We’ll do our best, but there’s really nothing more we can do.”

Yang Dong-Sik gritted his teeth. At the same time, Kang Chul-Gyu reached out and held Yang Dong-Sik’s shoulder.

“Go see your daughter first. We can find that motherfucker later,” Kang Chul-Gyu said.

Yang Dong-Sik turned to Kang Chul-Gyu, whose eyes looked as if he was about to go into the DMZ.

The murderous look in Yang Dong-Sik's gaze slowly disappeared.

"I'm going in," he said.

After taking a deep breath, he turned toward the door of her daughter's room.

*Rattle.*

Yang So-Mi, who was lying in bed, turned her head with difficulty.

Two small yellow IV packs were attached to her, sending unknown medications into her body at different speeds.

"Dad," Yang So-Mi called out weakly.

Walking toward the bed, Yang Dong-Sik forced himself to smile. "How are you feeling?"

"They said I can't be treated anymore, didn't they?" she asked.

"What are you saying? They said you'll receive surgery as soon as you regain your strength."

Yang So-Mi looked much better than when she was at Sohee's Noodles. Yang Dong-Sik didn't know how the nurses washed her, but her face and even her hair were clean.

"When I was in pain, you were the first person I thought of," Yang So-Mi said.

Forcing a smile while crying made Yang Dong-Sik look stupid, but he couldn't care less.

"Don't cry."

"I don't cry."

"You're crying right now."

Yang Dong-Sik couldn't answer. Tears kept rolling down his face.

Yang So-Mi continued, "I forgive you for having me when you were in middle school."

"I'm sorry..."

"I also forgive you for not being there for me when I was going through a difficult time."

"Okay..."

"So I hope you forgive me for falling ill, and for having to leave you behind."

"No... I can't... I can't handle that..."

Yang Dong-Sik couldn't help but burst out crying. His lips parted and quivered as he sobbed.

"You look like an idiot..."

"I'm sorry, So-Mi."

“Don’t cry, Dad... It doesn’t suit you...”

“Sniff... Sniff... Urgh...”

“I said... don’t cry...”

Yang So-Mi wiped Yang Dong-Sik’s tears away with her hand, which had an IV needle attached to it.

“Dad, I’m sleepy...”

“So-Mi, I’m scared.”

“You said... you’re not... afraid... anythi...”

“So-Mi, please...”

Yang So-Mi placed her hand on the bed as she slowly closed her eyes.

“So-Mi! So-Mi! So-Mi!”

*Rattle!*

The door opened, and Yoo Hun-Woo and the medical team ran inside.

Kang Chul-Gyu and Nam Il-Gyu held onto Yang Dong-Sik. He struggled in their arms as they dragged him away.

Meanwhile, Yoo Hun-Woo was putting so much medication into the IV pack that it looked as if he was pouring the entire thing into the pack.

“So-Mi! So-Mi!”

Yang So-Mi’s head dropped toward Yang Dong-Sik, and tears fell from her eyes.

At that moment, the heart monitor let out a sharp, unending beep.

Chapter 380: Don’t You Think We’ve Been Too Gentle (1)

Gérard's face was streaked with blood, and Kang Chan's right hand was a mess. Even their clothes were soaked red.

*Screeeeech!*

Medical staff rushed out of the entrance as soon as they arrived at the Bang Ji Hospital. With skillful precision, they transferred Gérard onto a medical bed and quickly wheeled him inside.

"Michelle! He'll need an interpreter. Stay with him," Kang Chan instructed.

“Got it, Channy.”

Since it was already evening and they had already taken control, there were no people around.

Kang Chan thanked Lee Doo-Hee. He then got out of the SUV and headed to the emergency room where Gérard had been taken. Yoo Hun-Woo, who was attending to Gérard, quickly ordered various tests. He then immediately approached Kang Chan.

"Why do you always have to be so reckless?" Yoo Hun-Woo chided.

“Don’t worry about me, I’m fiine. Just keep an eye on that bastard please,” Kang Chan said.

"We have to wait for the test results."

“Director!”

"Do you think I'll lose two people in one night? Just trust me and wait."

*What is he talking about? Is he referring to Lanok or Anne?*

Kang Chan looked up in surprise.

"Yang So-Mi passed away a little while ago. The French gentleman and his daughter are in surgery," Yoo Hun-Woo informed him gravely.

He disinfected the wound, layered oil emulsion gauze over it, and wrapped it in bandages. Kang Chan had never seen him look so serious.

“Mr. Kang Chan,” he weakly called as he secured the bandage with tape. "I don't know what happened, but please don't do this again. There's a difference between wanting to save lives desperately and destroying your own body."

If it were any other doctor, Kang Chan might have reacted angrily.

"Dr. Kim Ji-Hoon has brought in the Great Surgeon team. You probably don't know this, but operations where Dr. Kim Ji-Hoon and Dr. Shin Hyun-Soo are performing surgery simulatenously have high success rates."

*What is he trying to say?*

“However, even those two can’t save everyone despite how skilled they are.”

Yoo Hun-Woo's eyes mirrored the look he had when he talked about his late brother.

“I’ll do my best, but let's not resort to such desperate measures.”

“Understood.”

Yoo Hun-Woo probably didn't know how much Gérard meant to Kang Chan. Still, since Kang Chan could sense his sincerity, he had chosen to answer with respect.

He was sure that it was a tough night for both him and Yoo Hun-Woo. However, For Yang Dong-Sik—who had just lost his daughter—and Kang Chul-Gyu and Nam Il-Gyu, who had witnessed it all unfold, this night could only be described as brutal. To make matters worse, the reports stated that Yang So-Mi had severe signs of abuse.

Kang Chan exited the emergency room and headed to the parking lot. He then sat on the two-step staircase leading up to the entrance.

On his way, he couldn't help but think that this place currently looked like a battlefield hospital. Armed soldiers and agents in suits were scattered both inside and outside the building, their numbers matching the hospital staff's.

“Give me a cigarette.”

Seok Kang-Ho silently handed him a cigarette and lit it for him.

*Click.*

“Hooo.”

The smoke, illuminated by the hospital sign’s white light, stylishly vanished into the darkness.

*Damn it!*

He felt as if all the men he had killed had gathered to curse him today.

“Would you like some coffee?” Choi Jong-Il asked. He likely wanted Kang Chan to calm down, just like Yoo Hun-Woo.

Kang Chan nodded. He then took a drag on his cigarette.

“Hooo.”

As he exhaled, Choi Jong-Il handed him a paper cup.

Afterward, Woo Hee-Seung offered him a set of clothes. “We had this prepared for you, sir.”

“I’ll change later. Leave it for now.”

Seok Kang-Ho sat down next to Kang Chan. He then stared at his cup of coffee, his gaze akin to that of a soldier ready for combat.

“Daye.”

“Cap.”

Choi Jong-Il and Woo Hee-Seung were looking at Kang Chan as well.

“Don’t you think we’ve been too gentle?”

“Seems like it. Haha.”

Seok Kang-Ho laughed with a cruel gleam in his eyes, clearly suppressing an imminent outburst of anger.

Kang Chan put out his cigarette in the paper cup and looked up.

“Call the interpreter and have them search enemy bases in Garnich, Luxembourg. Track Jibril’s location as well.”

“Yes, sir.”

Choi Jong-Il immediately took out his phone and got to work.

\*\*\*

Three trucks with 40-foot containers drove down Route 54 in Kyzyl, Russia. Five 2.5-ton cargo trucks with tarp-covered beds were at the front and rear of the convoy.

*Rumble! Clang. Clang!*

The cab of one of the container trucks turned into a gently curved road, and the large container attached to it awkwardly followed the bend.

*Thud. Thud.*

Vasili's eyes opened, and his face contorted in pain. The vibrations coursing through the container and his bed seemed to worsen his condition.

"Help me up," he murmured.

*Clink. Clink.*

Two men in suits, rifles slung over their shoulders, followed his command. One adjusted Vasili's pillow, and the other pulled a lever to raise the head of the bed.

Vasili had so many bandages wrapped around his upper body that he looked as if he was wearing a snug white shirt.

"Where are we?" he asked.

"We're on Route 54, heading from Kyzyl to Mongolia, sir."

Vasili seemed to be at his wits' end.

"How long has it been?" he asked.

"About fourteen hours, sir."

"Have you found that bug who was going around with Alexei?"

"Yes, sir. We have also discovered that Yuri Shevchenko orchestrated the attack."

A corner of Vasili's lips twitched. When the container's vibrations hit him again, his unamused expression was quickly replaced with a frown.

"Where is Shevchenko now?"

"He's transporting a missile."

"A missile? Where to?"

"Coincidentally, he's heading in the same direction as us. It seems their target is the South Korean base in Mongolia."

"What about Alexei?"

"He's keeping a low profile."

Vasili nodded.

"Damn it. They plan to kill me and then use the weapons they got from Ivan to blow up South Korea's base!"

The man responding to Vasili quickly gauged his reaction.

"Why did I have to wake up before Shevchenko could launch a missile at the South Korean base? Now I have no choice but to focus on playing a supporting role!"



Vasili turned to his subordinates. "Phone."

One of his men quickly handed him a satellite phone.

"Ambassador Lanok and his daughter were shot in front of South Korea's French Embassy and are currently undergoing surgery. Yang Bum is fleeing to Mongolia, and Vant has been killed in a car explosion. Ludwig was attacked as well, but he managed to survive because his son died in his place."

"Ludwig's son! That gluttonous idiot. Anyway, Lanok isn't in a much better state, huh?"

Dialing the number with one hand, Vasili gritted his teeth as if trying to suppress a sudden surge of anger. His upper left lip twitched like a spasm.

"Alexei dared target me? Fucking cockroach!"

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

"As much as I want to see the South Korean base in Mongolia explode, I can't stand seeing that bastard satisfied. I will stop him myself."

*Tap.*

Vasili pressed the call button with his thumb and brought the phone to his ear.

"What about Andrei?"

"We haven't seen any movements yet, sir."

The call was answered soon after.

"It's Vasili."

Mentioning his name made the other party reply quickly.

"Have the KGB in Moscow eliminate Alexei. Make it look like a heart attack. Once the announcement and funeral are over, prepare his eyes, tongue, and heart for my inspection."

After listening to the response, Vasili said, "Wait."

He then turned his gaze to the man in front of him.

"How many more men do we need to seize Shevchenko's missile?"

"We have over two hundred men already in position. We can have it done as soon as you give the order."

Vasili nodded, then brought the phone back to his ear.

"I'll take care of that myself. Focus on eliminating every family member, relative, friend, neighbor, and anyone who has been in contact with the shooters in the last three months."

After briefly listening again, Vasili continued, “Find and kill all of Shevchenko’s operatives and any Mafia members who helped move the weapon. Make sure our fallen KGB soldiers are rewarded as well.”

Vasili then ended the call without bothering to wait for a response.

“Send the troops in and have them bring me Shevchenko and the missile to the South Korean base in Mongolia.”

“Do you want Shevchenko alive?”

Vasili glared at the man.

“Understood,” the man swiftly answered and picked up a brick-sized radio.

As he relayed Vasili’s orders via radio, Vasili smacked his lips and glared at the phone.

“I can’t believe I narrowly escaped death just to end up defending a South Korean base! Fucking supporting role!”

Despite his anger, Vasili started dialing another number.

*Buzz. Buzz. Buzz.*

\*\*\*

Choi Jong-Il had just pressed the call button when Kang Chan's phone rang.

*Did he dial the wrong number?*

The perfect timing made Choi Jong-Il double-check the number he was calling. Upon learning that he didn’t make a mistake, Kang Chan answered the call.

“Hello?”

- It’s Vasili.

“What is it?”

Kang Chan heard Vasili let out a deep sigh.

- Shouldn’t you at least ask how I’m doing? The first thing I did after nearly dying was protect the Mongolian base, you know.

“Fine. How are you?”

- Should I just blow up the base?

Kang Chan chuckled. Despite their rough and harsh conversation, they both felt a sense of relief and camaraderie. Deep down, Kang Chan also felt somewhat reassured.

- Some insect named Shevchenko is transporting a missile he got from Ivan. I’ll bring him and the missile to the South Korean base in Mongolia.

“What do you need me to do?”

- Vodka.

“That’ll take a day or so. There’s soju there, so drink that until your Vodka arrives.”

- Soju? Ah! The one I had in Korea!

*Did this bastard really get shot?*

- How’s Lanok?

“He’s in surgery.”

- Even if I pray here for his death, I just know that man will survive this. Pass on my regards when he wakes up. Anyway, I’ll contact you once I arrive at the base. I’m bringing two hundred ex-KGB soldiers with me, so you can stop worrying about it.”

Kang Chan paused for a moment. With his signature smirk, he then said, “Spasibo[1].”

- That’s the most pleasant thing I’ve heard today.

The call ended right after.

“That was Vasili. He told me he’d be seizing a missile from some person named Shevchenko. He also told me to stop worrying about the base in Mongolia since he’d be bringing two hundred former KGB members over,” Kang Chan said.

Just as Kang Chan was about to light another cigarette, Kang Chul-Gyu, Nam Il-Gyu, and Yang Dong-Sik walked up to him.

“What time will we be leaving tomorrow?”

Yang So-Mi, whom Yang Dong-Sik had worried about so much, had passed away due to stomach cancer. To make matters worse, they had just found out that she had been abused. Hence, It was only natural that anger filled the eyes of the three men.

“Your flight to Mongolia has been indefinitely postponed. Russian forces are currently heading over to our base, so we’ll have to observe the situation for now.”

Kang Chul-Gyu looked at Kang Chan in disbelief. However, they didn’t even need to talk for him to know that Kang Chan wasn’t lying.

“I see. We’ll be going out for a bit, then,” said Kang Chul-Gyu said, looking directly into Kang Chan’s eyes.

“Do you need anything?”

Kang Chul-Gyu subtly shook his head.

Kang Chan turned to Yang Dong-Sik. “I have a request.”

“Let’s hear it,” Yang Dong-Sik replied hoarsely.

“Unfortunately, I need to stay here for some work. If you find the bastard who hurt and abandoned your daughter, please take care of him on my behalf.”

Yang Dong-Sik’s cheeks twitched, and tears welled up in his eyes.

Contrary, to his expectations, Kang Chan didn’t tell him to take the National Intelligence Service’s stance into consideration or let the law handle this matter.

Caught off guard, he could only stare at Kang Chan in utter silence.

“I’m sorry,” Kang Chan added.

“None of this is your fault, Assistant Director...”

Yang Dong-Sik bowed his head to Kang Chan, then followed Kang Chul-Gyu and Nam Il-Gyu.

“Do you think he knows where his son-in-law is?”

“Doesn’t seem like it. The son-in-law’s a gambler, though, so he’ll probably go to someone who can help him first,” Seok Kang-Ho replied with a shrug.

*Did he think of that on his own?*

Though Kang Chan doubted it, there was no need to confirm it. Just as he was about to head back in to check on Gérard, his phone vibrated again.

*Buzz. Buzz. Buzz.*

He quickly checked the caller ID. The number seemed to be a satellite phone’s.

“Hello?”

- It’s Yang Bum.

Kang Chan turned and looked at the dark sky between the buildings. Somewhere in that darkness, the sun was preparing to rise and bring a new day.

“Are you safe?”

- Thanks to the Black Wolf Unit, we are. Anyway, we’re heading to the South Korean base in Mongolia. I’m bringing about one hundred fifty people with us.

Three hundred fifty Russian and Chinese troops would soon fill the South Korean base. To top it all off, the Russians would be bringing a missile with them.

Kang Chan let out a cynical laugh.

“I just got off the phone with Vasili. He’s heading to the base with two hundred ex-KGB members.”

- We can start planning a counterattack once we’ve reached the base, then. How is the director?

“He’s still in surgery. We’re still waiting for the results.”

- Please send him my regards. I’ll contact you as soon as we arrive.

Yang Bum also seemed to believe that Lanok wouldn't die. After relaying the conversation to Seok Kang-Ho, Kang Chan headed to the emergency room.

"The director is on the first floor," a nurse explained.

Upon reaching the first floor, the first thing they noticed was Gérard lying on a portable hospital bed.

"Channy," Michelle greeted called, worry evident in her expression.

Gérard was still unconscious, but his face had been cleaned, which Kang Chan found somewhat comforting. He also had IV packs and supplementary packs attached to his arm.

"Fortunately, the test results don't indicate any immediate danger. For now, we'll just have to monitor him," Yoo Hun-Woo said. He then glanced at Kang Chan's bandaged hand. "Will this patient be admitted?"

"Yes."

Following his instructions, the staff transferred Gérard to a private room.

When Michelle hesitated, Kang Chan said, "It's okay. Go and keep an eye on him."

Michelle nodded. She then followed the nurses wheeling Gérard away.

"Let's head to the operating room," Yoo Hun-Woo said, guiding Kang Chan to the elevator. Seok Kang-Ho, Choi Jong-II, and Woo Hee-Seung accompanied them to the third floor.

They all sat in chairs in front of the door that had a lit sign that said "Surgery In Progress."

Soon, Kang Chan's phone rang again. He pulled it out and answered the call.

"Hello?"

- It's Sherman.

Sherman spoke in French. His voice was as deep as always.

- We'll land at the Osan Air Base at five in the morning, Korean time. Ethan, Josh, and Romain are with me.

"I'll meet you there."

The call suddenly ended.

*I should hold a meeting about phone etiquette for all these bastards.*

"Choi Jong-II, we need to be at the Osan Air Base by 5 AM."

"Yes, sir."

Choi Jong-II walked to the end of the hallway and radioed in instructions.

Yoo Hun-Woo worriedly glanced at Kang Chan before turning his gaze to the operating room. The information that Gérard had risked his life to find, the troops gathering in Mongolia, and two of their enemies' tails arriving at dawn all seemed like pieces of a puzzle falling into place.

It was as if they were getting one step closer to the enemy's core. Now, all they had to do was wait in this dimly lit corridor until the surgery was done.

*Drnnng.*

Just then, the automatic doors of the operating room opened, and two doctors in blue surgical gowns and caps stepped out.