

## **Blackfield 381**

Chapter 381: Don't You Think We've Been Too Gentle (2)

Kang Chan, Yoo Hun-Woo, Seok Kang-Ho, Choi Jong-Il, and Woo Hee-Seung approached the doctors.

“How is he?” Yoo Hun-Woo asked.

The doctor on the left took off his cap.

“The surgery went well. We still have to monitor his condition, though.”

*Is he the Great Surgeon?*

The doctor was down-to-earth and looked like someone who could hold his liquor. He turned to the other doctor beside him, who nodded in agreement. The second doctor looked sharp and precise but seemed to lack warmth.

“Can we see him now?” Kang Chan asked.

The doctor directed his gaze to Yoo Hun-Woo, seemingly deferring the decision to him.

“Let's move him to the ICU and check his condition first,” Yoo Hun-Woo suggested.

Kang Chan thought it was best to leave these decisions to the doctors.

“Understood. Thank you for your hard work,” Kang Chan said briefly, then turned to leave.

Since there was nothing more to do here, he thought it best to check on Gérard.

As the three doctors had a discussion and the surgical staff began to disperse, Kang Chan walked toward the elevator.

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*Rattle.*

The hospital room door opened, and Kang Chul-Gyu, Nam Il-Gyu, and Yang Dong-Sik entered.

“Huh?”

Clutching his chest, Oh Gwang-Taek got out of his bed, where he had been reclining.

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

“Lying around doing nothing is driving me insane.”

Oh Gwang-Taek turned off the TV with the remote. He then put it on the table.

“Lie back down.”

“I'm almost fully recovered, and I was planning to cross over next month anyway,” Oh Gwang-Taek said, puzzling the three men.

He opened the fridge between the nightstand and the wardrobe. He then took out four small cans of drinks and placed them on the table.

At the same time, Oh Gwang-Taek's expression changed, becoming more serious. "What's going on?"

"President Oh," Kang Chul-Gyu called.

"Sir."

Their brief exchange made the urgency and gravity of the situation clear.

"Dong-Sik's daughter passed away from stomach cancer a little while ago."

Oh Gwang-Taek quickly turned to Yang Dong-Sik.

*If she died of stomach cancer, why are his eyes so full of anger? Did the doctor make a mistake? Do they want to sue the hospital?*

"It seems her husband assaulted her, took the insurance money, and ran away. Dong-Sik managed to get her to the hospital, but she was already too weak for treatment by then."

"That son of a bitch!" Oh Gwang-Taek cursed, twisting his head and gritting his teeth in fury.

*Snap!*

Oh Gwang-Taek suddenly raised his head. His face was red with anger, and his eyes gleamed dangerously.

"Where's the bastard? I'll handle him myself!" Oh Gwang-Taek growled in rage. "If a man takes someone's daughter's hand in marriage, they're duty-bound to treat her right! That motherfucking insect's lower than fucking scum!"

Oh Gwang-Taek had a daughter of his own. He had quit being a gangster for her sake, and he thought buying bananas for her was as important as dealing with his enemies. Perhaps that was why he felt so strongly about this.

"Her husband's a gambler, so he's probably hanging around gambling dens, wasting away the insurance money. I need your help finding him," Kang Chul-Gyu explained.

Oh Gwang-Taek stared at Kang Chul-Gyu with a puzzled look.

"I know the Assistant Director can easily find him, but we plan to take full responsibility for this matter, so we're trying not to rely on him."

Oh Gwang-Taek slowly nodded.

"That bastard..." He glanced at Yang Dong-Sik. "Do you know his name, age, and phone number?"

“Choi Chun-Sik, thirty-two years old. Has a butterfly tattoo on his arm,” Yang Dong-Sik replied. “I don’t know his phone number. I’m sorry.”

“You know I’ve given up that life, right?” Oh Gwang-Taek said. Just as Kang Chul-Gyu was about to apologize, he added, “That’s why I can’t just call someone to bring him in. We’ll have to do it ourselves.”

With a groan, Oh Gwang-Taek clutched his chest and stood up.

*Creak.*

He opened the wardrobe and pulled out some clothes.

“President Oh,” Kang Chul-Gyu called, but Oh Gwang-Taek ignored him, quickly shedding his patient gown and putting on a T-shirt, pants, and a jacket.

“Let’s go,” Oh Gwang-Taek said firmly.

Kang Chul-Gyu looked worried about him.

“Director Kang! I’m Oh Gwang-Taek! Oh Gwang-Taek! Dong-Sik’s suffering, and you want me to just sit here? Let’s go deal with that fucking bastard.”

“This could go wrong.”

“Damn it! With you, Il-Gyu, and Dong-Sik going, what could possibly go wrong? Worse comes to worst, we cut his throat and go to prison together! Don’t tell me to stay out of this! I have a daughter too!” Oh Gwang-Taek insisted.

Kang Chul-Gyu took a deep breath and then stood up, ending the argument.

*Creak.*

The four men left the room, leaving behind cans of drinks in the now-silent hospital room.

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When Kang Chan and Seok Kang-Ho entered the room, Michelle stood up from beside the bed. Michelle shook her head in response to Kang Chan’s questioning look, indicating that Gérard hadn’t woken up yet.

Kang Chan let out a quiet sigh and sat down at the table.

“We should get changed,” Seok Kang-Ho suggested.

“I’m fine. I’ll change when we head to the airport.”

Kang Chan was a mess, but he strangely didn’t feel like changing now. Instead, he leaned back in the chair and looked at Gérard, who was lying on the bed.

*Why does this bastard have such long eyelashes? He’s like a camel.*

Kang Chan smirked. Given the situation, it was an inappropriate reaction, so Seok Kang-Ho looked at him curiously.

Kang Chan gestured toward Gérard with his chin. “You used to fight with him all the time, didn’t you?”

“Ha! I was going easy on him! He was no match for me!” Seok Kang-Ho retorted.

Michelle tilted her head at Kang Chan, her expression seemingly asking, “.Want me to pass a message?”

When Kang Chan briefly nodded, Michelle leaned over Gérard’s bed and whispered in his ear, relaying the conversation between Kang Chan and Seok Kang-Ho in French.

“See how he’s lying pretending to be all-important right now? Romain, Josh, Ethan, and Sherman will be touching down tomorrow at dawn. The captain still needs me by his side,” Seok Kang-Ho remarked.

Michelle’s expression grew increasingly complex, caught between amusement and confusion. She was clearly struggling to determine what to believe and how to process everything.

She knew of Kang Chan’s capabilities, but it was still disconcerting to hear Seok Kang-Ho and Gérard calling him “captain” and speaking of things she couldn’t understand.

“Didn’t you send him elsewhere because you were worried about him being the weak link, captain?” Seok Kang-Ho asked.

Michelle, still perplexed, conveyed Seok Kang-Ho’s words to Gérard.

At that moment, Gérard’s eyebrows and the scar on his cheek twitched slightly.

Michelle turned back in surprise.

“Ha! Back then, that bastard needed help just to go to the bathroom. He’s been acting all tough, but look at him now...” Seok Kang-Ho clicked his tongue while glaring sharply at Gérard. He then shook his head.

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Sergey Gee, Gérard’s adoptive father, had always wanted something from Gérard. Even as a child, Gérard could tell if someone’s emotions were love or hate.

Intimidation was terrifying. For one to depend on another who didn’t care about them for everything—food, sleep, and education—was truly cruel. Having to internalize the cold and harsh gaze and words of the person providing those necessities only made things worse.

Whenever Gérard regained consciousness, he kept feeling drowsy. Moreover, he thought of Kang Chan’s smirk each time.

“Chick! Stick close to me until the mission is over!”

It was the first time someone had ever protected him. Despite his mocking, almost condescending smile, Gérard could feel and understand the genuine emotion behind Kang Chan’s order.

Kang Chan was Asian, yet none of the Foreign Legion’s special forces team members dared look down on him. His shooting skills, hand-to-hand combat prowess, leadership, and unwavering

loyalty to his comrades made him formidable. If he had been a bit more detached, he could have easily been the commander of the special forces team.

However, the world was full of annoying bastards.

“Haha! you little chick!”

Gérard would never forget Daye’s expression, words, and laughter back then. Strangely, he never wanted to lose to Daye.

*Stupid, big, dirty... He’s just a filthy bastard!*

The confusion Gérard felt when he met Kang Chan during the operation in Afghanistan was indescribable. Still, he had been feeling as though life was meaningless and hoping that someone would slit his throat in some operation, so he had been hoping to see him.

That didn’t matter right now, though. As of this moment, sleep meant death. If he didn’t wake up here, he would die bleeding from his nose, ears, and eyes.

At that moment, he recalled the warning of the yellow-eyed man.

‘Even if your memory returns, you will die.’

It was clear now. He still couldn’t move, but he at least finally understood everything. An unknown force coiled around him like a snake, injecting a painless death into him bit by bit.

Once again, Kang Chan’s smirk appeared in his mind. That was when he heard Seok Kang-Ho’s words again.

“... because you were worried about him being the weak link, captain?”

It was Korean, yet Gérard could understand what Seok Kang-Ho was trying to say.

*Twitch!*

‘You damn brute!’

Gérard struggled desperately in an attempt to escape the death gripping him.

“Ha! Back then, that bastard needed help just to go to the bathroom. He’s been acting all tough, but look at him now... Tsk, tsk, tsk!”

Daye’s voice pierced through the haze that enveloped Gérard, pulling him back.

“What are you going to do when he wakes up?”

Kang Chan’s voice echoed next. Although they both spoke in Korean, Gérard understood every bit of it. They believed he wouldn’t die from such a trivial threat. Hence, they were waiting for him—his captain was waiting for him.

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Seok Kang-Ho glanced at Gérard and chuckled.

“Why should I be worried? This man does nothing but faint. You know what? When he wakes up, we should just assign him to take satellite pictures. If he

goes out on another mission and faints again, who's going to clean up the mess? He's just a burden!"

Michelle interpreted immediately.

"Channy!" she called out in a panic.

Blood began to flow out of Gérard's eyes and nose.

"Gérard," Kang Chan called with a surprisingly calm voice. Seok Kang-Ho and Michelle turned to him

In French, he said, "We'll take care of Romain and Josh at dawn, then immediately fly out to eliminate Jibril. After that, we'll head to the place in Luxembourg that you mentioned. We'll beat up that yellow-eyed bastard if we find him there, so hurry up and wake up."

The scar on Gérard's cheek twitched, seemingly in response. Even more blood flowed out of his nose and eyes.

"Gérard!"

"Hah!"

Gérard spat out the blood that had pooled in his throat.

"Gérard!"

Gérard's eyes opened. "Oui! Capitaine! [1]?" Oh Gwang-Taek whispered, pulling his head back.

They were looking at a farmhouse in the middle of a field in Yangju. The red light from a roof-mounted lamp illuminated the building and its surroundings. Fields, a dirt road winding through them, a car, and the typical two-story farmhouse stood in the darkness.

Although it was already late at night, there was a "Munbang" sign positioned about twenty meters from the house, proving that the information Oh Gwang-Taek had obtained was almost certainly accurate. Kang Chul-Gyu's group was twenty meters away from the sign.

"There's probably a rabbit hole behind the house for escape," Kang Chul-Gyu commented.

"Do you see anyone aside from the bastards by the sign?" Oh Gwang-Taek asked, scrutinizing the spot where the Munbang sign was. Despite the absurdity of the situation, he only saw one person there.

"Phew."

Oh Gwang-Taek let out a silent sigh and lowered his head again. Although he had seen a lot of things in Mongolia and Libya, he momentarily forgot that the three men with him were monsters.

"If Choi Chun-Sik is here, then let's get going," Kang Chul-Gyu told Oh Gwang-Taek. Afterward, he turned to Nam Il-Gyu and Yang Dong-Sik.

"No need to kill those two," he added.

“Yes, sir,” Nam Il-Gyu and Yang Dong-Sik quietly responded.

“Go clean it up.”

“Yes, sir.”

Oh Gwang-Taek shook his head in disbelief. Right after, the two men who had just been beside him instantly disappeared.

Oh Gwang-Taek and Kang Chul-Gyu watched on in silence.

A sound like a badger passing by reached them, and the Munbang guard they had seen collapsed gently to the ground.

*Where is the other one?*

At that moment, Oh Gwang-Taek noticed Nam Il-Gyu's arm moving behind the trunk of the parked car.

*All three of them saw that guy crouching behind it?*

“Time to go.”

Kang Chul-Gyu approached the house like a theatergoer with a ticket.

*Swoosh.*

Yang Dong-Sik, with gleaming eyes, slipped to Kang Chul-Gyu's left rear.

*Swoosh.*

A little further along, Nam Il-Gyu emerged from behind the car. Glancing back, Oh Gwang-Taek saw a man slumped against the car.

Not long after, he realized that he couldn't hear the footsteps of the three men.

*Bang! Bang!*

Just then, doors on both the first and second floors burst open. There must have been CCTV. Three large men came out, wielding weapons that looked like iron pipes.

“Dong-Sik! Catch anyone trying to escape!”

“Yes, sir.”

*Whoosh!*

Yang Dong-Sik charged down the path.

“Who are you? What do you want?”

A panicked shout cut through the darkness.

*Thud! Screech!*

The three large men looked somewhat confident.

“What do you want?” one of them asked.

At that moment, Nam Il-Gyu darted forward.

*Thud! Thud! Crack!*

No one could even see what he did.

*Thud! Thud! Thud! Clang! Clang!*

“Ugh!”

Their opponents fell to the ground like scarecrows with their stuffing removed. Only one of them was still twitching.

*Thud.*

Nam Il-Gyu glanced at Kang Chul-Gyu. Upon getting his superior’s permission, he kicked the twitching man’s neck, abruptly cutting off the scream.

Meanwhile, Oh Gwang-Taek heard someone shouting even further into the house.

“Let go! Let go of me!”

“You bastard!” Yang Dong-Sik shouted.

*Thud! Thud! Thud! Thud! Thud! Thud! Thud! Thud! Thud!*

A seemingly endless brutal beating echoed across the darkness.

Chapter 382: Death to the Enemy (1)

They handled the situation quicker than expected. Once Yang Dong-Sik had swiftly caught Choi Chun-Sik, the rest of the gamblers were no longer a concern.

Oh Gwang-Taek entered the farmhouse and "educated" the manager, runners, and lookouts with his fists. Meanwhile, Kang Chul-Gyu, Yang Dong-Sik, and Nam Il-Gyu dragged Choi Chun-Sik, who was unconscious, to the car.

Yang Dong-Sik and Nam Il-Gyu lifted Choi Chun-Sik, put him in the trunk, and closed the lid. About three minutes later, Oh Gwang-Taek walked over.

“Hop aboard,” he told the three men and then climbed into the driver’s seat. Kang Chul-Gyu sat in the front passenger seat, while Nam Il-Gyu and Yang Dong-Sik got in the back.

Once all the car doors had been closed, they immediately drove away, leaving the eerily lit farmhouse behind.

*Thud. Thud.*

The car rocked along the unpaved road, shaking those inside.

“I made sure they understood the situation. None of them will be making any reports,” Oh Gwang-Taek said.

Kang Chul-Gyu, who was leaning a little, looked at him from the passenger seat.

*Did he beat them up until they understood?*

“How long will it take from here?”

“About forty minutes,” Oh Gwang-Taek replied.

*Thud.*

Upon reaching paved roads, Oh Gwang-Taek stepped on the accelerator and picked up the pace. Unlike earlier, the ride now felt incredibly smooth.

While driving, he asked, “You didn’t kill the bastard, did you, hyung-nim?”

Yang Dong-Sik nodded in response.

“Ha, bastard! I told them to start a fire in the factory and start melting metal. I plan to make a small door with his ashes and set it up behind the factory. I’ve even thought of a name for the door.”

Following the curved road, the car took a quick left turn, its tires screeching.

Kang Chul-Gyu glanced at Oh Gwang-Taek.

*What’s the name of the door?*

“Since he’s despicable, I’m going to call it the Door of Reflection, implying that he should reflect until the door has been completely rusted away.”

Oh Gwang-Taek looked around to see the others’ reactions, but the atmosphere in the car remained somber, which wasn’t what he was expecting.

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Kang Chan showered in the hospital room on the third floor and then changed into clean clothes. Afterward, he went up to the ICU, put on a sterile gown, and stood by Lanok’s bed. Lanok looked at Kang Chan with an unusually warm-hearted gaze.

“Anne’s condition has also stabilized,” Kang Chan informed him. He then told Lanok about the calls from Vasili and Yang Bum.

“Vasili and Yang Bum also send their regards,” he finished. “On another note, Sherman, Josh, Ethan, and Romain will arrive at Osan at dawn.”

Noticing that Lanok’s eyes were struggling to stay open, he reached out and lightly grasped Lanok’s hand.

“It seems we’ve already found the core of the enemy, so just get some rest. I’ll have some good news for you when you wake up.”

With Lanok no longer able to continue the conversation, Kang Chan bowed to him and moved to Anne’s bed. Anne, small for a French woman, looked at him with difficulty.

“Your father is safe, so don’t worry about anything else and just focus on getting better,” he reassured her. Anne only managed a faint smile in response.

“Everything will be alright. Stay strong, okay?”

An hour before midnight, Kang Chan left the ICU, removed the sterile gown, and headed back to the third-floor hospital room. Seok Kang-Ho, Gérard, and Michelle were waiting for him.

Honestly, Kang Chan wanted to go to the office. He wanted to check the location in Garnich that Gérard had mentioned and confirm a few things. Nevertheless, he decided to stay at the hospital to support Lanok and Anne and ensure Yang So-Mi's last moments weren't lonely.

First, Kang Chan asked Choi Jong-Il to prepare for Yang So-Mi's funeral. He then sat down at the table. It had been an incredibly long and busy day.

Suddenly, he smirked. Despite everything, seeing Gérard opposite him made him laugh. If he hadn't saved Gérard, this long, busy day might have ended horribly.

"Have you eaten dinner?" Kang Chan asked.

Michelle glanced at Gérard and then shook her head at Kang Chan.

"I'll order some late-night snacks. We can eat before heading in."

"Oh!" Seok Kang-Ho cheered, making it clear that refusal was no longer an option.

"If you're going to order, get some for the hospital staff and the agents too," Kang Chan said.

"Who do you think I am?" Seok Kang-Ho replied cheerfully as he left the room.

While the dead lay in the cold morgue and the dying were confined in the ICU, the living ordered late-night snacks in hospital rooms.

Life didn't require much. If one was capable, they could live a fancy and luxurious life. If not, he could endure with those around him. Why kill and fight for more?

As Kang Chan reached for a cigarette, Gérard got up to turn on the ventilator and open the window.

"Want some coffee?" Gérard asked.

"Well, isn't that worth living for?" Kang Chan teased.

Gérard walked awkwardly to the corner. Watching the long-legged Frenchman pour two packets of instant coffee into a cup was quite a sight. Everything about him was long—arms, legs, eyelashes, nose, and even the scar on his cheek. That was all Kang Chan knew so far.

"Gérard."

"Oui," Gérard replied as he approached the table with a plastic cup.

"If you ever pull a stunt like this again..."

Gérard lowered his gaze, his expression tense.

Noticing the scar on his cheek twitch, Kang Chan couldn't help but laugh. "Damn it! You're playing the victim again, you bastard!"

Michelle, catching the mood, laughed as well.

"Together, we made it this far from Africa," Kang Chan said.

Gérard's eyes gleamed as he listened, and Michelle's expression grew complicated again.

“So don’t fight alone.”

“Oui.”

“Fucker!”

As they shared a strange laugh, Seok Kang-Ho returned.

“I ordered thirty jokbal and thirty bossam. The hospital staff had to check the order before allowing it,” Seok Kang-Ho said. He then grumbled, “You made coffee as soon as I went out to order? You have no sense of camaraderie.”

Right after, he made himself a cup of coffee and brought it to the table.

“I also ordered stir-fried octopus and rice.”

Kang Chan nodded and put out his cigarette in a paper cup. If they wanted to stand a chance in the incoming battles, they had to eat and rest whenever possible.

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*Screeech.*

Yang Dong-Sik grabbed both of Choi Chun-Sik’s ankles as if they were the handles of a handcart. He then followed Oh Gwang-Taek, dragging Choi Chun-Sik with him. As they walked across the parking lot and entered a building made of bricks, the first thing that hit them was the intense heat.

“Welcome,” three men built like barrels greeted Oh Gwang-Taek.

“Have you melted the metal?”

“It’s almost ready. Is that the guy?”

The man craned his neck to look at Choi Chun-Sik, who was sprawled on the floor. From their words, actions, and glances, it was clear to Kang Chul-Gyu, Nam Il-Gyu, and Yang Dong-Sik that these men were no strangers to this line of work.

“You guys step outside for a bit,” Oh Gwang-Taek instructed.

“Alright,” one of the barrel-chested men replied. He then gestured to the others. The two men bowed deeply before exiting the building.

“Time to let it all out, hyung-nim. Once you’re done, throw him in there.”

Oh Gwang-Taek pointed to a round container over roaring flames. It was just the right size for a hot bath.

“There’ll be nothing left of him within five minutes. Once he’s been liquefied, we’ll pour the metal into this mold, and the Door of Reflection will be finished.”

Oh Gwang-Taek emphasized the name he had given it, but the reaction remained the same.

“Do we really need to make a door?”

“It’s better that we do. If some nosy bastards come to investigate later, this will make it easier to say we were rushing an order since we can just show this as evidence,” Oh Gwang-Taek explained.

Kang Chul-Gyu nodded and looked at Yang Dong-Sik.

‘Do as you see fit.’

Yang Dong-Sik lowered his gaze. Choi Chun-Sik lay motionless on the floor, looking as if he were dead.

“Is that bastard here to sleep?” Oh Gwang-Taek muttered, slipping on a pair of thick gloves from the table. He then picked up a ladle-like tool and scooped some molten metal.

“Let’s see if he can sleep through this.”

Oh Gwang-Taek leaned back as far as he could from the heat and extended the ladle’s tip toward Choi Chun-Sik’s face.

*Plop. Plop. Plop.*

The molten metal from the ladle dripped onto Choi Chun-Sik’s face. A yellowish smoke rose, accompanied by the acrid smell of burning flesh.

“Argh!”

With a scream, Choi Chun-Sik woke up and immediately rolled on the floor. He brought his hands to his face but could do nothing more than flail around.

“Ha! So, you do feel heat, you bastard!” Oh Gwang-Taek said, putting the ladle away.

Meanwhile, Nam Il-Gyu brought a chair and placed it behind Kang Chul-Gyu.

“Do you have any cigarettes, Mr. President” Kang Chul-Gyu asked.

Oh Gwang-Taek rummaged through his pocket and pulled out a pack of cigarettes. He then one each to Kang Chul-Gyu, Nam Il-Gyu, and Yang Dong-Sik. Afterward, he lit the cigarettes for them.

*Click.*

The light of the flame illuminate the four men’s glinting eyes.

“Hoo.”

After blowing out a puff of smoke, Oh Gwang-Taek turned back to Choi Chun-Sik.

“Get up, you piece of shit!”

Groaning, Choi Chun-Sik struggled to his knees.

“Hey, bastard!”

“Yes—”

“Stupid fucking scumbag!”

Choi Chun-Sik flinched and looked at Oh Gwang-Taek. Clearly, there was a specialty here. Neither Nam Il-Gyu nor Yang Dong-Sik understood why Oh Gwang-Taek was swearing.

Even though Choi Chun-Sik had answered when called, Oh Gwang-Taek still thrust his face close to him and cursed at him.

“You blew all the insurance money away, huh, you useless little shit?”

Choi Chun-Sik glanced at Yang Dong-Sik.

*Crash!*

Oh Gwang-Taek’s fist, clutching a cigarette, smashed into Choi Chun-Sik’s face.

*Thud!*

“Get up!”

Choi Chun-Sik scrambled back to his knees. He looked like he had lost what little composure he had.

“If you give me a shitty answer again...” Oh Gwang-Taek glanced at the blazing furnace. “I’ll throw you right in there, so you better answer properly.”

“Yes, sir,” Choi Chun-Sik answered.

Oh Gwang-Taek’s eyes bulged grotesquely, and his lips twisted strangely. This wouldn’t have any effect on Kang Chul-Gyu or Nam Il-Gyu, but it was a clear reminder of Oh Gwang-Taek’s gangster background—a truly repulsive impression.

“Did you waste away all the insurance money?”

“I-I did,” Choi Chun-Sik replied, dropping his gaze.

Yang Dong-Sik clenched his teeth so hard that his cheeks visibly twitched.

“Hey!”

“Y-yes!”

“Let me ask you one more thing. Why did you beat your wife even though she had cancer?”

Choi Chun-Sik couldn’t raise his head.

“Did she refuse to give you money? You needed some for gambling, but she held onto the insurance payout, so you beat her up for it? Is that it, hmm?”

Yang So-Mi’s pitiful final moments flashed through Yang Dong-Sik’s mind. He swallowed his tears as he glared at Oh Gwang-Taek and Choi Chun-Sik.

Yang Dong-Sik didn’t expect to be asked such a question. He thought Oh Gwang-Taek was just going to rough him up, not try to dig out the reason behind it.

*Bam!*

Oh Gwang-Taek grabbed Choi Chun-Sik's head and punched him repeatedly.

*Wham! Wham! Wham!*

“Motherfucking trash! What did you see in those dying eyes that made you beat her up, you sorry excuse of a man?!”

Oh Gwang-Taek relentlessly targeted Choi Chun-Sik's eyes.

“Didn't you feel sorry for your dying wife, huh?!”

*Wham! Wham! Wham!*

Oh Gwang-Taek yanked Choi Chun-Sik's head forward, making the latter tremble like an aspen tree.

“You can't tell me why you beat her?”

*Screeech!*

Oh Gwang-Taek dragged Choi Chun-Sik's head toward the furnace.

“I-It's because that b-bitch said she wasn't going to use the money for treatment! She said she was going to give it to her father!”

*Thud.*

Oh Gwang-Taek released his grip, and Choi Chun-Sik collapsed onto the floor.

“Keep going.”

“She said her father had nothing and that if she was going to die anyway, she wanted to at least cover his rent... When she said she would give the money to a father who never even visited her, I just lost it...”

Had Choi Chun-Sik not been so out of it, he wouldn't have spoken like this. The tense atmosphere and Oh Gwang-Taek's interrogation skills contributed to his breakdown.

Oh Gwang-Taek looked up, finding tears rolling down Yang Dong-Sik's cheeks.

“I'll leave him to you, hyung-nim.”

As if his task was done, Oh Gwang-Taek sat down in a chair and lit a cigarette.

“Il-Gyu,” Kang Chul-Gyu called.

“Sir,” Nam Il-Gyu responded.

“You take over.”

“Got it.”

Nam Il-Gyu stood up and looked around. They were in a factory that specialized in molten metal. Long iron skewers were scattered around.

*Step, step. Swoosh.*

Nam Il-Gyu picked up a skewer that was about a meter long and about five millimeters thick. It looked like a cut piece of rebar with a blunt end.

Nam Il-Gyu grabbed the skewer, walked over to Choi Chun-Sik, who was sprawled on the ground face-down, and lifted Choi Chun-Sik's head.

“Gah!”

Nam Il-Gyu positioned his left leg over Choi Chun-Sik's left shoulder and held him tightly. He twisted the skewer, aiming for the ear, with a demonic expression.

“Aaaah! Aaaah!”

Oh Gwang-Taek's eyes widened, but unlike in Libya, where he had turned away when killing enemies, he didn't look away this time.

The skewer didn't go in easily partly because of the blunt tip and partly because Choi Chun-Sik was thrashing his head in desperation.

*Crack!*

“Aaagh!”

*Crack! Crack!*

“Ugh! Uuurgh!”

“You bastard! Why couldn't you live like a decent human being? Why?! Why did you sell a dying person's last hope just so you could gamble?!”

*Crack!*

“Arrgh!”

Nam Il-Gyu gritted his teeth and used every last bit of his strength. Finally, the iron rod emerged from the other side of Choi Chun-Sik's ear.

“Dong-Sik, what do you want to do next?” Nam Il-Gyu asked, turning his head to Yang Dong-Sik.

Yang Dong-Sik slowly approached Nam Il-Gyu. He grabbed the end of the iron rod protruding from the opposite ear. Meanwhile, Nam Il-Gyu lowered his leg from Choi Chun-Sik's shoulder and grabbed the other end of the rod.

Lifting together, the two men carried Choi Chun-Sik's limp body toward the furnace. The final material for the Door of Reflection was thus dragged into the molten metal.

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After eating their late-night snack, Michelle bid Kang Chan and the others goodbye and left. Once she was gone, the three men lay down on their beds.

*What is there to worry about? We can just be thankful that Gérard is alive and that we are together again.*

They had slept in piles of dirt, swamps crawling with insects, and mountainsides, so they all naturally fell asleep quickly in this quiet and safe environment. Due to the exhausting day that they had, they slept deeply and soundly. As time passed, moonlight entered through the window and flowed back out.

When Kang Chan woke up, he shook his head and got out of bed. The lights from the surrounding buildings illuminated the hospital room. He moved to the water dispenser, picked up a bottle, and drank it.

“Ugh!” Seok Kang-Ho groaned.

*That bastard always wakes up like that.*

*Rustle.*

Gérard woke up next. Kang Chan picked up two more bottles of water and handed them to the two. Gérard’s gaze lingered on the bandage wrapped around Kang Chan’s hand.

“Just drink the water,” Kang Chan said.

As they rehydrated themselves, they couldn’t help but appreciate the fact that they were all still alive and together. Soon, they washed up and made themselves presentable. Choi Jong-Il then arrived around twenty minutes past four that morning.

“Sir Kang Chul-Gyu and the others are already at the funeral hall,” Choi Jong-Il said.

“Have you even slept yet?” Kang Chan asked.

“I have,” Choi Jong-Il replied with a smile.

“Good. Anyway, got pistols and knives for Daye and Gérard?”

“They’re in the car. Should I bring them in?”

“The car we’re taking?”

“Yes, sir.”

*No need to bother fetching them, then.*

“We’ll just get them on the way,” Kang Chan said.

Following Kang Chan, Seok Kang-Ho, Gérard, and Choi Jong-Il headed out.

In front of the hospital entrance, six SUVs waited with their lights on. Kang Chan hoped the efforts and hardships of the agents waiting inside wouldn’t go to waste.

He walked past the SUV where Lee Doo-Hee was waiting and moved to the one at the very front. It wasn’t any different from going into battle. They were on a mission, ready for combat at any moment, not knowing who they might lose or when they might face death. No matter the outcome, they wouldn’t get recognition for it.

They only ever got attention for the international building incident. If they had failed back then, they would have had to take all the blame.

*Tap, tap.*

Kang Chan tapped the front windshield of the SUV twice and slowly walked alongside it.

*Thank you. At the very least, I, Choi Jong-Il, Gérard, and Seok Kang-Ho understand the value of your sacrifices and efforts.*

*Tap, tap.*

Kang Chan performed the same gesture with the second SUV, looking at the fully tinted side window. Just like in Africa, the men with him right now were precious comrades. However, unlike back then, everyone present now was close to his heart.

Kang Chan tapped the front windshields of the remaining five SUVs before getting into his own.

*Vroom.*

Once their convoy had exited the hospital grounds, Choi Jong-Il handed out radios, pistols, and knives to Seok Kang-Ho and Gérard. The two strapped the pistols and knives to their ankles and clipped the radios to their waists.

Meanwhile, the SUV sped onto the highway at an alarming speed, weaving through trucks and busy cars.

Before long, they reached the entrance of the Osan Air Base. After verifying Choi Jong-Il's identity, the guard quickly raised the barricade.

*Vroom.*

The SUV drove straight onto the runway. The six SUVs then lined up with their headlights still on, illuminating the runway marked by guiding lights. Kang Chan got out, followed by Seok Kang-Ho, Gérard, Choi Jong-Il, and Woo Hee-Seung.

“Would you like some coffee?” Choi Jong-Il asked.

Kang Chan turned and smiled, prompting Choi Jong-Il to move to the SUV and pour pre-made instant coffee from a thermos into paper cups. The sweet aroma of the coffee filled the air.

“We gotta have a cigarette with this, don't we?” Seok Kang-Ho said as he handed a cigarette to Kang Chan and lit it for him.

*Click.*

“Hoo.”

The cool morning air retreated from the cigarette smoke.

“This reminds me of our first trip to Mongolia,” Seok Kang-Ho said. He then glanced around the runway with a peculiar smile. In the distance, a plane with its wingtips glistening came into view.

“Daye,” Kang Chan called.

Seok Kang-Ho cast a sideways glance at Kang Chan. “Yeah?”

“Stay alert.”

“Got it.”

They didn’t know what could happen, but Kang Chan had just called him “Daye,” and he had had the intense look of someone heading into battle. Hence, Seok Kang-Ho was sure that something was up.

As Kang Chan stubbed out his cigarette in the empty coffee cup, the plane on the runway turned toward them.

*Vrooom.*

When the plane stopped, Kang Chan walked straight toward it. When the private jet’s door opened, a three-part staircase automatically extended.

Sherman was the first to exit.

“Mr. Kang!” Sherman called.

“Welcome.”

Kang Chan extended his hand. They shook hands warmly.

“Why don’t we talk inside?” Sherman suggested.

Looking into Sherman’s eyes, Kang Chan smiled and nodded. As Sherman stepped aside, Kang Chan entered the plane. Inside were armed agents in suits. Ethan, Romain, and Josh sat across from each other with uncomfortable expressions.

Romain silently grasped Kang Chan’s hand, his gaze lingering on the bandage wrapped around it. Next was Ethan.

“It’s been a while.”

“Yes, it has.”

Calling him an “idiot” inwardly, Kang Chan shook hands with Ethan. Finally, it was Josh’s turn. Josh looked at Kang Chan with an overtly uncomfortable and hostile expression. Kang Chan had no intention of forcing a handshake on someone who clearly didn’t want it.

Kang Chan smirked and reached out with both hands.

*Thud.*

Josh probably didn’t expect to be grabbed by the head as soon as they met.

“Mr. Kang!” Sherman called out quickly. Meanwhile, Romain and Ethan looked on in shock.

Kang Chan’s and Josh’s eyes locked.

“Didn’t you know? My codename, God of Blackfield, means the god who delivers death to his enemies.”

Josh’s eyes conveyed his thoughts as clearly as if he had spoken them.

*You can’t be serious.*

## Chapter 383: Death to the Enemy (2)

Few people understood the fortitude required to kill someone while looking them in the eye. That was one of the reasons why shooting someone was easier than stabbing them. Those who knew how a rookie would make their first kill with a knife would understand. They would stab, stab, and stab again.

It was hard to believe, but it was true. While experts struck or cut critical areas in one swift move, rookies would keep stabbing their opponent even if the latter was already incapacitated. Moreover, they usually aimed for the gut, which didn't immediately kill their target. The muscles in that area would grasp the knife as if holding onto it, too.

Terrified that their struggling victim would retaliate, rookies would just keep stabbing them. They wouldn't even stop to check on their victim's condition.

It took a lot of experience or sheer ruthlessness for one to cut their enemy's throat or stab their heart.

At the last moment, both the killer and the victim would come to a realization. The killer would learn whether they were simply trying to scare or genuinely aiming to kill, and the victim would learn if the killer was frightened or ready to fight to death.

Seeing the resolve in Kang Chan's eyes, Josh's gaze wavered like a candle in the wind.

*What? How? Why here?*

Kang Chan smirked.

*You really shouldn't have underestimated me.*

In the blink of an eye, Kang Chan twisted Josh's head, making the latter face the chair he was sitting on.

*Click! Click! Click!*

Alerted, the bodyguards drew their pistols but withheld themselves from opening fire.

As Kang Chan released his grip and stood up straight, Josh's head slumped against Ethan's shoulder.

Kang Chan then slowly turned to Romain.

"Romain," he called.

"Mr. Kang!" Sherman called out, almost shouting, but Kang Chan's eyes remained on Romain.

"I warned you. Anyone who messes with the ambassador, no matter who they are or which country they belong to, will face the most gruesome enemy in the world."

Looking into Romain's stiff eyes, Kang Chan steeled his resolve.

“Sherman, if I get shot here, the missile at our base in Mongolia will be aimed at New York. I’m sure you’re well aware that Vasili and Yang Bum are already over there.”

Sherman and Romain’s expressions made it clear that they didn’t know.

It didn’t matter to Kang Chan, though. Even if he died here, he wasn’t sure if Vasili would actually launch the missile. However, now that he had pushed things this far, he couldn’t afford to show any weakness.

“I didn’t know that they were planning to assassinate Lanok,” Romain said.

Kang Chan smirked again.

“I mean it.”

“Then you admit that you knew about the assassination attempts on our president, Vasili, Yang Bum, Vant, and Ludwig?”

“I didn’t know about that either.”

Romain now looked somewhat resigned.

“Even so, you should face the consequences for bringing Ambassador Lanok to Lorian.”

“Mr. Kang, continuing this act like this is—” Sherman interjected.

“Sherman, have you forgotten the terms of our agreement?” Kang Chan asked, cutting Sherman off. “All I wanted was Josh and Romain. Are you trying to break our agreement and force a final confrontation?”

“With you handling things this way, what do you expect my position to be?”

“Why should I care about your position? Remind me, what did you do when the ambassador was attacked and my allies were targeted? Would you react the same way if someone tried to assassinate the President of the United States?”

Sherman met Kang Chan’s gaze but offered no retort.

People didn’t change easily, especially not someone like Sherman. It was clear that he had hoped to mediate and gain something out of this meeting on the plane, but now he could only look at Kang Chan with a frustrated and helpless expression.

*I didn't think he'd come on so aggressively!*

His eyes conveyed his thoughts to Kang Chan.

“Alright, let’s get this sorted out,” Kang Chan said.

Kang Chan stood by the table, looking at the three men and the corpse. Sherman looked troubled, Romain appeared exhausted, and Ethan, the idiot, seemed terrified.

“The Star of David attacked Ambassador Lanok, Vasili, Yang Bum, Vant, and Ludwig. We lost Vant as a result.”

Ethan nodded. Whether he understood or was just trying not to anger Kang Chan was unclear.

"Decisions should be made here and now."

The three men exchanged glances and then turned back to Kang Chan.

"Who's behind all of this? The Star of David or the DGSE?" Kang Chan asked. He then turned to Romain, seemingly asking him for his answer first.

"Can we talk privately for a moment?" Romain asked.

"Don't even think about scheming. If you start spewing nonsense, that missile aimed at New York will be redirected to Paris."

"And you think South Korea will remain safe?"

"Romain, regardless of whether you knew it or not, you were part of the Star of David. From the moment Ambassador Lanok was attacked, France became my enemy."

Romain threw a defiant look at Kang Chan.

*Such laughable defiance.*

"You've broken all the warnings I gave you. If you believe threatening South Korea's safety in front of me is wise, I won't spare France either," Kang Chan remarked. "Don't underestimate me, Vasili, Ludwig, the Swiss Intelligence Bureau, and my special forces teams. Such threats only work on those who fear war—on scums like you and France!"

He knew he was pushing his limits and putting South Korea's safety at risk, but he couldn't afford to be seen as weak in this exchange. In fights where one had to protect something precious, one was always at a disadvantage and often had to face painful outcomes.

*If France and South Korea both get hurt, who will suffer more? What would happen if Romain continues to resist? Well, I can just snap his neck, and all of this will be over.*

Even if the agents behind him tried to shoot him to death, Kang Chan wasn't planning to just stand around and get hit, especially with Sherman as a convenient shield.

"Monsieur Kang."

"Speak."

"I'd like to talk to you in private."

Romain's gaze remained unwavering.

"Alright."

Kang Chan turned to Sherman. "Mind if we step out for a moment?"

"Not at all."

Kang Chan moved toward the plane's door. The guards lowered their guns and watched cautiously. The runway was still shrouded in darkness. Seok Kang-Ho and Gérard stood alert. Choi Jong-II, Woo Hee-Seung, and other agents in suits were positioned near the plane.

Kang Chan had just snapped the neck of the second-in-command of the British intelligence bureau and dragged down the director-general of the DGSE. Nevertheless, the support of his determined men, who seemed ready to pull the trigger at any moment, made him feel confident. Of course, it would be just as much of a burden for Romain.

Following Kang Chan, Romain walked to the front of the SUVs.

"Do you have anything other than coffee?" Kang Chan asked.

"We have black tea."

"One cup of black tea, please."

Choi Jong-II poured a cup of tea and handed it to Romain.

"Cigarette," Kang Chan ordered.

Seok Kang-Ho offered him a cigarette and lit it.

Although Kang Chan likely seemed arrogant, he was only acting this way to appear authoritative. He wanted to send a clear warning that he had grown in influence within the world of intelligence and shouldn't be treated like a novice.

Kang Chan also wanted to convey his determination to make anyone who would dare mess with his people or his country face severe consequences. He had learned through experience that in this field, creating the right atmosphere was often more effective than brandishing a weapon.

That was why he truly appreciated the looks and attitudes of Daye, Gérard, and Choi Jong-II during moments like this.

Kang Chan slowly exhaled smoke, giving Romain a look that said, "Out with it."

"Do you really think you can take on the Star of David?" Romain asked.

"If that's what you wanted to say, I'm very disappointed."

"Just answer," Romain insisted.

"Romain."

"Don't think I'm afraid of dying, I didn't know they would target the ambassador," Romain said. He raised his gaze from the cup to Kang Chan.

Romain glanced around before adding, "In the end, I was used and discarded by the Star of David. Though it sounds like an excuse, if I had planned to eliminate the ambassador, I wouldn't have brought him to Lorian."

"So, what are you trying to say?"

Romain's demeanor made Kang Chan feel a sense of disgust. He had a good idea of what was coming.

“Give me one more chance.”

It was just as he expected.

Seeing Kang Chan’s expression, Romain quickly continued, “Since the Star of David has abandoned me, rather than collapsing quietly, I want to strike where it hurts them most.”

“How can I trust you?”

Romain’s eyes hardened as if his pride was wounded by Kang Chan’s words.

“Why should I bear the burden of you leading the DGSE and causing trouble again? I can end this right here.”

Romain let out a deep sigh.

“Monsieur Kang, you trust the ambassador’s word, don’t you?”

“Stop mentioning him. The more you do, the more I want to snap your neck.”

Gérard’s gaze sharpened as he watched Romain, ready to act at Kang Chan’s signal. Romain looked at Gérard uneasily before refocusing on Kang Chan.

“How about I delegate the power of the DGSE Director-General to you until the ambassador formally instates you in the position, Monsieur Kang?”

*He’s going to do what?*

Kang Chan tilted his head and smirked.

*Does he think I’m an idiot? Even appointing a neighborhood watch captain requires proper procedures, what more delegating the powers of the French DGSE Director-General?*

“Although our president must approve of someone’s appointment into a position first, internally, I can delegate my authority to you during a crisis. That way, you’ll know I won’t misuse the DGSE,” Romain said, giving the conversation an unexpected twist.

“Since the ambassador is active again, I’m sure you know that my influence is now limited. Moreover, now that I’ve been discarded by the Star of David, I have nowhere else to go. Given this situation, I’d rather seize a chance to fight for France’s glory with my final effort.”

*Is this bastard for real?*

The look in Kang Chan’s eyes made Romain sigh quietly. “In a crisis, the Director-General can delegate their authority to one of the assistant directors. Call Hugo at the DGSE and confirm this for yourself. He’ll tell you the same thing.”

Romain handed the untouched paper cup back to Choi Jong-Il and continued, “The authority can only be revoked if I die and the president appoints a new Director-General or if the delegated assistant director returns the power. Those are the only two conditions.”

Kang Chan nodded slowly. “Why go to such lengths?”

“I told you, given the situation, I want to dedicate my final act to the glory of France.”

Kang Chan didn't want to be deceived again, and he didn't trust this cunning bastard. Hence, he just watched Romain silently.

“I agree with the ambassador's decision to appoint you as the commander of this fight, Monsieur Kang. The DGSE and its Director-General's authority will be a significant asset to you,” Romain declared, his tone noticeably different.

With a bitter smile, he added, “The ambassador probably anticipated this situation when he suggested appointing you as Assistant Director. It's as if he foresaw this exact moment.”

He seemed to have realized that he was merely a pawn in a larger game.

*Damn it!*

If Romain's smile was genuine, then that meant that their roles, whether king, queen, knight, or bishop, made no difference—Kang Chan was also just a piece on the chessboard.

Did Lanok really want this? Was that why he intended to appoint Gérard as the Inspector Director-General?

This was a fight against the Star of David. Kang Chan needed to protect Lanok, Vasili, Yang Bum, and Ludwig. Hence, gaining additional strength wouldn't be that bad.

Finally reaching a decision, Kang Chan took out his phone and called the DGSE.

- This is Hugo.

*These guys never change.*

"I'll put you through to the Director-General. Speak with him."

Without waiting for a response, Kang Chan handed the phone to Romain.

Staring at Kang Chan, Romain raised the phone to his ear and said, “Hugo, it's the Director-General. Execute operation Glory of France.' The hero is Deputy Director-General Monsieur Kang. Verify the approval code.”

Listening to Hugo, Romain gazed at the dark runway.

“RCG 8359, FDG 2533.”

After another moment of silence, Romain finally said, “Approved. Please hold on.”

He handed the phone back to Kang Chan, who in turn brought the phone to his ear.

- We are transferring the Director-General's authority to you, Deputy Director-General. Will you accept this responsibility for the glory of France?

*These bastards!*

They always asked tricky questions to make lying difficult. Refusing here would be even trickier.

“Oui.”

- Approved. As of this moment, all information and decisions of the DGSE have been transferred to you, Acting Director-General. It is an honor to serve you, sir.

Feeling as if he were under a spell, Kang Chan took a deep breath. He then suddenly realized that this wasn't what he had wanted.

“We'll talk later,” Kang Chan said. He ended the call and looked at Romain.

“From now on, you have to make sure I don't die,” Romain said.

“Stay at the embassy for now,” Kang Chan replied.

“Got it.”

Romain's polite reply made Kang Chan feel awkward, but Kang Chan didn't pay it any attention.

Gérard watched Kang Chan with a strange expression.

“Let's go inside.”

Romain turned and walked back to the plane, and Kang Chan followed. By the time they had gotten back to the table, Josh was already nowhere to be seen. Romain sat next to Sherman while Kang Chan looked at Ethan, forcing him to reluctantly move to where Josh had been sitting.

Taking his seat, Kang Chan said, “Romain will be staying with me for a while.”

Right after, with a nonchalant expression, Romain casually revealed what had happened outside.

“I've transferred the powers of the DGSE Director-General to Monsieur Kang. From now on, any matters regarding the DGSE should be discussed with him.”

Sherman exhaled heavily, looking troubled, while Ethan simply nodded again. Kang Chan thought it was puzzling how Romain had survived for so long as the Director-General of the DGSE.

“Can we leave now?” Ethan asked.

“Ethan, it's best not to get involved with the Star of David,” Kang Chan warned.

“I'm not like Josh.”

Kang Chan nodded. If he said that Ethan was like Josh, Josh would probably rise from the dead and twist his own neck back to its original position just to prove him wrong.

“Monsieur Kang,” Sherman called, his tone different from before. “I appreciate your strength and decisiveness, but please remember that actions like today will just create more enemies. Try to consider the mediator's position as well.”

“I didn't want mediation, Sherman. I wanted Josh and Romain handed over.”

“Regardless, handling matters this way resolves nothing.”

Kang Chan looked at him firmly.

“I don’t know how foreign intelligence bureaus have been dealing with the Star of David until now, but don’t expect the same thing from me, especially not when it comes to messing with my people.”

“Monsieur Kang, you don’t understand the true power of the Star of David. Do you think the United States, France, the United Kingdom, Germany, and Russia have tolerated them until now because they don’t know how to fight like this?”

Sherman sounded as if he was trying to calm Kang Chan down.

Since Sherman was being reasonable, Kang Chan saw no reason to get angry. However, he had even less reason to change his mind or back down.

“Sherman,” Kang Chan called.

Sherman silently met his gaze.

“You don’t know me any better than you know the Star of David. This is just the beginning. Watch closely and witness how I fight.”

Sherman let out a loud sigh.

“We’ll leave now.”

Kang Chan nodded and stood up.

“Take care on your way back.”

“Good luck.”

After shaking hands with Sherman and Ethan, Kang Chan watched as Romain, with a somber expression, briefly shook hands with the two as well before following Kang Chan out.

Chapter 384: Monsieur Kang Will Be the Target (1)

Water and oil could be shaken for eternity, but they would quickly return to their rightful place, just like Kang Chan and Romain now.

Kang Chan wondered if they were different species or simply had different attitudes toward life. In any case, on the car ride up to Seoul, the two didn’t really talk. Rather, Kang Chan used this time to call the Mongolian base.

- Hello? To whom do I owe this pleasure?

“President Kim, Vasili and Yang Bum are traveling to the base with about two hundred and one hundred fifty people respectively. Please cooperate with them,” Kang Chan requested.

Hearing Vasili’s name, Romain quickly looked up.

Despite the ridiculousness of the early morning call, Kim Tae-Jin replied that he understood without any hesitation.

- We already received general reports about it, and Kim Hyung-Jung is keeping me informed of the situation. We’ll cooperate as much as we can, so don’t worry too much.

“Thank you. Are my parents doing well?”

- They are both in such good health now that you’ll be surprised when you see them.

“That’s good to hear. I’ll be in touch with you later.”

- Got it.

Kang Chan hung up the phone. Soon, they arrived at the embassy.

As Kang Chan and Romain got out of the SUV, soldiers from the 606 rushed toward them from the entrance and surrounded them protectively.

“Follow the 606’s instructions for now,” Kang Chan said.

“I was planning on asking the DGSE for security.”

Romain’s tone and expression seemed to be asking for permission, so Kang Chan nodded.

Their relationship was so awkward that Kang Chan couldn’t even offer to have breakfast together before parting ways. He didn’t know how they could, considering being with each other was as uncomfortable as sand being stuck in his eye.

It wasn’t that Kang Chan was being unfair, but he kept getting the feeling that there was something dishonest in Romain’s eyes.

They both knew that Romain had to speak first, though. Otherwise, Kang Chan would simply look into it during a discussion with Lanok.

Leaving the embassy, Kang Chan made his way to his office just before rush hour so he wouldn’t have traffic completely blocking the road.

When he reached his destination, he briefly washed up and then had breakfast with his men.

Kang Chan sat right in front of the window, basking in the morning rays that the sun was lazily sending through the pane.

“Coffee,” Seok Kang-Ho said as he set a mug down in front of Kang Chan.

“Where’s Gérard?”

“He’s gone off to analyze satellite images.”

Seok Kang-Ho walked over and sat across from Kang Chan, facing the window.

It had been a while. Kang Chan was pleased to have some downtime to drink coffee and stare out the window.

“Daye, the men are tired.”

Seok Kang-Ho followed Kang Chan’s gaze, finding Choi Jong-Il, Woo Hee-Seung, and Lee Doo-Hee sitting at their desks.

“It’s not just them. I’m sure the boys on guard duty below feel the same. We’re only going to have you, me, Gérard, and a minimum of people on the move

when we go after Jibril—or whatever his name is—and that yellow-eyed bastard from Luxembourg. So let them rest, and you get some sleep while you can.”

“Okay. What about you?”

“I’ll get some shuteye too.”

Kang Chan downed the last of his coffee and stood up.

“Choi Jong-II, I don’t have anything else to do except stop by the hospital in the afternoon, so take turns getting some rest. Daye and I will be getting some sleep.”

“Understood.”

Kang Chan moved toward the reception room.

If he had known it was going to be like this, he would have put a bed here instead of a couch.

He was living like a soldier in the middle of a battlefield. Hence, he had to get some sleep whenever he could.

*Why do I feel so uncomfortable, though?*

Kang Chan lay down on the sofa in his pants and shirt. He then shook off his thoughts.

For now, he just needed to get some sleep.

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Kim Tae-Jin felt like he was going to go crazy.

As soon as Vasili and his two hundred subordinates burst in, they announced that the first thing they were going to do was install a missile—and not just a small one used in skirmishes. The missile they brought was so huge that half of its body would stick out of a large container truck.

That wasn’t all.

Amid all the noise from installing and unloading the truck’s lodging-use containers, Yang Bum and about one hundred fifty armed soldiers rushed in. A silver lining was that Yang Bum spoke fluent Korean and that he was polite and unassuming for an intelligence officer of a major country.

Most of all, Kim Tae-Jin was grateful that this huge group of people could take care of their own lodging and food.

The nonstop arrival of containers was quickly followed by the creation of another similarly sized base.

Yang Bum and Kim Tae-Jin headed over to the container where Vasili was staying.

*Creak.*

Ridiculous.

That was how Kim Tae-Jin felt when he saw the interior, which was decorated like it was some fancy hotel room or a hospital suite.

Was this the power of a major country? Or was this simply Vasili's abilities?

From the bed inside, a sharp, cold-eyed Vasili arrogantly looked at Kim Tae-Jin and Yang Bum.

"Vasili, meet Kim Tae-Jin, the Korean overseer of this base," Yang Bum said in fluent French and then Korean.

Leaning back on the bed, Vasili extended his hand and gestured to a chair.

"As I'm sure Monsieur Kang informed you, I'll be staying in your territory for a while," he said.

"We will provide our cooperation for anything you need," Kim Tae-Jin replied.

Vasili looked at Kim Tae-Jin with a piercing stare, but it didn't deter Kim Tae-Jin.

After five seconds of silence, Vasili spoke again.

"What I want is the alcohol called soju...? Yes, soju."

Kim Tae-Jin looked at the bandages wrapped around Vasili's upper body. "Right now?"

Vasili then nodded in response.

"I'll bring you some, then."

Kim Tae-Jin stood up and left, and Yang Bum sat down in the seat he vacated.

"Mr. Kang Chan must be quite stressed," Yang Bum said in French.

"We're probably being targeted because their plan to provoke war and use rebels and terrorists failed. Now that it has come to this..." Vasili turned to look outside the container's window. "Monsieur Kang will naturally be their final target."

With a stoic expression, Vasili looked at the sky reflected in the glass pane, then immediately turned his head toward Yang Bum.

"When did you scrape together all those retired soldiers from the White Wolves?"

"The Black Wolves have always been around. I disliked how they kept selling themselves to the Triad, so I helped them out in the past. However, I never had any intention to manage the organization."

"Hmph!" Vasili exclaimed in amusement. "So even in our business, people come first?"

"I believe that is Mr. Kang Chan's greatest charm and strength."

Vasili frowned. "Do you believe that he's destined to be our hero?"

"Well, there are times when I'm surprised by him."

“Our protagonist is too sentimental, simple, and ignorant.”

“That’s why you and the rational High Commissioner Lanok are guarding his back, isn’t it?”

“That’s a misunderstanding. I’m always looking forward to hearing the news that our simple protagonist and Lanok have passed away.”

Yang Bum looked at Vasili’s mysterious smile.

Despite being so bandaged up that he seemed to be wearing them as clothes, Vasili had rushed to the South Korean base in Mongolia. With his control over the KGB, the missile in front of the base, and the power to take out Alexei, he could easily become the Russian president right now if he wanted to. Instead, he was here with his missile, risking death all for...

Noticing Yang Bum’s smile, Vasili asked, “Do you think I’m here because of Monsieur Kang?”

“It does seem like it.”

Vasili took a deep breath, his expression becoming scarier.

“Damn it! I got hit in the same place I got hit five years ago, and the worst part about this wound is that I can’t even go to the bathroom to relieve myself.”

Yang Bum chuckled, and Vasili followed suit, laughing like he was cracking up at a joke that someone else had made.

“When Lanok, that dreadful man, put Monsieur Kang in the position of Deputy Director-General, we were all prepared for death. We thought he wouldn’t be able to destroy the Star of David, but he could at least incapacitate them for a hundred years.”

“What is it they really want?” Yang Bum asked.

He hadn’t been at the helm of intelligence for long yet. However, he had quite a serious temperament. Paired with his respect for Lanok and Vasili, he was able to ask the question without hesitation.

“We don’t know everything the Star of David has planned either. However, we do know that they think there are too many people on Earth and that they believe they need to clean up the human race.”

“That’s absurd.”

“If Lanok hadn’t built the Hadron Collider, we wouldn’t even have had this chance.”

Vasili had never spoken of this before, so Yang Bum looked at him expectantly, wanting more explanation.

“It’s simple. In the past, Blackheads were nothing more than expensive jewelry. However, we eventually realized that they had energy in them. That seems to be

where the Star of David got the idea to wipe out continents. They were thinking of wiping out China and India, reducing the world's population by 30%.”

Yang Bum's eyes sunk deep, focusing on Vasili's words.

“We think they plan to make Africa uninhabitable through anthrax and envisioned ridding the world of humans little by little. Their plans have even Brazil covered.”

“Is that possible?”

“China and India falling apart and Africa becoming a wasteland will force a nuclear war between us and the United States.”

“Wouldn't they be in danger too?”

Vasili shook his head. “I believe they've been targeting the 'cleansed' Africa and Brazil and developed Bali and Bintan for that reason.”

“What about Europe?”

“Don't mistake the Star of David's mission being a world where only they can live. Their goal is for the superior European race to live long and prosper in a pleasant and clean Earth.”

Yang Bum looked puzzled.

“You must be wondering why the intelligence services of the United States and Europe are unable to stop such an outrageous plan. Well, you'll be able to understand if you look at me, Lanok, and yourself.”

Vasili sharply glared at his bandaged upper body.

“We are bound to be sensitive to our national interests in dealing with them, and the only one who has been able to coordinate us is Lanok, who created the European Intelligence Committee.”

“Hmm.”

“After all, he went to South Korea as an ambassador to escape attacks and the attention of the enemies. But there, he met a bumbling, ignorant, and simple-minded hero. Monsieur Kang stopped the drug run of Gong Te Automobile, which could have led to Lanok's downfall. If it wasn't for that...”

Yang Bum exhaled heavily as he sat upright.

“That explains a little of what's been going on.”

“A hundred years—that was all the peace we wanted. But Monsieur Kang's grasp on the next-generation energy source made it possible to stretch that dream to over five hundred years.”

“What are you going to do now?”

“We’re just fucking supporting characters, so all we can do is polish our missiles until the main character tells us what to do.”

Just as Vasili finished speaking, a man in a suit with a rifle slung over his shoulder entered the room. He looked down at Vasili’s sharp gaze and whispered something in his ear.

The man straightened back up.

“Not only has our hero given us Josh’s head, but he’s been given the authority of the DGSE Director-General,” Vasili remarked. He looked so displeased that Yang Bum thought it was too much.

“How far does that sly Lanok’s calculations even go? It’s impossible to foresee what will happen now that the sly fox and the simpleton are causing a mess together,” he grumbled, then turned away.

“What about Yuri Shevchenko?” Vasili asked the man.

“He’s tied to the missile.”

Vasili nodded.

“We can let the centipedes eat his body, right?”

“Yes, sir. Should we bury him alive?”

“That would be perfect. Leave it so I can verify his corpse in three days.”

“Understood, sir.”

The man with the rifle turned away from Vasili with a satisfied look on his face.

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Kang Chan woke up from a deep sleep, safe and slightly removed from the battle that was to follow.

How much time did humankind spend on sleeping? What if someone invented a pill to stop sleeping?

*That would save a lot of money on electricity bills.*

Grabbing a towel, Kang Chan left the reception room and headed for the drinking fountain.

It was already noon, yet everyone, including Seok Kang-Ho, Gérard, Choi Jong-Il, Woo Hee-Seung, and Lee Doo-Hee, was still stretched out asleep like rice cakes thrown out on a hot day.

Choi Jong-Il had probably stayed up all night. Kang Chan couldn’t help but grin when he saw him asleep.

Kang Chan drank from the fountain and quietly headed to the bathroom. Out of the corner of his eye, he saw Gérard sleeping with one long leg dangling over the edge of a cot.

Kang Chan stepped into the shower, and the cool water hit him head-on.

He had to keep his right hand out of the water, which made him look a bit funny.

There were still many to kill.

Before, he only had to eliminate enemies to protect his people. Now, he was doing it for South Korea as well.

*How dare they target the President? You think you're untouchable? That you'll be safe and sound for the rest of your lives?*

One shouldn't forget that if they killed others, they should be prepared to be killed themselves.

“Whew!”

Kang Chan spat out the stream of water running down his face.

Even though he was taking a cold shower, he still didn't feel refreshed.

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“Considering the Korean veterans didn't go to Mongolia, the only thing you got out of this plan was Vant.”

Xairo, with eyes the color of a donkey's, kept his mouth shut and his gaze at the table where Ziegfeld was sitting.

They were at a private villa on a beach, overlooking the Bintan Lagoon Resort on Bintan Island.

“What about the idiots who were waiting in the wings, ready to shoot down the helicopter that wasn't coming?”

“We've already pulled them out, sir.”

Ziegfeld glared at Xairo with frighteningly sunken eyes.

“Why didn't those old men take off?”

“One of their daughters died in the hospital right before leaving.”

Ziegfeld laughed in disbelief.

“I may not know South Korea very well, but do you really think the death of someone's daughter is enough for soldiers of that caliber—men of Korean intelligence—to opt to abandon their base and stay within the country?”

“It was also probably because they knew that Vasili and Yang Bum would reinforce their base.”

Ziegfeld sighed, his eyes completely devoid of emotion.

“How do you propose to capture the Great Ant, then?”

“I plan to leak information to the Director of the National Intelligence Service. It's nothing more than the DGSE delegating authority to Kang Chan, the promises he made to Sherman, and the missile he installed at the base.”

Ziegfeld's expression filled with disappointment.

"Xairo."

"Sir."

The sun shone brightly on the land and the blue ocean in front of them.

"It seems like you've been taking things too easy and became flustered at the slightest fallback. You need to take a close look at what's in front of you."

"Yes, sir."

"Consider that what you thought was a giant ant was actually a scorpion. I thought it was a giant ant based on what I saw and heard, but shouldn't you, the one who has to deal with it, have realized it was a scorpion?"

"I apologize."

Ziegfeld turned his gaze back to the sea and let another silence fall.

The wind dragged the white clouds over the sea for a long moment, scattering the heat around the two of them and the ornate building.

"I don't have a good feeling about this."

Soon, Ziegfeld looked at Xairo as if waking from a dream. He now looked stoic and emotionless again.

"I can understand Vasili and Yang Bum surviving, but something seems off about the South Korean veterans deciding not to fly over to Mongolia. That's too much of a coincidence."

Ziegfeld shook his head.

"I'm inclined to think he's as good as a scorpion. Where's Gabriel?" he asked.

"He's with Kang Chan."

"Then use Gabriel to eliminate him first."

"Understood, sir. What do you suggest we do about leaking information to South Korea's National Intelligence Service?"

"Proceed as planned. I want results immediately."

"Yes, sir."

Ziegfeld waved his hand, sending Xairo away.

The calabash-shaped cup had ice in the middle to keep Ziegfeld's tea chilled at all times.

He took a sip of the tea and wiped his hands on a white napkin that he kept next to him.

"A scorpion..."

Ziegfeld looked back at the sea, sensing a vague unease blooming.

As he took a deep breath, the strange foreboding feeling spread from his chest through his veins.

Chapter 385: Monsieur Kang Will Be the Target (2)

Office of the National Intelligence Service Director.

Unlike previous directors, Go Gun-Woo had placed two chairs in front of his desk so he could sit face-to-face with the department managers. Currently, Kim Hyung-Jung was sitting in one of the chairs.

“The evidence is too clear for it to be tampered.”

“Hmm.”

“We have CCTV footage of the car from the moment it left its parking to the moment it reached its destination. We also have several witnesses who can testify to the circumstances of the kidnapping.”

Kim Hyung-Jung laid out a few photos in front of Go Gun-Woo. One was a black and white photo of the car that Oh Gwang-Taek drove.

The CCTV footage photos' time and location were clearly printed in the lower right corner in a digital-looking font.

“And this Choi Chun-Sik?”

“He appears to have been disposed of after the murder. We haven't confirmed the details yet.”

Go Gun-Woo looked at Kim Hyung-Jung with a grave gaze.

“Assault, kidnapping, confinement, murder, and disposing of a dead body...”

“He's the son-in-law of Yang Dong-Sik, a member of the DMZ team who was assigned to our counter-terrorism team before the last Libyan operation. His daughter died three days ago of terminal stomach cancer.”

“Was that the funeral you went to recently?”

Go Gun-Woo was treating Kim Hyung-Jung more comfortably than before.

“Yes, sir. Apparently, Choi Chun-Sik assaulted her until he got the insurance money. The injuries she sustained made it impossible for her to survive surgery, ultimately leading to her death the same day we brought her to a hospital.”

Go Gun-Woo looked at the photo again, then gazed back up.

“Where are those three people now?”

“They went back to the hotel after the funeral this morning. They are scheduled to leave for Mongolia tomorrow morning.”

“If something goes wrong, it'll cause trouble for the assistant director.”

Go Gun-Woo sighed and turned the monitor on his desk toward Kim Hyung-Jung.

“This information came in yesterday. I thought you might want to take a look at it...”

*Click, click.*

Go Gun-Woo opened a file—a text document in the form of an email—in the Director’s Direct Reports folder.

It had all fields filled out—including date, time, subject, and content—except for the sender field.

“This is about the assistant director and his associates kidnapping and murdering Choi Chun-Sik...”

*Click, click.*

“And this is regarding the assistant director making promises to American intelligence.”

Go Gun-Woo scrolled down.

“It says that he has promised to make South Korea build next-generation energy facilities in the US affirm our friendship with them, and recognize their influence in Asia.”

*Click, click.*

“It also has an entire section dedicated to the installation of heavy and medium-sized missiles at our base in Mongolia. It even came with photos of the evidence. If these things are published in foreign news, our people won’t leave the assistant director alone.”

Kim Hyung-Jung, who had been looking at the monitor, straightened his back and glanced at Go Gun-Woo with a serious expression.

“These files were probably sent to me to target the assistant director. If the public learns that three of the agents he recruited had kidnapped and murdered a civilian and even dumped his body somewhere...”

Go Gun-Woo’s expression was now as serious as Kim Hyung-Jung’s.

“I will report this to the President. I know it will be difficult, but how about you go to the hotel and try to get these three to turn themselves in?”

“Shouldn’t you inform the assistant director first?”

Go Gun-Woo shook his head resolutely.

“Right now, we need to focus on protecting the assistant director. To do that, we have to begin with an internal crackdown. I’m willing to bet my position and my conscience, as I’m sure you are, that the promises he made to the US

intelligence bureau and the missile installation in Mongolia were all for the good of our country.”

Kim Hyung-Jung responded with an agreeing gaze.

“I don’t know what attitude the assistant director will have toward the three of them, but don’t you think it would be better to keep them out of the loop for now? That way, he can’t intervene in any way. Besides, depending on his reaction, there is a good chance that the agents, the Jeungpyeong special forces team, and even the 606 soldiers who respect the DMZ team’s Kang Chul-Gyu will rebel.”

Kim Hyung-Jung took a deep breath. However, it didn’t make him any less tense.

“Do you have any way to find the overseas agent who submitted this information?”

“I don’t, sir. In his determination to eliminate corruption within the NIS, the late Director Hwang prevented us from recording any non-public information input.”

“Then this must be some kind of threat. If I keep quiet after being given this much information, they’ll blow it to the press. Do you think I’m being too sensitive?”

“No. I believe that’s a valid hypothesis.”

“On the other hand, it can also mean that one of our agents overseas is working for the enemy.”

“Yes, sir.”

Go Gun-Woo straightened up.

“Manager Kim, we must protect the assistant director.”

“Of course, sir. I’ll go meet the DMZ team members in question now.”

“I’ll head straight to the President.”

The two men stood up at the same time.

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On his way to the hotel, Kim Hyung-Jung called ahead to see if Kang Chul-Gyu was out.

- All three of them are in their rooms.

“Tell him I’m paying him a visit. Let me know if he’s going out.”

- Copy.

Just as he put the phone down, the red traffic light changed to green.

He wished the light hadn't changed. Unfortunately, the roads were clear enough that he could drive quickly and smoothly.

This was how it always was. It wasn't odd for things not to work out the way one wanted them to.

Upon reaching the hotel, Kim Hyung-Jung parked the car and went to the 11th floor.

*Ding.*

He stepped off the elevator, went to Kang Chul-Gyu's room, and rang the bell.

"Who is it?"

*Click.*

The door opened as the question was asked.

"Come in."

Kim Hyung-Jung made a brief bow, then entered the room.

It was neat.

The bed was made so well as if it hadn't been used, and the utensils and fixtures were still in place. Aside from a cheap bottle of water—which looked like it had been bought from a grocery store—on the table, everything seemed untouched.

Kang Chul-Gyu offered Kim Hyung-Jung a seat a couple of times before the two finally sat down together at the table.

Kang Chul-Gyu was sharp and had a heavy demeanor.

However, time was fair to him too. His forehead and the crinkles around his eyes showed the weight of the past.

Kang Chul-Gyu waited for Kim Hyung-Jung to talk, but Kim Hyung-Jung couldn't bring himself to.

A heavy silence settled over the room.

*Rustle.*

After some time, Kim Hyung-Jung placed a photo on the table. Upon seeing the picture, Kang Chul-Gyu looked at him as if asking for an explanation.

"Someone tipped off the prosecution."

Kang Chul-Gyu's eyes revealed nothing. Kim Hyung-Jung wondered if he was going to deny it.

"Choi Chun-Sik's kidnapped, assaulted, confined, murdered, and abandoned a civilian."

A tremendous sense of gravity settled over the room as Kim Hyung-Jung finished his sentence.

"There are forces out to get the assistant director, and we don't want them to capitalize on this case."

“What can we do?”

Kim Hyung-Jung let out a sigh and looked at Kang Chul-Gyu, who was sitting across from him.

The legend of the DMZ. As a soldier and a member of the special forces team, Kang Chul-Gyu was renowned in North Korea, Russia, and even China.

This man, instead of asking to be saved, asked what he could do so Kang Chan wouldn't be harmed.

“I think you should turn yourself in.”

“I see. Can I take the fall on my own?”

“That is a bit difficult.”

Forced to give brutal answers, Kim Hyung-Jung's throat burned.

“To put a definite end to this situation, you, President Oh, and the two others with you will likely have to turn yourselves in.”

“Is there any way to get at least President Oh out?”

“That won't be easy. The best I can do is keep this case off the news as much as possible. If you turn yourself in before the prosecution announces it, I will take care of the rest. I suggest that you four go together to satisfy the prosecutors.”

Kang Chul-Gyu nodded.

“The sooner the better, I suppose,” he mused.

“That's right.”

“Can you wait a little while?”

“I have until this afternoon.”

Kang Chul-Gyu got up from the table and picked up the room phone next to the TV.

*Beep, beep, beep, beep.*

Kim Hyung-Jung sighed, punctuating the silence.

“It's me. Come to my room with Dong-Sik.”

*Click.*

Kang Chul-Gyu hung up afterward. He then went back to the table and sat down.

“I have a favor to ask.”

“Go ahead.”

For the first time, Kang Chul-Gyu looked like he wanted something for himself.

“Please wrap up this case so that the assistant director will never know who did it, and make it clear that everything happened under my orders.”

The weight of Kang Chul-Gyu's words settled on Kim Hyung-Jung's chest, rendering him unable to do anything but gulp.

*Ding.*

When the bell rang, Kang Chul-Gyu rose from his seat and headed to the door.

There was no greeting or conversation—the two men simply entered with heavy expressions, seemingly sensing the atmosphere in the room. They nodded at Kim Hyung-Jung and took their seats.

“Take a look at that photo,” Kang Cul-Gyu said. “Someone has reported what we did to the prosecutor's office. This could harm the assistant director.”

Nam Il-Gyu and Yang Dong-Sik looked up from the photo.

“If we turn ourselves in this afternoon, Manager Kim says he can wrap all of this up quietly. I plan to go to the prosecution now,” Kang Chul-Gyu explained.

Nam Il-Gyu nodded in understanding.

*Were they expecting this?*

Kim Hyung-Jung looked at them curiously.

“I was the one who killed Choi Chun-Sik and poured him into the molten iron, so I should go in first,” Nam Il-Gyu replied. “You and Dong-Sik should come after, sir.”

“You mother—” Yang Dong-Sik yelled before they could finish comprehending what Nam Il-Gyu had just said. However, upon glancing at Kang Chul-Gyu, he swallowed the curse back in. “What's wrong with you? I was the one who murdered the bastard who killed my daughter, you idiot! I did it for her! She's not your daughter, so why are you trying to be cool?!”

Yang Dong-Sik turned to Kim Hyung-Jung.

“Let's go. Sunbae and Il-Gyu followed me without knowing anything. You know he assaulted my daughter, right? I was going to kill that bastard, but I didn't have a car, and I didn't know the area, so I dragged these two along. Sunbae even tried to talk me out of it...”

“Dong-Sik,” Kang Chul-Gyu called, cutting Yang Dong-Sik off.

“I gave the orders. You two and President Oh just followed my commands, so don't say anything else.”

“President Oh has to go too?” Nam Il-Gyu asked.

Kim Hyung-Jung nodded.

“Sunbae,” Nam Il-Gyu called. He was wearing a pilled cotton t-shirt, worn pants with creases, and old sneakers.

“We shouldn’t cause the assistant director any trouble,” he said calmly. “If you’re framed as the main culprit, the assistant director will be greatly shocked, so please let it be known that Dong-Sik and I perpetrated this incident, and you unknowingly became involved in it.”

“Hey!” Yang Dong-Sik yelled in protest.

“Let’s just do as I say, Dong-Sik. Considering someone’s already reported this, trying to get away with this now will only affect sunbae-nim. In what world does it make sense that the two of us can’t stop you? I’m the one who took care of the guys at the farmhouse anyway, so let’s just stick to this plan. We have to protect sunbae-nim and President Oh.”

Through gritted teeth, Yang Dong-Sik nodded, agreeing that they needed to protect Kang Chul-Gyu and Oh Gwang-Taek.

Kim Hyung-Jung couldn’t do anything but quietly watch.

They would be given a lawyer. Even so, that wouldn’t happen until later. Right now, Kim Hyung-Jung had nothing more to say.

“Have you contacted President Oh?” Nam Il-Gyu asked.

“Not yet,” Kim Hyung-Jung replied.

“Then let’s go to the hospital together,” Nam Il-Gyu suggested, showing his willingness to take action.

He wanted to take care of things before Kang Chul-Gyu said something, and they were all aware of that. How could they not be?

“Il-Gyu.”

“... Yes, sir.”

Kang Chul-Gyu was now smirking.

“If I shirk my responsibilities because you asked me to, then from that moment on, I’ll be nothing more than an old, cowardly man. Do you think I’ll be able to face the assistant director then?”

Under Kang Chul-Gyu’s piercing glare, Nam Il-Gyu found it difficult to answer.

“Let’s not waste any more time and just say you followed my orders.”

This was the first time that Kim Hyung-Jung saw Nam Il-Gyu and Yang Dong-Sik not reply to Kang Chul-Gyu.

“Let’s call President Oh first.”

Kim Hyung-Jung called the hospital only to find out that h Gwang-Taek wasn't in. Nevertheless, thirty minutes later, the former gangster arrived at Kang Chul-Gyu's room.

Thus marked the beginning of a shouting spree that echoed through the room.

“It was done in my factory! My factory! I was the one who found out where that son of a bitch was! The women at the prosecutor's office will laugh if they hear that I, Oh Gwang-Taek, followed you around without knowing what was happening! What's wrong with you?!”

Oh Gwang-Taek was so loud that Kim Hyung-Jung had to ask him to lower his voice several times.

If someone was listening in the next room, they would have thought it was a group of freedom fighters trying to take credit for killing a traitor.

After about two hours, the debate finally ended.

“Let's go.”

Oh Gwang-Taek stood up.

“You just need to turn yourself in by the end of the day. Go and see your family.”

“I saw them earlier today. Didn't you say this can get in Kang Chan's way? So let's go right now.”

Oh Gwang-Taek's final remarks must have sounded decisive. The moment he finished speaking, Kang Chul-Gyu, Nam Il-Gyu, and Yang Dong-Sik stood up from their seats and rushed Kim Hyung-Jung.

This wasn't what Kim Hyung-Jung wanted.

He had hoped for some more time, and maybe even to have a nice hot meal with them before leaving. However, Kim Hyung-Jung couldn't stop them.

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Go Gun-Woo sat across from Moon Jae-Hyun at a table overlooking the backyard of the Blue House. He had to wait a while due to Moon Jae-Hyun's hectic schedule.

Go Gun-Woo first told Moon Jae-Hyun about Choi Chun-Sik's murder. “The last thing I heard was that they were going to the prosecutor's office to turn themselves in.”

He then went on to report the agreements Kang Chan had made with the US intelligence bureau and the installation of missiles at their base in Mongolia.

“So our assistant director is being targeted.”

“That's what we think.”

Moon Jae-Hyun drummed his fingers, his gaze drifting to the grass in the backyard.

“I gave the assistant director the level of responsibility as the Deputy Director-General of the DGSE.”

Moon Jae-Hyun smiled at Go Gun-Woo, which the latter found surprising.

“You don’t have to say that. I also believe in the assistant director. Whenever I recall the sacrifices he has made for our country and the things that he has done, I always feel ashamed that I’m the president.”

Go Gun-Woo listened to Moon Jae-Hyun with an awkward expression.

“I knew a day like this would come. It was always like this whenever we discovered talented individuals. Things will be different this time, though. Let’s do everything in our power to protect him.”

“Yes, sir.”

For the first time, Go Gun-Woo felt grateful that he chose to become the Director of the National Intelligence Service—that he was now leading the organization that could protect Kang Chan.

“Since he’s terribly fond of his agents, please meet with him personally... Or at least arrange a meeting for the three of us so we can console him.”

“Yes, sir.”

Moon Jae-Hyun stood up from his seat.

“We must protect the assistant director.”

He then turned away.

\*\*\*

After stopping by the prosecutor’s office, Kim Hyung-Jung made his way to Kang Chan’s office.

Kang Chan and Seok Kang-Ho, dressed in suit pants, shirts, and shoes, greeted Kim Hyung-Jung. Kang Chan’s form-fitting shirt accentuated his physique, which seemed like something out of a commercial.

“Welcome, sir.”

“Would you like some coffee?”

Afterward, they offered him a seat. Having Kang Chan greet him so welcomingly made him feel bad.

Seok Kang-Ho filled a mug to the brim with coffee and set it in front of Kim Hyung-Jung.

“What brings you here?”

Kang Chan wasn’t an idiot. He knew that Kim Hyung-Jung’s expression was different from normal.

“Today...”

Kim Hyung-Jung told him that he had just come from the prosecutor’s office. With difficulty, he then explained the reason why.

Aware of what Kang Chul-Gyu meant to Kang Chan, Seok Kang-Ho pulled out a cigarette and gave it to Kang Chan as soon as he was finished with his explanation.

“I’ll have one later.”

This was the first time Seok Kang-Ho and Kim Hyung-Jung had seen Kang Chan refuse a cigarette. Kang Chan slowly got up and walked to the window. Amid the dead silence that had filled the room, he then faced the sunlight coming through the glass pane.

Chapter 386: You Should Die, Cap (1)

For three days straight, Kang Chan felt agitated.

His discomfort didn't go away even as they examined the satellite images of Luxembourg and looked for Alman bin Jibril. It was similar to the feeling of being unable to change his clothes even though they reeked of cigarettes—uncomfortable.

Resting his right arm against the window, Kang Chan looked down at the cars filling the roads, the buildings next to the roads, and the sky that took up half the world.

Distressed, he found himself chuckling.

Kang Chul-Gyu's face now had more wrinkles than before. Traces of time were evident on his forehead, cheeks, the corners of his eyes, and his neck.

All those wrinkles tugged at Kang Chan's heart, especially now that he had been told that Kang Chul-Gyu had to go to a detention center.

Kang Chan knew that Kang Chul-Gyu had committed a crime. He killed a man far different from the enemies that they had faced off against—a man who had assaulted Yang So-Mi.

Suddenly, Kang Chan became disgusted with everything. He also felt very disappointed.

Was he being selfish?

If it was selfish to just want to take a day off after working nonstop, then he wouldn't know what to say.

"Daye," Kang Chan called, though his gaze remained on the scenery past the window.

"Sir," Seok Kang-Ho answered softly.

"Prepare a car—we're leaving. Tell Gérard he's coming with us," Kang Chan said.

"Alright."

Finally, Kang Chan turned to Kim Hyung-Jung. "The three of us will be taking the afternoon off, Manager Kim. Those two can protect me, so don't worry about the security. Please leave us alone even just for this afternoon."

Seok Kang-Ho had entered the room for the foreign agents. Now, he was heading to the office door with Gérard to leave.

"You should at least have some bodyguards," Kim Hyung-Jung said.

Kang Chan had to remember that they were innocent—that they didn't know the relationship between him and Kang Chul-Gyu. Even if he wanted to explode, he should know better than to take it out on them.

"Please turn a blind eye to this. I just want to take a break right now," Kang Chan said.

He then picked up a jacket from a hanger and walked out the door.

No one moved as he left the office. They were aware that even though he was holding in his emotions, he was about to explode.

Kang Chan got in the elevator and went down the building.

There were agents at the entrance to the basement parking lot as well.

"We'll be taking a break, but we won't be bringing any security with us. I already told Manager Kim about it," Kang Chan informed them. He then got into the backseat of the car that Seok Kang-Ho had driven over.

*Click.*

Gérard closed the car door for Kang Chan and then got in the passenger seat.

*Vroom.*

Seok Kang-Ho immediately left the basement parking lot even though Kang Chan hadn't told him where to go.

Meanwhile, Kang Chan sighed, then looked outside the window.

Kang Chul-Gyu naturally had to be punished. He did commit a crime, after all—he killed someone protected by the law.

Kang Chan knew all that, yet for some reason, he still couldn't help but be furious and find it difficult to accept the situation.

However, he was furious at himself the most. He wondered what he had been doing until now that he let something like this happen. That was the hardest thing for him to accept.

Kang Chan had heard about Yang Dong-Sik's daughter some time ago.

Whenever a Jeungpyeong special forces soldier or an NIS agent died, he would go around saying that they didn't deserve this, that they shouldn't be treated like this. However, in the end, he failed to take care of Yang Dong-Sik's daughter when she was dying from terminal stomach cancer. He couldn't even protect her from being assaulted.

*Damn it! If only I paid more attention to them, Yang So-Mi wouldn't have died in vain, and Kang Chul-Gyu, Nam Il-Gyu, Yang Dong-Sik, and Oh Gwang-Taek wouldn't have had to go to a detention center.*

The scenery outside the window changed.

Seok Kang-Ho quickly drove out of the Olympic Expressway. He didn't know much, but he at least knew why they suddenly had to leave. How uncomfortable would this situation be for Gérard, who was sitting in the passenger seat completely clueless?

Kang Chan explained Kang Chul-Gyu's situation to Gérard.

In the meantime, Seok Kang-Ho got off the Olympic Expressway and crossed the Gangdong Bridge.

"Where are we going?" Kang Chan asked Seok Kang-Ho.

"Gapyeong. We're going to have some boiled chicken. At times like this, it's best to just have a hearty meal, drink a bowl of makgeolli, then take a good nap."

Kang Chan didn't have anywhere else to go, so he remained silent.

"The weather's nice today! Look at that river."

Even if Seok Kang-Ho hadn't said that, Kang Chan was already watching the river beyond the road.

After about forty more minutes on the road, Seok Kang-Ho parked the car at a chicken restaurant that Kang Chan and Seok Kang-Ho had visited before. It had a wooden table and a canopy tent next to the small, crystal-clear stream and offered boiled chicken.

They drank makgeolli with the acorn jelly[1] that was served first.

Seok Kang-Ho brought up stories of their time as mercenaries. They had talked about those days so many times that they should've been sick and tired of them already. On the contrary, however, they just kept reminiscing about them.

"Do you remember the other captains worrying a lot because the soldiers from the other units kept bullshitting that they wanted to move to our team after we returned from the operation in Congo? Our cap was so cool back then! Hahaha!"

Kang Chan relayed what Seok Kang-Ho was saying to Gérard in French.

Smiling, Gérard chimed in, "It was always hilarious to watch new recruits peeking at our unit to see the cap's face. One idiot even broke three fingers when he fell while trying to imitate the way our cap runs while reloading!"

Although they were just talking about things they had already talked about before, it reminded Kang Chan that he had survived that place and that the three of them were still together right now. Little by little, the thought energized him.

Soon, the chicken was served. There were three people but only two chicken legs.

"Let's divide the meat evenly," Seok Kang-Ho suggested.

He then removed all the meat from the bones with his hands so they wouldn't have to choose between the good and bad meat.

After eating chicken, they had porridge.

Having his fill and talking to the two made Kang Chan feel a little better.

Soon, they ordered instant coffee. As their mugs were brought to their table, they each smoked a cigarette.

Noticing that Kang Chan had calmed down and no longer seemed about to explode, Seok Kang-Ho discretely asked, "What are you going to do now?"

*You become a fucking wily fox at times like this.*

"Twist the necks of Jibril and the guy who wrecked Gérard," Kang Chan said.

"Sounds good."

Kang Chan then relayed their conversation to Gérard.

"Daye, since you know Arabic, I want you to spearhead the operation against Jibril. Bring Jong-Il, Hee-Seung, and Doo-Hee with you," Kang Chan said. He then revealed the rest of his plan.

"You remember what we talked about last time, right? Since Michelle produces dramas, Gérard suggested that we ask her to apply special makeup on us. I want you and the others to hunt down Jibril looking like Arabs. The National Intelligence Service can probably make you guys passports with your new faces."

Seok Kang-Ho nodded.

Kang Chan continued, "In the meantime, I'm thinking of going to Luxembourg with Gérard."

"You want to attack them at the same time?"

Kang Chan nodded. "Luxembourg may not be their main headquarters. While you're out chasing Jibril, Gérard and I will try to get as much information as possible in Luxembourg. We'll join you as soon as we find intel about their headquarters. Let's put a proper end to this."

"About time we do that."

Afterward, Kang Chan told Gérard the plan. However, Gérard's response was slightly different from Seok Kang-Ho's.

"I'm sure we'll be fine going to Luxemburg since we'll be going together, but is it really a smart idea to send that stupid bastard to an operation by himself?" he asked.

Kang Chan knew these two fuckers fighting again would exhaust the shit out of him.

"To me, you two aren't that different" he quickly answered.

"What? No way. That's not true, Cap."

"What's not true?"

"I use my brain, don't I?"

"You're crazy."

The two snickered in front of Seok Kang-Ho, who was looking at them suspiciously.

"Are you going to get some sleep?" Seok Kang-Ho asked Kang Chan afterward.

"Nah, I'm good."

"Let's leave in a bit, then."

"Sure."

It wasn't almost three in the afternoon.

A cool breeze gently blew past them, accompanied by the sound of water rushing over rocks. The warm sunlight kept them from feeling too cold.

Stepping out of their harsh lives for a moment was all they needed to learn that the world was worth living. However, they knew they would eventually have to return to their brutal lives, where they didn't even know who was going to die and when.

Still sitting at the wooden table, the three watched the river.

It would've been great if Kang Chan visited a place like this with Kang Chul-Gyu at least once. The weather was nice, the sunlight was warm, the sound of water was amazing, and the food was great.

*Naturally, at times like this...*

Kang Chan turned around and picked up a cigarette and a lighter.

*Ring. Ring. Ring.*

At the same time, Gérard's phone rang from inside the jacket he had taken off.

Only a few people knew this fucker's number—it had to either be the army interpreter or Michelle.

Gérard pulled out his phone and checked the caller ID. He cocked his head, but he still answered the call.

"Ello?"

- Bleep.

As Kang Chan cupped the flame coming from the lighter and lit his cigarette, Seok Kang-Ho sharply called him.

"Captain."

He only ever used that tone when they were out on operations.

Kang Chan quickly looked up and then immediately followed Seok Kang-Ho's gaze, which was on Gérard.

It was terrifying.

Gérard's eyes had completely rolled to the back of his head, making Kang Chan wonder if human eyes could even do that.

"Oui," Gérard told whoever he was speaking to on the phone. He sounded like a completely different person. "As Xairo commands."

*What's he saying?*

As Kang Chan and Seok Kang-Ho exchanged gazes, Gérard said something unexpected.

"I'm going to kill Kang Chan."

Seok Kang-Ho quickly crouched. With just a nod from Kang Chan, he would kill Gérard.

Gérard continued, "After completing his duty, Gabriel will ascend to the sky."

Blood dripped out of his nose and stained his white shirt.

The area around them had quieted down so much that all they could hear was the water babbling in the stream.

Eventually, Gérard's eyes slowly returned to normal. At the same time, he spat out blood.

Seok Kang-Ho glared at Gérard with glinting eyes, still crouching.

“Captain, I remembered the name of the yellow-eyed bastard in Luxembourg. It's Xairo. That son of a bitch is in charge of the organization that turned me into this,” Gérard said.

He then wiped the blood from his nose with the tissue paper on the table.

*Chk chk.*

In the meantime, Kang Chan lit up a cigarette and handed it to Gérard. Next, he lit up two more cigarettes and handed one of them to Seok Kang-Ho.

Even while taking the cigarette from Kang Chan, Seok Kang-Ho kept his eyes on Gérard. However, it wasn't because he was worried that Gérard would betray them. Rather, he was worried about what Gérard would do while hypnotized.

“Hoo.”

Although Gérard saw Seok Kang-Ho crouching and staring at him suspiciously, Gérard exhaled the cigarette smoke as if he wasn't offended in the slightest.

“I was aware that you and Daye were in front of me. I also knew how I should act and answer in response to their orders. If I had lost my mind a little more, I would've gone somewhere else to answer the phone, and I might've tried to attack you.”

Wiping his nose with the back of his hand, he added. “Please tell Daye to kill me immediately if I do anything suspicious.”

“Crazy bastard.”

“What is that fucker saying?” Seok Kang-Ho asked Kang Chan.

“He wants me to tell you to kill him as soon as he does anything suspicious.”

“Motherfucking son of a bitch.”

They swore twice in their quick conversation. Gérard laughed weakly, and Seok Kang-Ho laughed with him, eyes glinting.

“Captain,” Gérard called.

Kang Chan just looked back at him.

“You should die.”

It was difficult to respond to things like this. If Gérard had said that in Korean instead of French, Seok Kang-Ho might've already attacked him.

Gérard continued, “When I remembered the name Xairo, I realized that even if we go to Garnich, it isn't really a place we can enter. But if you die, then there'll be a way for me to get in.”

“Is that what ‘Gabriel ascending to the sky’ means?”

Gérard nodded.

“It doesn’t mean that you’re going to commit suicide?” Kang Chan asked again.

“The sky is a jargon that refers to Garnich, Luxembourg. If I kill you and survive, I’ll be able to head to the base in Garnich. They will definitely come to pick me up then.”

“So you’re saying that we should target that moment?”

Gérard nodded. The scar on his cheek twitched.

“What’s he saying?” Seok Kang-Ho asked.

Kang Chan told him about Gérard’s suggestion.

Afterward, Seok Kang-Ho looked like he found Gérard’s suggestion suspicious.

“What if that fucker is planning to use that as an excuse to target you?” Seok Kang-Ho asked.

“Let’s hear him out first before we decide.”

Kang Chan looked back at Gérard. “How are you going to accomplish that?”

“That’s what we have to figure out. We need to give them a way to confirm the ‘kill’ while also keeping them from finding out about our plan.”

“This is going to be fun,” Kang Chan commented.

The three then began to brainstorm ways Kang Chan should die.

*Maybe these fuckers have actually wanted to kill me before this?*

Looking deep in thought, Kang Chan glared at Seok Kang-Ho and Gérard. The two enthusiastically suggested that he should be stabbed to death with a bayonet, shot to death with a pistol, or riddled with holes with a machine gun. They even suggested falling from the roof of a building... again.

It was dumbfounding, but Seok Kang-Ho—who had been suspicious of Gérard—was more actively thinking of ways to kill Kang Chan than Gérard.

Seok Kang-Ho and Gérard stopped talking when they finally noticed the look in Kang Chan’s eyes.

At that moment, Kang Chan asked one last question.

“Who should we tell our plan?”

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A day in Jeungpyeong started with training and ended with training.

When Park Chul-Su returned and took over the administrative problems, Cha Dong-Gyun devoted himself to their training even more passionately than before.

Park Chul-Su sighed.

Even though his upper body hadn't completely healed yet, he still sat up and looked at the pile of documents.

Rumors were quite scary.

Every day, they received requests for cooperation from foreign special forces because they wanted to train with the Jeungpyeong special forces team. Now, the Ministry of National Defense was subtly pressuring them to accept the requests from certain countries as well.

Park Chul-Su was glad that he had learned from Choi Seong-Geon himself.

He removed the requests for cooperation from the countries that the Ministry of National Defense had recommended they trained with. He then placed them at the bottom of the pile.

“Lead the military camp as you please. I'll take responsibility for whatever happens afterward,” he once told Cha Dong-Gyun.

Hence, when Park Chul-Su returned, Cha Dong-Gyun requested just one thing—he wanted to train. He wanted to train until he was satisfied.

Cha Dong-Gyun wished to create a special forces team whose members could return together from an operation—a world-famous special forces team that was second only to the DMZ team.

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

The gunshots from the AK-47s in the distance echoed into the barracks.

To that end, Park Chul-Su got ahold of everything that Cha Dong-Gyun had asked for, including AK-47s and RPGs. They also cut down the mountain next to the makeshift city and made it look like the terrains in Africa and Afghanistan.

Moreover, they found groundwater so they could make a temporary stream whenever they wanted. This allowed them to train for operations in the rain as well since they could spray the groundwater like a fountain.

Unfortunately, since the soldiers used so much live ammunition every day, Park Chul-Su had been called over by the higher-ups twice. They sarcastically told him that he was acting out too much because he believed in his connection with the President.

If Park Chul-Su hadn't experienced the battle in Africa, he wouldn't have been able to do all of this for the soldiers.

If he hadn't seen how many soldiers a competent commander could save in a hellish battle and lead an otherwise impossible operation to success, he wouldn't be the same person today.

*Screech.*

Park Chul-Su stood up from his seat. The adjutant quickly stood up as well.

He then limped out of the barracks and put a cigarette in between his lips. Right after, the adjutant quickly lit it for him.

*Ratatatatat! Ratatatat! Ratatatatatat!*

Once again, terrifying AK-47 gunshots quickly echoed toward them from a distance. Whenever he heard those noises, Park Chul-Su was reminded of Africa.

"Hooo."

The cigarette smoke he exhaled dispersed into the air as if it was afraid of the gunshots.

"This is our last training for today, right?" Park Chul-Su asked.

"Yes, sir. We don't have night training scheduled today," the adjutant answered quickly.

"Do you think they're crazy?"

"I'm not sure about that."

The adjutant tried his best to avoid the difficult question.

Park Chul-Su looked away from the adjutant. He then turned to where the makeshift city was located.

'Get stronger.'

He thought of Cha Dong-Gyun, then of Kwak Cheol-Ho and Yoon Sang-Ki.

*'The day you men become a commander like him, we'll become the world's best special forces team in the world.'*

Once again, Park Chul-Su strengthened his resolve to protect the men until they could achieve that goal.

Now, they had an abundance of experience—they had completed operations in Afghanistan, Africa, Libya, and even the counter-terrorism operation in the International Building.

However, they couldn't do anything about the difference in their capabilities. After all, that depended on whether Kang Chan was present.

Park Chul-Su believed that the soldiers were going to become stronger, and he was going to do his best to support them.

They were going to become the special forces team that Choi Seong-Geon had wanted to create so badly.

After smoking, Park Chul-Su exhaled the cigarette smoke one more time as if he were sighing. He then threw the cigarette butt into the can in front of him.

The dreams and wishes of Choi Seong-Geon—a commander with unparalleled perseverance—continued with Park Chul-Su.

Chapter 387: You Should Die, Cap (2)

Kang Chan entered Lanok's hospital room.

The corners of Lanok's lips rose when he saw Kang Chan. Although he seemed happy, his expression remained so calculating that those who didn't know him well enough would think he was displeased.

"How are you feeling today?" Kang Chan asked.

"Très bien[1]."

Contrary to what he had just said, Lanok sounded somewhat sad, but that was likely due to his weak voice and the nasal twang at the end of his sentence.

Kang Chan sat next to Lanok's bed.

"I can't stay long, Mr. Ambassador, and I probably won't be able to see you for a while."

Lanok gave Kang Chan a perplexed gaze. He looked like he wanted more information, but Kang Chan didn't say anything else.

A brief moment of silence passed.

Once again, Lanok smiled at Kang Chan. They had no need for further words. Kang Chan looked back at Lanok for a few more seconds, then attempted to stand up. However, at that moment, Lanok reached out and held Kang Chan's hand with his left hand, which had an IV needle in it. Through his weak and bony hand, he conveyed his wishes and resolve to Kang Chan.

Kang Chan slowly looked up from Lanok's hand to his blue eyes, pointy nose, sharp cheekbones, and thin lips.

The relationship they had in the beginning had long since evolved into one so full of trust that they could now understand each other without saying anything. If the ambassador hadn't been around for him or offered him help, Kang Chan wouldn't be who he was today.

Kang Chan held onto Lanok's hand and smiled faintly.

Soon, Lanok nodded at Kang Chan, telling him both goodbye and good luck. In response, Kang Chan stood beside the bed and courteously bowed to say goodbye.

He then quickly straightened up and walked out of the room. Dragging out farewells for too long could make things depressing.

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Visiting hours at the detention center ended at 5 pm.

Kang Chan arrived at the detention center with Seok Kang-Ho at around 4:20 pm.

They had heard that visitors could not meet with accomplices in groups. However, since they didn't have time, Kang Chan had no choice but to ask Kim Hyung-Jung for help.

Soon, it was decided that Kang Chan would see Kang Chul-Gyu, while Seok Kang-Ho would meet Oh Gwang-Taek at a different location.

While they were waiting, Kang Chan transferred money to the detention center for Kang Chul-Gyu, Nam Il-Gyu, Yang Dong-Sik, and Oh Gwang-Taek to use while locked up. He transferred such a large amount that the employee had to double-check it with him in surprise.

*Screech! Screech!*

*Whoosh!*

Before meeting Kang Chul-Gyu and Oh Gwang-Taek, Kang Chan and Seok Kang-Ho heard a car driving noisily outside. They then saw agents rushing into the visitors' waiting room.

Although they were wearing sunglasses, why did they think eyewear was enough to hide their aura?

“We’ll be resuming our guard duty. How are you, sir?” one of them asked.

Choi Jong-Il and Woo Hee-Seung looked as if they had run over to save Kang Chan from danger.

Kang Chan felt bad. To think he made them worried just because he couldn’t control his emotions.

He didn’t intend for this to happen, but it would have been hard for him to show off the authority of the National Intelligence Service’s Assistant Director to this extent even if he had planned it.

“I’m the head of security.”

A detention officer guided Kang Chan to a special meeting room. Inside, he found Kang Chul-Gyu waiting for him.

Kang Chul-Gyu was wearing the red, clay-colored uniform for prisoners under trial. It also had his room and prisoner number.

Kang Chul-Gyu, South Korea’s old, gray-haired hero, greeted Kang Chan. He was hiding his emotions behind a smile and a determined expression.

“How are you?” Kang Chan asked.

“President Oh can exert his influence here,” Kang Chul-Gyu said and smiled unusually brightly, making the wrinkles at the edge of his eyes deepen. “You shouldn’t have come. I heard meeting with us can implicate you, so don’t come back.” Kang Chan inhaled softly, forcibly stopping himself from saying, “Worry about yourself, old man!!”

He then turned from Kang Chul-Gyu to the employee assigned to observe them. Considering how quickly his pen moved across the paper, he seemed to be writing down greetings that they had never even said—it was like he was writing a novel.

“You’re going to hear the news that you heard from Africa again. Wait for me, alright? I’ll be back soon,” Kang Chan said.

Kang Chul-Gyu sharply looked at Kang Chan. He seemed confused—almost as if he was trying his best to understand what Kang Chan had just said.

“I stopped by because I was worried that you’d stupidly skip meals. You get what I’m saying, right?” Kang Chan asked.

Over the table, Kang Chan saw Kang Chul-Gyu tightly clenching his fist.

Since silence took up most of the designated visiting hours, the employee checked his wristwatch.

“There are more victories out there for you to claim, DMZ King,” Kang Chan added.

Having filled out the log he used to “transcribe” the conversation happening between Kang Chan and Kang Chul-Gyu, the employee looked out the window. Because of that, he missed Kang Chul-Gyu’s eyes suddenly widening and him becoming flustered.

Having said everything he had wanted to say and seen whom he had wanted to see, Kang Chan began to stand up.

“Assistant Director,” Kang Chul-Gyu called with difficulty. “I’ll be waiting.”

Kang Chan smirked in response. He then left the room.

By the time he had walked out the main gate of the prison and returned to the detention center, it was already almost five in the afternoon. There were no longer any civilians inside.

Seok Kang-Ho approached Kang Chan.

“Gwang-Taek told me to send you his regards and tell you that you shouldn’t worry. Anyway, I told Jong-Il to get the car ready. A different agent will drive and return the car that we used to get to this place.”

Kang Chan nodded.

When Choi Jong-Il gestured at the agents, Lee Doo-Hee brought over an SUV. Kang Chan, Gérard, Seok Kang-Ho, Choi Jong-Il, and Woo Hee-Seung got in.

The SUV soon drove off, looking like it was part of a procession.

Vroom.

On the road, Kang Chan, Gérard, and Seok Kang-Ho discussed their next course of action. Eventually, they decided to include Choi Jong-Il, Woo Hee-Seung, and Lee Doo-Hee in their plan.

The reason they chose those three wasn’t that they were suspicious of others. Rather, it was because if Gérard “killed” Kang Chan—be it in public or behind closed doors—there was no way Choi Jong-Il and Woo Hee-Seung would just sit back and watch.

They would likely jump in front of the bullet that was supposed to hit Kang Chan or shoot Gérard in response. Either way, their reaction would interfere with the plan, making things even more fucking complicated.

The situation was already hectic and difficult as it was, and the agents were already hard to deceive since they were so full of spite after losing Director Hwang and Director Song.

Hence, during the twenty-five-minute drive to the office, Kang Chan quietly explained their plan.

Choi Jong-Il looked at the dried-up blood on Gérard’s shirt, Kang Chan’s determined expression, and Seok Kang-Ho’s glinting eyes. Afterward, he nodded.

If Kang Chan was the main character, then Gérard was Supporting Character 1, and Seok Kang-Ho was Supporting Character 2. There were three other characters as well.

Upon reaching the entrance of the office, Seok Kang-Ho began talking about what they should have for dinner even though he had just eaten chicken, porridge, makgeolli

, and muk[2].

Those foods were suitable for Kang Chan, who had to die soon.

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“I was told that they arrived in the office a moment ago from a meeting with agent Kang Chul-Gyu and President Oh Gwang-Taek at the Seoul Detention Center.”

Sitting in a chair in front of the desk, Kim Hyung-Jung told Go Gun-Woo what was reported to him in the phone call.

“Is it safe to assume that the Assistant Director has calmed down after seeing him?” Go Gun-Woo asked.

“I’ll meet him tonight or tomorrow morning. I don’t think you need to worry too much.”

“I know you already have a lot on your plate, but please do whatever it takes to calm him down. The Assistant Director is amazing. Considering all the accomplishments he has achieved so far, you would expect him to request something unreasonable, but...”

Go Gun-Woo looked like he suddenly felt bad for some reason.

“When I look at the Assistant Director, I sometimes feel like I’m looking at a person who has gone through so much more than I have—a person who’s experienced everything in life.” Go Gun-Woo exhaled loudly, then said, “Anyway! What are the results of the investigation on Director Jeon Sang-Woo?”

Kim Hyung-Jung first handed Go Gun-Woo five pages of documents. “Please take a look at that file first. It contains the call history of Heo Chang-Seon, the person who used to be in charge of the airport’s Lost and Found Division. You just need to look at the highlighted part.”

“Is he still our employee?”

“We fired him under the suspicion of leaking information during the operation in China’s airport. He also made a personal phone call with one of our agents stationed in France using a number that’s under his sister-in-law’s name, not his.”

When Go Gun-Woo looked up at him, he continued, “The agent Heo Chang-Seon talked to in France was Jin Seung-Gyo, a veteran agent under our Foreign Affairs division. This year marks his tenth year working in France.”

“Couldn’t he have just personally talked to Jin Seung-Gyo because they befriended each other in the past or something?”

“That’s true,” Kim Hyung-Jung said, then took out another file and handed it to Go Gun-Woo. “I also would’ve thought that way if it wasn’t for this document.”

“What’s this?”

“A transaction record of the money that Yang Seok-Woo sent to Heo Chang-Seon. I’ve told you this before, but Director Jeon Sang-Woo is Yang Seok-Woo’s

first son-in-law. Yang Seok-Woo can send living expenses or money to buy a house to his son-in-law, but there's no reason for him to send Heo Chang-Seon money under his second daughter's name dozens of times when he doesn't even know him."

When Go Gun-Woo cocked his head, Kim Hyung-Jung handed him yet another document. In response, Go Gun-Woo looked down and skimmed through the first page.

"That document shows the current status of Yang Seok-Woo's company. On the second page is a list of the companies that he has closed down or liquidated."

*Rustle.*

Kim Hyung-Jung added, "You'll see Suh Jeong Motors among them."

"The company closed down after Yang Seok-Woo lost the importing rights of Gong Te automobile to the assistant director's father. At the time, the people who came to South Korea for the negotiation were Smithen and Sharlan, the man behind some of the recent terrorist attacks."

"What on earth is this?" Go Gun-Woo asked himself.

He looked up in case Kim Hyung-Jung had another document to give him, but Kim Hyung-Jung was only looking at him with sharp eyes.

"There's a strong possibility that Jin Seung-Gyo reported information about the assistant director through the NIS director's hotline."

"We only want to put an end to the matters involving Director Hwang, yet things are strangely getting out of hand," Go Gun-Woo commented.

"We also believe that Jin Seung-Gyo tipped off the terrorist attack on the International Building."

Go Gun-Woo cocked his head.

*Why would Jin Seung-Gyo tell us that after they worked so hard to prepare the terrorist attack?*

As if noticing Go Gun-Woo's doubt, Kim Hyung-Jung said, "Director, I'd like to remind you that Abibu used the UIS to execute that terrorist attack."

*That's right!*

Go Gun-Woo returned to his senses.

"If so, why do you think Jin Seung-Gyo reported such important information through the NIS director's hotline?" he asked.

"I haven't been able to figure that out yet, but I'm gathering evidence for a few possible reasons."

"Hmm."

Go Gun-Woo sighed, indicating that he wanted to hear the possible reasons. Through the same sigh, however, he conveyed that Kim Hyung-Jung could keep the reasons to himself if he couldn't reveal them right now.

When he looked at Kim Hyung-Jung, Kim Hyung-Jung elaborated, "The first possible reason is that Jin Seung-Gyo was giving information to Abibu. Since using the NIS director's hotline would attract less suspicion, Jin Seung-Gyo used it to inform Abibu that Director Hwang had caught onto their plan and that he should stop the director himself. The proof of that is the mystery phone number that the late director had called just before he died."

"So Jin Seung-Gyo killed the previous Director Hwang through Abibu, then infiltrated this room to get rid of the evidence?"

"That's correct. The second possible reason is that they needed a diversion to make the terrorist attack on the International Building work. Back then, Director Jeon Sang-Woo insisted that the counter-terrorism team withdraw, play an inactive role, and execute a passive operation. He even pressured them to allow the employees back into the building."

Go Gun-Woo listened attentively to Kim Hyung-Jung, seemingly engraving the explanation to his memory.

Kim Hyung-Jung continued, "The first explosion occurred on the 1st and 45th floors. If there had been any casualties—even among the employees of Kotra—the Suh Jeong Group would've benefited greatly."

"How come?"

Kim Hyung-Jung took out the last document from the envelope that he had placed in front of him. He then handed it to Go Gun-Woo.

"Suh Jeong Constructions received an enormous amount of compensation from the government because of the attack on the International Hotel during the Eurasian Rail Conference. They also collected reparations from a special insurance plan for natural disasters or incidents equivalent to war," Kim Hyung-Jung explained.

"Did they take out that insurance for the International Building as well?"

"Yes, sir. Please take a look at the last line under their terms and conditions—it explains that the contract is based on their previous experience with the International Hotel. Suh Jeong Constructions would have received an additional 2.5 billion won for each casualty."

Go Gun-Woo looked like he couldn't believe what he was hearing. Would a construction company that was a part of such a massive group really plan something like this just for insurance money?

"Yang Jin-Woo's death put Suh Jeong Group in a bad financial situation. I'll be focusing on those two reasons while I investigate this matter in more detail," Kim Hyung-Jung concluded.

Go Gun-Woo thought about how hard it must have been for Kim Hyung-Jung to investigate all this by himself. Kim Hyung-Jung's eyes were bloodshot and sunken, and his cheeks were hollow, making him look as if he was ten years older than he actually was.

With his history as a special forces soldier, Kim Hyung-Jung would have had an easier time forcing evidence out of people. Nevertheless, he chose to put in the effort to find the evidence properly.

Go Gun-Woo wanted to say something to him, but as the Director of the National Intelligence Service, he couldn't easily show his emotions.

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Kang Chan and his men went to the BBQ restaurant that they had dropped by last time. There were so many of them that they had almost taken all of the tables.

Except for the armed agents standing guard outside, about thirty agents sat at the tables that had been pushed together.

There was a pile of meat on each table, but nobody could eat comfortably.

The agents were obviously aware of what had happened to Kang Chul-Gyu. After all, they did drop by the detention center earlier and were forbidden from following Kang Chan all throughout the afternoon. That was probably also the reason why Kang Chan still didn't look happy.

They could also guess why they gathered at this restaurant—even fools would've recognized that Kang Chan came here to cheer up the exhausted agents.

Although they could simply eat and chat, the atmosphere was solemn to a fault.

Four agents sat at each table, but only two of them ate at a time. Even though they hadn't been ordered to, the other pair stood guard and examined their surroundings. They didn't even pick up their chopsticks.

They had lost Director Hwang and Director Song.

All of the agents inside the restaurant and all the armed agents standing by outside would still remember Kang Chan patting the SUVs in front of the hospital.

They had never had a superior who showed them that much affection and respect for their work.

Hence, now that they were guarding him again, they all oozed with the strong resolve to keep him as safe as possible. They would rather starve than let him down.

Meanwhile, Kang Chan was about to go crazy. He didn't expect the agents to act like this.

The agents were taking their duty so seriously that they even received the food the restaurant employees served outside the private room that they had rented.

He felt guilty for having to lie and deceive them despite how much dedication they were showing him. Losing Director Hwang broke them so much that they decided to eat and sleep in the counter-terrorism team's barracks instead of returning to their homes. Now, he had to fill them with despair and disappointment again.

*Damn it!*

*You Star of David bastards better be prepared for the worst—no. You sons of bitches should lower your guard. I'll make sure to slit your fucking throats wide fucking open for these men.*

Kang Chan ate an adequate amount of food to not seem suspicious, then put down his chopsticks. Meanwhile, despite the situation, Seok Kang-Ho still managed to finish eating an entire bowl of rice.

“I’m heading out for a smoke,” Kang Chan said.

Ten or so agents immediately sprang up from their seats.

“Choi Jong-II. Got any cigarettes?” Kang Chan asked.

“Yes, sir.”

“Come with me, then. Tell the agents to keep eating. We can just smoke next to the armed agents outside anyway, can’t we?”

“Just to be safe, I’ll have Hee-Seung and Doo-Hee go with us as well.”

“Alright.”

Seok Kang-Ho, Gérard, Choi Jong-II, Woo Hee-Seung, and Lee Doo-Hee followed Kang Chan to the door of the restaurant.

“We’ll stay near the armed agents, so just keep eating. Don’t take too long, though,” Choi Jong-II ordered the agents. “It’s been a long time since the assistant director treated us to a meal. It’d be disrespectful not to eat the food.”

Only then did the agents sit down again.

*Huh, I didn't know Choi Jong-II could act.*

Choi Jong-II spoke to them with so much determination in his eyes that he didn’t even look guilty for deceiving them.

Once he was done issuing orders, he and the others headed outside. They then leaned against the SUV that the armed agents were in.

They were near the entrance of the parking lot.

*Chk chk.*

After lighting up his cigarette, Kang Chan looked around his surroundings. It was dinner time, so the road and the restaurants around them were filled with people.

Kang Chan exhaled the cigarette smoke. “Hoo.”

Seok Kang-Ho glanced at the CCTV that was installed in the parking lot next to the restaurant.

At the same time, Kang Chan’s eyes met Gérard’s. He trusted the fucker. Together, they would destroy the Star of David and end this boring fight.

“That’s enough smoking. Let’s do this,” Kang Chan said.

Kang Chan exhaled another puff of smoke and then turned to Seok Kang-Ho.

“Lee Doo-Hee. Are you ready?” Kang Chan asked.

“Yes, sir.”

The two avoided looking at each other as they talked so nobody would find them suspicious.

Afterward, Kang Chan looked at Choi Jong-Il but spoke to Gérard.

“Gérard, you may begin,” Kang Chan said.

“Oui.”

There was a lot of tension between the six.

They were waiting for a moment when there would be a bit fewer people walking by to lessen the chances of anyone near them getting hurt. The timing had to be perfect so Gérard could run away.

Kang Chan purposely threw the cigarette that he had been smoking, then held out his hand to Choi Jong-Il.

Using his mouth to hold the cigarette he was smoking, Choi Jong-Il took out a cigarette and a lighter from his pocket.

Seok Kang-Ho also approached them and asked for one. He then lowered his head toward the lighter that Choi Jong-Il had lit.

*Click!*

At that moment, Gérard lowered his hand and pulled out the pistol strapped to his waist.

*Swish!*

In response, Seok Kang-Ho and Choi Jong-Il quickly turned around.

*Pew! Pew! Pew!*

Before they could react, sparks flew from the muzzle of the pistol, and ear-piercing gunshots echoed.

*Whoosh! Rattle!*

Gérard then sprinted away from the area. At the same time, armed agents sprang out of the SUV, and agents in shirts ran barefoot out of the restaurant.

“Hold your fire! There are too many civilians around! Just follow him and bring the SUV over! Now!” Choi Jong-Il yelled.

People crowded around them. By the time Lee Doo-Hee had brought over the SUV, Kang Chan’s upper body was already covered in blood.

“Head straight to the Bang Ji Hospital!” Choi Jong-Il ordered. “Clear the road!”

As Choi Jong-Il and Woo Hee-Seung carried Kang Chan into the SUV, other cars cleared a path, their sirens blaring.

*Vroom! Screech!*

The SUV merged into the main road, causing Seok Kang-Ho and Choi Jong-Il to swerve roughly.

“Captain!” Seok Kang-Ho yelled.

Gritting his teeth, Kang Chan looked back at Seok Kang-Ho.

“This doesn’t look right! Did the bastard shoot you in the wrong place?!” Seok Kang-Ho asked. He then turned to Choi Jong-II, surprise evident on his face.

Afterward, Seok Kang-Ho yelled, “Hey! Lee Doo-Hee! Drive faster! The captain is in danger!”

Chapter 388: You’re a Strong Man! (1)

*Screech!*

The SUV raced toward the hospital entrance so fast that it looked as though it would crash.

Like a madman, Seok Kang-Ho jumped out of the SUV and shouted, “Move!”

*Thud!*

Armed agents in suits swiftly surrounded the area.

*Clatter!*

By the time the medical staff rushed over with a wheeled stretcher, Seok Kang-Ho was already running toward the entrance, carrying Kang Chan on his back.

“Open the door!”

Kang Chan’s upper body was completely soaked in blood.

Due to how severe Kang Chan’s condition was, Seok Kang-Ho was leaving a trail of blood drops on his path.

“Director!”

“This way!”

Yoo Hun-Woo ran with Seok Kang-Ho into the emergency room.

“Lay him down here!”

*Thud!*

As soon as Seok Kang-Ho placed Kang Chan on the bed, Kang Chan grabbed Seok Kang-Ho’s shirt with terrifying strength.

“Captain!”

“Leave... leave Gérard alone!”

“That motherfucker betrayed us! He shot you in the chest!”

“It doesn’t fucking matter! Leave him be!”

“Captain!”

Seok Kang-Ho grabbed Kang Chan’s wrist and tried to pry his hand away.

“Mr. Kang Chan! Let’s get you treated first!” Yoo Hun-Woo pleaded, but Kang Chan wouldn’t release his grip on Seok Kang-Ho’s shirt.

*Why does he want to protect Gérard so much...? He’s a traitor!*

However, Seok Kang-Ho couldn’t break Kang Chan’s will. He couldn’t even loosen Kang Chan’s grip, so how could he go against the fierce determination in his eyes?

“Alright, alright! Let go of me so we can start treatment already!”

“Promise me!”

“Yeah, I promise! We’ll leave that bastard alone, so please let us treat you already!”

*Thunk!*

Finally, Kang Chan let go of the shirt and collapsed onto the bed.

*Swish!*

The medical staff drew the curtain as one of them cut off Kang Chan’s shirt with scissors.

“Please step outside!” the medical staff ordered.

“I’m staying right fucking here!”

Despite their objections, however, Seok Kang-Ho stayed by Kang Chan’s side, glaring fiercely.

“Gérard! That bastard!”

Seok Kang-Ho gritted his teeth. He was second to none in this field. Seeing the wound on Kang Chan’s chest, he was certain that Gérard had aimed for his heart. Had Kang Chan not twisted away at the last moment, the shot would have been fatal.

"Mr. Kang Chan! Mr. Kang Chan!" Yoo Hun-Woo called out urgently.

"Get more blood!"

His unusually loud voice and the frantic instructions he gave for various injections underscored the severity of Kang Chan's condition.

*Thud! Thud! Thud!*

Medical staff hurriedly brought in machines that looked foreign even to them and placed them around Kang Chan's bed. They quickly hooked Kang Chan up to IVs and blood transfusions, desperately injecting fluids into the lines.

Outside the curtain, armed agents completely surrounded the emergency room and the nearby areas.

*Beep—*

An ominous machine sound echoed.

"CPR! Everyone, out! Get out now!"

Kang Chan's head lolled away from Seok Kang-Ho. He was covered in so much blood that it seemed to have been poured over him. The moment his face turned pale, Seok Kang-Ho felt as if he were falling off a cliff.

"Clear!"

*Bang! Jolt! Thud!*

Kang Chan's body arched high off the bed before falling back down. Everything felt distant and surreal, the sounds around him dull and muted.

"Clear!"

*Bang! Jolt! Thud!*

Seok Kang-Ho watched Kang Chan's head droop limply again.

"Please! Kang Chan!"

Yoo Hun-Woo's gown, pants, and hands were drenched in Kang Chan's blood. He climbed onto Kang Chan's abdomen, frantically compressing his chest.

"Kang Chan! You're a strong man! Please! Mr. Kang Chan!" Yoo Hun-Woo yelled repeatedly as if he were crying. Time seemed to blur.

*One minute? Two? Maybe three?*

Yoo Hun-Woo stopped and looked at Seok Kang-Ho with a vacant expression.

*What's he saying? He's not going to tell me the captain is dead, is he?*

Seok Kang-Ho struggled to hold on to his slipping consciousness.

"Keep trying! You know the captain won't die to something like this!" he shouted.

Choi Jong-Il and Woo Hee-Seung burst through the curtain and rushed to Seok Kang-Ho.

"Captain! Get up! We need to go take out Gérard and that yellow-eyed bastard!"

They grabbed Seok Kang-Ho by the shoulders and tried to drag him away.

"Let go! Let me go!"

Lee Doo-Hee and three other agents had to join the two before they finally managed to pull Seok Kang-Ho out of the emergency room.

"No! Get your fucking hands off me! Don't you know him? Didn't you hear him cursing at me in Libya? Do you really think he'll die like this? Let go! Let me go!"

The agents around the bed looked equally distraught. The shooting had taken place during dinner. Consequently, the news following the incident was entirely focused on the event, which had transpired at a restaurant in Gangnam.

[Reporter Lee Deuk-Soo has obtained CCTV footage of the incident. Let's take a look at the video.]

The TV screen showed Gérard suddenly shooting Kang Chan, who was lighting a cigarette. The black-and-white footage captured the muzzle flash three times and Kang Chan collapsing, his chest turning dark.

[The victim, identified as the head of the National Intelligence Service's counter-terrorism team who rescued our citizens in Afghanistan and stopped the terrorist attack on the International Building, is reportedly in critical condition.]

As the journalist finished speaking, Kang Chan emerging from the International Building filled the screen ominously. Although his face was concealed with a helmet and a hood, everyone could tell that it was him.

[For security reasons, we cannot reveal the counter-terrorism team leader's identity. We hope for their swift recovery and thank them for dedicating everything to the safety of South Korea and its people. Reporter Yoo Ji-Eun will summarize his achievements.]

The footage shifted. Scenes of Kang Chan limping and running in Afghanistan, firing while injured, holding out alone in a ruined building, and leading the International Building operation played on the screen. As the female reporter detailed Kang Chan's accomplishments in a clear voice, the screen showed the Taegeukgi patch on Kang Chan's arm.

At that moment, the anchor abruptly appeared on the screen.

[Breaking News. We have just received word that the head of the National Intelligence Service's counter-terrorism team has tragically passed away at the Bangji Hospital.]

The anchor took a deep breath and glanced at the script before looking back at the camera.

[Once again, the head of the National Intelligence Service's counter-terrorism team has died during an emergency treatment at the Bangji Hospital.]

The screen then showed the Bangji Hospital surrounded by reporters and news crews.

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Park Chul-Su, Cha Dong-Gyun, and Kwak Cheol-Ho listened to the anchor in stunned silence.

"I'll call Director Jeon or Manager Kim Hyung-Jung. You guys head over there," Park Chul-Su said.

"Yes, sir."

Even after answering, Cha Dong-Gyun couldn't get up from his seat. It was as if the shock had drained the strength from his legs.

"Hey! Cha Dong-Gyun!"

Cha Dong-Gyun looked at Park Chul-Su with vacant eyes.

*Is this really happening?*

It felt like watching Park Chul-Su drift away in a river, his face growing distant.

*Smack!*

Park Chul-Su grimaced in pain as he slapped Cha Dong-Gyun hard enough to make his chest wound throb.

"Snap out of it! Have you forgotten what he taught us in Africa? If the French really killed him, then we'll avenge him. For now, focus on leading the team with determination!"

The fire in Cha Dong-Gyun's eyes gradually returned.

"You can't drive in this state," Park Chul-Su said. He then turned to his aide. "Drive them! Use my car!"

"Yes, sir!"

The aide rushed out.

"Cha Dong-Gyun, go see Seok Kang-Ho or Choi Jong-Il. If the French really did this, we'd go to Seoul in civilian clothes and handle it ourselves. I'll cover for you, so find out exactly what happened."

"Yes, sir."

Cha Dong-Gyun finally stood up.

"I'm going."

His eyes now gleamed with determination. As he walked to the door, he hesitated and then turned back.

"No need for a salute, you idiot! Just go!" shouted Park Chul-Su.

Cha Dong-Gyun saluted quickly and hurried out.

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The Blue House and the National Intelligence Service were engulfed in tense silence. To get a clear picture of the situation, secretaries and security personnel were dispatched to the Bangji Hospital to confirm Kang Chan's death.

President Moon Jae-Hyun canceled all his appointments and met with Go Gun-Woo and Kim Hyung-Jung in the underground situation room.

"Manager Kim, do you have a cigarette?"

"Yes, sir."

Perhaps trying to calm himself, President Moon Jae-Hyun reached for the cigarette even though he had quit smoking. He then lit it and took a deep drag.

"Hooo..."

Amid the silence, the smoke drifted toward the vents.

"If I were lacking, they should have taken me instead..."

Mumbling words that seemed directed at no one in particular, President Moon Jae-Hyun shook his head and put his hands on the table. As the president, he was not supposed to show weakness in front of others. Nevertheless, as if he had committed a grave sin, he couldn't even raise his head.

The cigarette between his fingers burned like incense.

"If they gave us such a talent and knew how hard we tried to protect him, they should have taken me instead."

Despite Moon Jae-Hyun's deep sigh, Go Gun-Woo remained silent, sensing that the president needed a moment until the cigarette burned out. After a while, Moon Jae-Hyun finally raised his head and stubbed out the barely smoked cigarette in the ashtray.

He then turned to Go Gun-Woo, revealing his bloodshot eyes. "What's our next course of action?"

"We have to make sure that the intelligence operations that the assistant director was in charge of keep functioning," Go Gun-Woo replied wearily. "We'll use his office and contact the relevant intelligence bureaus through our agents."

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News of Kang Chan's death reached Kang Chul-Gyu as well. Fortunately, the detention center was lenient enough to allow the detainees to watch the news.

Gritting his teeth, Kang Chul-Gyu glared at the TV as if he could destroy it with his stare. It seemed like this was what he had meant. Still, the fact that it was on TV raised a chilling suspicion that maybe the plan had gone wrong and Kang Chan had truly died.

"I stopped by because I was worried that you'd stupidly skip meals. You get what I'm saying, right?" Kang Chan had said back then. "There are more victories out there for you to claim, DMZ King."

Remembering his words quite clearly, Kang Chul-Gyu exhaled softly and looked out the small window. The sky looked especially small that night.

He wanted to get out. He didn't know what he would do, but he wanted to be beside Kang Chan, taking on the most dangerous tasks rather than being stuck in here.

"Old man, stop trying to set the mood and sit down."

Oh Gwang-Taek had told the detainees to treat him well, but it seemed that the guy running the place was annoyed by Kang Chul-Gyu's behavior. Maybe it was because Kang Chul-Gyu wasn't his sunbae from his days in the army.

Normally, Kang Chul-Gyu would have just sat down quietly instead of arguing. However, that day, he instead slowly turned his head toward the large man.

"I told you to sit down."

The figure had a large head, a thick neck, and quite slanted eyes.

But to Kang Chul-Gyu, he was just a lump of meat.

What use was it to deal with someone like that?

As Kang Chul-Gyu turned his gaze back to the window, the big guy hastily removed his socks to avoid slipping on the wooden floor during the fight.

*Thud!*

The big guy charged.

*Crash.*

Not a single person saw how or where that big guy was hit. To onlookers, it might have looked like he just tripped and fell while running.

*Thud!*

In the blink of an eye, Kang Chul-Gyu kicked the downed man onto his back and pressed his foot firmly on the man's throat.

*Crack.*

“Gah! Guh.”

Others tried to intervene, but upon seeing the fierce gleam in Kang Chul-Gyu's eyes, they dared not move. All they could do now was swallow dryly and watch him warily.

“My son told me to wait...”

Kang Chul-Gyu took a deep breath and raised his foot.

With his air passage unblocked again, the big guy coughed. “Guh! Guh!”

Meanwhile, Kang Chul-Gyu struggled to calm the murderous intent within him.

\*\*\*

Life could sometimes be brutally harsh. Seok Kang-Ho's phone, lying beside him on the marble steps in front of the hospital, painted a picture of that cruelty. It rang incessantly.

People must have been frantic, wanting to confirm the news they had heard. However, anyone who understood the relationship between Kang Chan and Seok Kang-Ho would have known that he wasn't in any condition to answer calls. Hence, in his stead, Choi Jong-Il constantly picked up calls and repeated the same brutal answer.

"It's true."

Meanwhile, Seok Kang-Ho only had one thought in his mind.

*That bastard...*

They had established a hideout in Bangbae-dong. A car, suitable clothes, a wig, and money had even been prepared. If Kang Chan hadn't held him back, he would have probably rushed over to that place already.

*Are they trying to deceive me as well?*

Seok Kang-Ho smirked. This had to be what it felt like to go mad.

“Hehehehe.”

After being reincarnated, aside from a few trips to Gapyeong, Kang Chan fought tirelessly for others' sake. Now, he had been killed by someone he held close to his heart.

To think that during the Battle of Mangala, Kang Chan was the only one who noticed the brief moment when Gérard got sick of the blood.

"Send that bastard to another platoon."

"Why? He's just starting to be useful."

Sharlan had been planning a new operation centered around Kang Chan's platoon at the time. That was the same operation that had killed Kang Chan and Daye.

"Something doesn't feel right."

"If you send him away, how do you plan to live while constantly worrying about him? Just keep him close. Are the other platoons really any safer?"

"In two days, three platoons are moving toward Congo. It's better to send him with them."

In the end, Kang Chan still transferred Gérard to another platoon.

*He took care of him so well...*

Seok Kang-Ho remembered all of it—their conversation about meeting again, the moment they returned from Mongolia and parted at the Osan Air Base, even the look in Kang Chan's eyes at the time.

*That bastard cannot be left alone.*

Seok Kang-Ho gritted his teeth and stood up.

"Choi Jong-Il."

Choi Jong-Il quickly ended his call and rapidly approached Seok Kang-Ho.

"Tell Doo-Hee to get the car ready. You, Hee-Seung, and I will be heading out. Pack plenty of rifles, pistols, and ammo."

Choi Jong-Il hesitated to respond.

"What is it"

"The director and Manager Kim are on their way, sir. Cha Dong-Gyun and Kwak Cheol-Ho have also left Jeungpyeong."

"We know the rendezvous point, so it won't take us long to catch him. That man killed the captain. How could I live with myself if we let him go after everything the captain did for us?"

Choi Jong-Il met Seok Kang-Ho's eyes and firmly nodded.

"Understood. Since there are other agents around, I'll need about five minutes to prepare. I'll have the car ready outside the hospital."

Moved by Seok Kang-Ho's determination, Choi Jong-Il walked into the building. Meanwhile, Seok Kang-Ho took a deep breath.

*I'll break that bastard's neck!*

Seok Kang-Ho pulled a cigarette from his pocket. Just as he was about to light it, Choi Jong-Il hurried back.

"Please come inside, sir," he whispered, making it look like he was asking for a cigarette to the other agents.

Seok Kang-Ho couldn't seem to read what Choi Jong-Il was thinking.

Chapter 389: You're a Strong Man! (2)

*Disclaimer: The plot, characters, and opinions presented in this novel are purely fictional and do not necessarily represent the views of Wuxiaworld, our translators or partners*

"I'd prefer if you entered without the other soldiers noticing," Choi Jong-Il said as he lit Seok Kang-Ho's cigarette.

If one couldn't understand that much, they weren't just stupid—they were an absolute fool. Seok Kang-Ho frowned and dropped the freshly lit cigarette, crushing it under his foot.

"Shall we go now?"

He followed Choi Jong-Il up the marble steps and through the glass doors. His heart pounded so hard he feared the soldiers around might hear it. Passing the director's office, Choi Jong-Il led him down to the basement.

Seok Kang-Ho wondered why they didn't just use the elevator but not because it inconvenienced him. Rather, it was because it was making him even more clueless about where they were going.

Soon, they reached the dimly lit hallway of the first basement floor and went through a room labeled with signs for syringes, plaster materials, crutches, and bandages. Eventually, they stopped before a set of doors marked "Staff Only," with IV fluids and other medical supplies stored behind them.

Choi Jong-Il checked both sides, opened the doors, and gestured for Seok Kang-Ho to enter.

Aware that any delays could prove problematic, Seok Kang-Ho quickly stepped inside and gasped. Kang Chan was lying in the damp and cluttered makeshift storage room.

Wheeled machines were intricately connected to Kang Chan's body, with IV lines and blood bags hanging from stands. Woo Hee-Seung and Lee Doo-Hee stepped aside, and Yoo Hun-Woo approached Seok Kang-Ho with a complex expression.

"Do you remember when I checked on him earlier? His heart started beating again," Yoo Hun-Woo said wearily.

Seok Kang-Ho moved closer to Kang Chan.

Meanwhile, Yoo Hun-Woo gestured to Woo Hee-Seung. "As Mr. Kang Chan requested, after you left and his death was announced, we moved him here as fast as we could with Hee-Seung's help."

"So he's okay?"

Unexpectedly, Yoo Hun-Woo shook his head.

"In his current state, if we remove the ventilator..." Yoo Hun-Woo trailed off.

*What kind of ridiculous explanation is that?*

Noticing the fierceness in Seok Kang-Ho's eyes, Yoo Hun-Woo explained, "Medically, he's alive. However, at this rate, we shouldn't get our hopes up. He asked to be declared dead, but I never imagined he'd sustain gunshot wounds this severe..."

Trailing off, he looked at Seok Kang-Ho, confused about why he was smirking.

"Choi Jong-Il."

"Yes, sir."

"Proceed as planned."

"Yes, sir."

Yoo Hun-Woo couldn't comprehend what was happening. Choi Jong-Il issued orders, and Woo Hee-Seung hurried out of the room.

"Doctor, we'll bring a wax figure identical to the captain. Please process his death certificate accordingly."

"Mr. Seok..."

With gleaming eyes, Seok Kang-Ho gazed at Yoo Hun-Woo. "Don't worry. That man will get up. Do you really think someone who returned from the dead will die so easily again? Anyway, are there any other medical staff aware of this?"

"Two others," Yoo Hun-Woo replied in disbelief.

*Isn't that risky?*

Seok Kang-Ho turned to Choi Jong-Il.

"Both are secured in the SUV."

*He's already taken care of all loose ends in such a short time!*

Seok Kang-Ho felt like kissing Choi Jong-Il on the cheek.

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Upon reaching the designated location, Gérard wore a black wig and shabby clothes. He then headed out to a one-room apartment in Bangbae-dong. The news of Kang Chan's death had reached him through the TV.

When he arrived at the hideout, he recalled the conversation he had with Kang Chan while planning the operation.

"Captain!"

Despite Gérard's defiant glare at the time, Kang Chan remained calm. "You are to aim for the heart. This is not up for debate."

*Why is he doing this? Could it be...?*

Gérard felt as if he had been struck on the back of his head.

"Are you worried that the Star of David might suspect and eliminate me before you arrive?"

Kang Chan smirked as if telling Gérard not to be ridiculous.

"Why do you want me to aim for your heart, then? Aren't you worried that I'll take this opportunity to kill you? What if the hypnosis hasn't completely worn off?"

"Lower your voice."

“Captain!”

Kang Chan handed Gérard a cigarette and lighter.

*Click.*

Once Gérard had lit the cigarette, his emotions began to settle a bit.

“Remember the CCTV footage from when Oh Gwang-Taek suspected that you were a traitor and caused a ruckus?” Kang Chan said.

“Yes.”

*How could I not?*

“I suspected you back then, too.” Kang Chan smirked. “I’d rather be tricked into taking a bullet than do that again.”

“Haven’t you thought about the people and responsibilities you’ll be leaving behind if something happens to you, Captain?”

“If we want our enemies to believe that the hypnosis hasn’t worn off yet and that you truly plan to kill me, then you have to do it before we’ve accomplished all our missions. Doesn’t that mean this is the best time to deceive them, no?”

Gérard was so stunned that he forgot he was holding a cigarette.

“I’ll protect Daye and our team. If you’re going to kill me, do it now and go back to the Star of David.”

“Are you insane?”

Kang Chan gave Gérard his signature smirk. “I mean, if you do kill me, at least you’ll survive.”

“None of this makes sense. Are you sending me off alone again? I can’t do that anymore!”

“What if it looks like I’m trying to kill you?” Kang Chan asked with an amused expression. He then brought the cigarette he was smoking to his mouth.

“I’d just die...”

Before Gérard could finish his sentence, Kang Chan stubbed out his cigarette in the ashtray and said, “Gérard.”

“Sir.”

He took the cigarette, which had completely burned out, in between Gérard’s fingers. With an annoyed expression, he stubbed it out in the ashtray as well.

“We’re going to shatter the Star of David with this mission.”

Gérard watched as Kang Chan's eyes sharpened. His captain had returned to his usual determined self.

“So aim for my heart and choose the path you want. Leave the rest to me.”

“Sometimes, you seem more stubborn than Daye.”

Kang Chan smirked. It looked somewhat different this time.

“Do your best to aim for my heart. If you don't, we won't fool the Star of David. If you're still under any effect of the hypnosis, get rid of it now.”

Kang Chan had the same fierce expression he always had when preparing for battle.

“Whatever choice you make, only you and I will know about it. If you're still hypnotized, we can also keep that between us. However, after this mission, I want to see the Gérard I know.”

*Is that why he planned such a ridiculously dangerous mission?*

“Do you think I'm still under hypnosis, Captain?”

Kang Chan's intense gaze was all the answer Gérard needed.

“Since the motorcycle incident, you've had the same sad look in your eyes that you had in your childhood photos. It hasn't all disappeared yet.”

Gérard felt something hot rising within him.

“If I die, Daye won't leave you alone. No matter which one of you dies, revenge will follow.”

There was no arguing with that.

“I don't want to see that, so I won't die. Now, get rid of all the fucking hypnosis in you. I'm tired of seeing you bleed from your nose.”

Gérard didn't know what to say. Hence, he instead sat at the table and took a drag on his cigarette.

*Drip.*

Blood started flowing out of Gérard's nose again, snapping him back to reality.

“Damn it!” he cursed in Korean.

Gérard tore off a ply from a roll of toilet paper, wiped the blood, and plugged his nose. Smoking with a blocked nose made the cigarette taste bitter and disgusting.

*It's perfect for quitting smoking.*

*Click.*

Nevertheless, Gérard lit another cigarette, realizing that Kang Chan was right. He had no idea what had happened, and he only snapped out of his trance after firing three shots.

‘Go!’

If it weren't for Kang Chan's eyes, twisted in pain yet still unwavering...

'Go! You bastard!'

Gérard clenched the cigarette in his hand. After going through adoption, cold foster parents, and hellish Africa, he finally met Kang Chan, the only person he could rely on. Considering he had aimed right for his heart, however, Gérard might have just truly killed Kang Chan.

*Captain! I'll destroy the Star of David even if I have to do it alone! I'll take down and drag as many of those bastards who hypnotized me to hell!*

Smoke was still rising from the cigarette in Gérard's hand.

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"Korean news channels are reporting Kang Chan's death."

"Is there a chance he faked it?"

"None," Xairo firmly answered, making Ziegfeld raise his head to look at him. "We had him go through dual-layered conditioning. If Gabriel had disobeyed our last command, he would have died on the spot."

"Hmm. What's Gabriel's current condition, then?"

"He's likely recalling his past."

"I see."

Ziegfeld took a sip from the glass filled with iced tea. With a satisfied look, he said, "The iced tea is just perfect. Anyway, it's best to be thorough. Dig up his grave if you have to, and confirm the DNA from his corpse, blood, or even his cremated bones."

"Understood. I'll retrieve Gabriel as well."

Ziegfeld looked up, quite surprised. "Isn't it better to leave him be?"

"If his memories have returned, there's a high chance information could leak. Besides, we can still use him to manipulate the Foreign Legion and the DGSE."

A hot sea breeze tousled Ziegfeld's hair.

"Damn it!" Raising his hand to fix his hair, he asked, "Are you suggesting I was wrong to try and eliminate him through the British intelligence bureau?"

"Not at all, sir," answered Xairo right away.

"Fine. Handle Gabriel as you see fit. I heard Xavier died under unusual circumstances. Who do we have in Korea now?"

"Gabriel's cousin."

Ziegfeld's expression turned sharp in an instant.

"When Xavier died, we sent him to monitor Kang Chan. He's in contact with Kang Chan's woman and supported the recent terrorist attacks on South Korea's previous NIS director and Energy Resource Department head."

Despite Xairo's explanation, Ziegfeld's gaze remained intense.

"My apologies. I thought I could manage it independently and judged it was unnecessary to bother you with minor details."

"Although I believe you, how do you justify not reporting back? Should I only expect to hear results from you from now on?"

"I was concerned about bothering you with minor issues, but I underestimated the situation. I'm sorry."

Xairo bowed his square head in acknowledgment of his mistake.

A brief silence followed. Xairo stood under Ziegfeld's scrutinizing glare. The scorching sun shining on Bintan Island bore down on his head and shoulders.

"Xairo."

"Sir."

"You are free to retire whenever you want."

"I'm sorry."

Another silence ensued.

The sea breeze continued unabated, shaking the parasol that Ziegfeld was leaning on and sprinkling moisture from the ocean onto Xairo's head and shoulders.

"Where is Gabriel?"

"We can locate him through the chip implanted in his body."

"It's hard to predict the game when chess pieces move on their own. Do you think I ask for detailed reports because I have nothing better to do? Monitoring Parthal was no different."

"I assure you this won't happen again."

Ziegfeld sighed. "You are free to make your own judgments and decisions, but if you fail to report again, you won't even have the luxury to retire."

"Yes, sir."

Ziegfeld raised his glass and drank iced tea, a sign that his emotions had settled.

"Retrieve Gabriel and prepare to execute the plans that were halted due to Kang Chan."

"Yes, sir."

Ziegfeld waved his hand dismissively, and Xairo turned and walked away from the table, disappearing into the building.

"A yellow race surpassing the Caucasians, huh..."

He muttered to himself as he gazed out at the sea.

"Is it possible to create a monkey that surpasses the Caucasians through training? Thinking about him makes me doubt our grand plan."

With a baffled smile, he raised his glass.

"A toast to the divine will that killed the giant ant! The divine mission to cleanse this soiled Earth!  
And a world without yellow and negro races that do nothing but eat and breed!"

His face displayed a complicated mix of contempt and expectation.

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Vasili poured himself another glass, then looked up. He had placed a table next to the bed, and Yang Bum sat across from him. In front of them were glasses and forks, and the plate in the center was full of well-cooked pork belly and bulgogi.

"Bring us another bottle."

"Да [1]."

A man with a rifle fetched a new bottle of soju from the refrigerator and placed it on the table.

Although Vasili's injuries were serious enough to warrant concern, Yang Bum just silently watched.

"The intelligence bureaus must be in turmoil. How is China?"

"The Black Wolf Unit is dealing with the traitors as we speak."

"Why is it that the Black Wolf Unit, which even Suo Ke couldn't control, is so loyal to you?"

"Probably because Suo Ke tried to sell them out while I tried to buy them."

"Hmph!"

Vasili downed his soju in one gulp.

"This has an oddly sweet aftertaste."

He poured himself another glass, muttering excuses.

"I can't believe our main character died so easily. This is troublesome."

Vasili rubbed his nose and mouth with his hand. Their conversation was in French so the men guarding them couldn't understand.

"What are you planning to do?" Vasili asked.

"Chairman Lanok is still alive. Right now, regaining control of the Chinese intelligence bureau is my top priority."

"You're not giving up?"

"There's no room for negotiation with the Star of David anyway."

Vasili's eyes suddenly gleamed, seemingly dissatisfied with Yang Bum's response.

"Russia is more or less sorted out. If necessary, I can even become the first ruler of Russia to hold both the positions of President and Director-General of our intelligence bureau. Anyway, I plan to destroy the next-generation energy facility being built in Saudi Arabia."

"I'll lend my support as soon as things are settled."

Vasili smiled slyly and raised his glass. "But, you see..."

Yang Bum, about to raise his glass for a toast, paused.

"I have a feeling that our main character is still alive somewhere."

"Could it be the shock of the news affecting you?"

Vasili shook his head.

"After years in the intelligence world, I've learned that, sometimes, our gut feeling can be more accurate than the evidence or data in front of us. I've survived numerous life-and-death situations thanks to my instincts, though it doesn't compare to our main character's animalistic intuition."

He sounded almost defensive. Meanwhile, Yang Fan simply watched with a peculiar smile.

"For once, I hope the news reports are accurate. I'd love to see Lanok's nose rubbed in the dirt!"

*Tink!*

Vasili clinked his glass with Yang Bum's and downed his soju in one go.

*Is this what Vasili meant by intuition?*

Yang Bum sensed that Vasili might actually become Russia's president—one without blood or tears that others could oppose.

Chapter 390: The Dice Are Cast (1)

Right after getting a call from Kim Hyung-Jung, Kim Tae-Jin removed the receiver from the satellite TV antenna.

"Haah."

Climbing up to the top of the barracks, Kim Tae-Jin took in his surroundings and let out the loud, frustrated sigh that had been clogging his chest.

Had he ever felt the futility of life as badly as he did now?

It was bad enough that he received the news of Kang Chan's death, but now he had to break the news of his death to Kang Dae-Kyung and Yoo Hye-Sook.

"Whew."

They had finished building the foundations of the factory in front of the base and moved on to attaching the outer walls.

It was safe to say that Kang Chan had done all of this—all of South Korea's achievements—single-handedly. The DMZ team and Suh Sang-Hyun had helped with everything they could, but without Kang Chan—without him risking his life—they wouldn't even have this chance.

They were too greedy. The country, the government, and the people around him had placed too heavy a burden on Kang Chan's shoulders.

Kim Tae-Jin remembered Kang Chan's performance during their first live ammo drill and the way he shouted at his men in the mess hall when they were demoralized.

Unable to hold it in any longer, Kim Tae-Jin lowered his head and sobbed inaudibly.

South Korea failed to protect the man who had sought revenge for Choi Seong-Geon.

Kim Tae-Jin rubbed his face like he was washing his face, took a deep breath, and let it out even louder. At the same time, he recalled Kim Hyung-Jung's request during their conversation.

"His parents will be greatly shocked," Kim Hyung-Jung had said. "Since his mother possesses a gynecologic risk, please make sure she hears the news once she's back in the country."

Kim Tae-Jin wished this was all just a bad dream.

Looked up at the Mongolian sky. The stars lavishly scattered across it were shining so brightly it was as if they were soaked in clear water and then wiped dry with a clean cloth during the day.

'I'm sure you're one of those stars now.'

He felt like Kang Chan was smirking somewhere in the sky.

'Sorry. I'm sorry.'

Kim Tae-Jin gritted his teeth and swallowed back the tears that threatened to burst out again.

"Whew."

Slowly walking down the barracks, he thought about Kang Dae-Kyung, who had tanned from working under the sun, and Yoo Hye-Sook, who always looked exhausted from kitchen work. Despite their fatigue, they always smiled at the soldiers and staff.

*Pat. Pat.*

He took heavy steps back. Just then, he saw a light coming from beneath a truck.

Kim Tae-Jin had repeatedly told him that he didn't have to work, yet Kang Dae-Kyung still couldn't take his hands off the job.

Kang Dae-Kyung didn't want to tarnish Kang Chan's name by slacking off. Moreover, he was motivated by his sense of duty and the thought that the vehicles he maintained would help his son build the factory he wanted.

Kim Tae-Jin chokingly called out to Kang Dae-Kyung.

Kang Dae-Kyung slid out from under the truck. He removed his greasy neck gloves as he walked over to Kim Tae-Jin.

With Kang Dae-Kyung looking at him curiously, Kim Tae-Jin told him the brutal truth as gently as he could.

*Thud!*

Kang Dae-Kyung stumbled backward and fell to the ground on his bottom. He desperately tried to find hope in Kim Tae-Jin's eyes and face.

Kim Tae-Jin knew it was hard to believe, much more accept it.

"He was shot...? Where is my son now?"

"I heard he's at the Bangji Hospital."

Following their brutal conversation, Kang Dae-Kyung stood with his mouth wide open as he beat his chest and cried.

His sobs were so heartbreaking that Kim Tae-Jin found it painful to watch. He couldn't even make a sound since Yoo Hye-Sook and the men could overhear him.

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Armed counter-terrorism team agents blocked the entrance to the hospital, their faces covered by helmets and masks. They were outfitted with rifles, pistols, bayonets, extra magazines, and body armor.

It had been about half an hour since the news of Kang Chan's death was announced.

Citizens had gathered in the area. One by one, they placed white chrysanthemums in front of the hospital's walls, entrance, and agents, turning the surroundings so white it was as if it had suddenly snowed.

Surprisingly, people all over Seoul, even in the provinces, also placed white chrysanthemums in front of subway stations and city halls. Moreover, buildings began to hang large Korean flags on their exterior walls.

Even though it was already so late in the evening that they should take the flags down, the buildings around the hospital chose to keep flags hanging on walls that faced the hospital.

The road around the hospital was so crowded that cars couldn't move, yet there wasn't a single car honking.

The crowd grew larger and larger.

Office workers, housewives, students, kindergartners, families, the elderly—as more time went by, more people brought chrysanthemums. Moreover, instead of heading back home, they lit candles in paper cups and stood in front of the hospital.

Nobody knew who started it, and the citizens weren't asked to do it.

At the head of the crowd was a kindergartener holding a sign that said "Thank you for your service to Korea."

Many people burst into tears.

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Cha Dong-Gyun and Kwak Cheol-Ho arrived at the hospital at nearly midnight. They had to walk quite a distance as there was no parking space on the jammed streets.

Armed members of the counter-terrorism team let them inside. Once in the foyer, Choi Jong-II greeted the two.

"Please have a seat."

"We'd like to see the captain first."

"Please wait for Mr. Seok. He's on his way."

Choi Jong-Il was their senior. Even if he wasn't, they felt inclined to listen to his stubbornness since he was most likely more shocked than anyone here.

Woo Hee-Seung brought coffee from the vending machine, and the four sipped the tasteless coffee.

"Did you find any sign of the Frenchman?" Cha Dong-Gyun asked. He sounded betrayed.

"We're still looking for him," Choi Jong-Il answered.

Cha Dong-Gyun felt anxious. Fortunately, Seok Kang-Ho soon walked up the stairs and into the waiting room.

"Good to see you."

Cha Dong-Gyun and Kwak Cheol-Ho could only bow in reply.

"Come this way."

Seok Kang-Ho led them to an empty office somewhere on the first floor.

The room had an iron bed that looked like it needed repair and folding chairs from the auditorium lined up against the wall.

"Sit."

Seok Kang-Ho, Choi Jong-Il, Cha Dong-Gyun, and Kwak Cheol-Ho pulled out the chairs and sat down. Meanwhile, Woo Hee-Seung stood guard outside the door.

"I'm doing this entirely at my discretion," Seok Kang-Ho said in an uncharacteristically stern tone. He then looked around the dull room.

Following Seok Kang-Ho's lead, Cha Dong-Gyun looked around them. What was going on?

"After leaving the hospital, head straight to the office."

"Pardon?"

Seok Kang-Ho spent the next five minutes explaining the situation to them. The two found the news unbelievable.

Kang Chan was declared dead on TV, but he was actually alive?

Cha Dong-Gyun and Kwak Cheol-Ho's faces perfectly illustrated the expression of someone who had received shocking news twice in one night.

"Secrecy comes first. Tell the troops that I'll visit them after the funeral, and keep the office under lockdown."

"Yes, sir," Cha Dong-Gyun firmly replied. He then asked a few questions, which Seok Kang-Ho swiftly answered.

Although the situation came across as a great shock, they were at least glad that there was hope. They were also looking forward to destroying the core members of the enemy faction.

“The captain risked his life for this. It was my decision to get you two involved, so don’t let your guard down. There will be no reporting to me either. Do whatever you need to do.”

“Yes, sir.”

Cha Dong-Gyun’s eyes and responses were filled with a sense of duty that had come from previous combat experiences.

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Kang Chan’s office was filled with a murderous atmosphere even though only the interpreter—who had a rifle slung over his shoulder—was the only person inside. When Cha Dong-Gyun and Kwak Cheol-Ho arrived, the ambiance only darkened further.

*Click!*

Kwak Cheol-Ho aimed his rifle at the two hospital staff who had come in with them. At the same time, the interpreter frisked them.

Glaring ferociously at the two, Kwak Cheol-Ho warned, “Make yourselves comfortable in here. Feel free to make any request you might have, too. However, if you try to make any form of contact with the outside world, I will shoot you on sight. Do not forget that.”

Perplexed, the two could only nod and head inside.

Michelle behaved differently, though. After calming down the shocked and fed-up special makeup team, she offered Cha Dong-Gyun and Kwak Cheol-Ho coffee.

“Can I get you some coffee?”

“We’re good.”

They sounded quite cautious, but she couldn’t blame them. Given the situation, they probably had to be wary of any beverage offered to them, even coffee and water.

Neither Michelle nor the special makeup team had any idea what was going on. They were just to bring their equipment and create a replica of Kang Chan. Afterward, they were locked up.

The interpreter took their shut-off phones and collected them like they were his life, so they weren’t able to make any calls or even watch TV.

Therefore, they couldn’t figure out why there were Korean flags on every large building or why people were lining the streets with candles and white chrysanthemums.

Cha Dong-Gyun took his phone out of his pocket and dialed Park Chul-Su’s number.

-Hello? Have you confirmed the news?

“Yes, sir.”

Park Chul-Su groaned as if he was trying to fight off the pain.

“I have a request, sir.”

-What is it?

“We have to stay in Seoul for at least a week, maybe even longer.

-Is it because of that bastard?

“Yes, sir.”

Cha Dong-Gyun was grateful for Park Chul-Su’s question.

-Understood. Do you need weapons?

“I believe we can procure some here.”

A brief moment of silence dawned upon the call. Eventually, Park Chul-Su broke it.

-If you think there’s gonna be a problem, use my name! Say you’re following my orders! No! This is a command! You two are to do whatever it takes to arrest the man who killed him. If he resists, shoot him.

“Thank you, General.”

Cha Dong-Gyun was about to hang up when Park Chul-Su spoke again.

-Dong-Gyun. I can’t build the strongest special forces team in the world without you, so don’t mess that plan up just because you feel responsible, got it? Make it clear that you’re simply following my orders.

Park Chul-Su hung up.

The dice were cast.

“Bring a table over.”

Kwak Cheol-Ho brought a table and two chairs.

*Click.*

Cha Dong-Gyun put the phone on the table and sat down in one of the chairs.

“We have two rooms to guard. The room where we’re at right now and the room where the satellite operatives are. Including the interpreter, we only have a total of three men, so we’ll take breaks in turns. Switch with the interpreter and tell him to take six hours off.”

“Yes, sir.”

*Click, click.*

Kwak Cheol-Ho went inside. Unlike the interpreter holding a rifle—which made Michelle and the special makeup staff have trouble breathing—he moved smoothly and without hesitation.

“Please make yourselves comfortable.”

“We will,” Michelle managed to answer.

Michelle glanced at Cha Dong-Gyun, then turned her attention to the dark sky.

She remembered the look in Gérard's eyes back in Apgujeong-Dong. He could be making those eyes somewhere right now...

Although she didn't know what happened, she somehow felt as if she shouldn't ask about his well-being right now.

Where was Kang Chan? Could it be that his replica that they had spent a day making was...?

Michelle shook her head to dismiss the ominous thought that kept nipping at her mind.

It was already past one in the morning.

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Seok Kang-Ho naturally stayed by Kang Chan's side.

Whenever he had to leave, even if just for a moment, he made sure to leave either Choi Jong-Il, Woo Hee-Seung, or Lee Doo-Hee in the room.

A loaded rifle was slung over his shoulder, and pistols were strapped to his waist and ankles. He had also outfitted himself with a bayonet and a radio.

The dripping blood packs, IV lines, a gurgling tube pumping in air, and a line that moved in steady waves were the only signs that Kang Chan was alive.

Soon, the radio crackled.

*Chk.*

-This is Manager Kim Hyung-Jung. Where are you, Mr. Seok?

"Jong-Il, take Hee-Seung and Doo-Hee and come up with an excuse. Tell them I'm in too much shock to meet them and that I'll see them tomorrow."

Choi Jong-Il nodded and left the room with the other two.

Seok Kang-Ho picked up a gauze pad and wiped Kang Chan's forehead, then gently took his hand in his own calloused, rough, and scarred hand. It was goddamn cold.

"Captain," Seok Kang-Ho grumbled. "Hurry and get up already. Seeing you unconscious like this is giving me trouble breathing."

Seok Kang-Ho looked at Kang Chan's face and hands, which were so white that they seemed as if blood had been sucked out of them.

"I didn't lay a finger on Gérard, that dumbfuck. So you better wake up from this. I told the men that you will, and I believe it too... but for the first time in my life, I actually feel afraid. I didn't even feel scared when I was dying in Mangala."

Seok Kang-Ho looked at Kang Chan.

"Get the fuck up!" he spat, then peeked at Kang Chan to see if he was listening.

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The next day, the chrysanthemums that the civilians had placed in front of the walls, gates, and sidewalks yesterday became blindingly white under the morning sun.

The Bangji Hospital was even more crowded now. The crowd was so large that the traffic on the road in front of the hospital now spanned twenty meters.

There was no reason for the president or any other government officials to visit. After all, a funeral had not been officially organized yet. Nevertheless, congressmen of the National Assembly and other politicians swarmed in as if stamping attendance books.

Kim Hyung-Jung took control of the hospital with Go Gun-Woo's permission.

Visitors were allowed, but only up to the makeshift incense burner that they had set up in the hospital yard.

"How is Mr. Seok?"

"He's in no condition to speak right now," Choi Jong-Il reported.

Kim Hyung-Jung sighed quietly.

It was currently two in the afternoon; twelve hours had passed since he arrived. Nevertheless, Kim Hyung-Jung still hadn't seen Seok Kang-Ho.

However, Kim Hyung-Jung no longer had the time to worry about him. He had to deal with a huge crowd of people, among which were a few politicians.

What if a terrorist attack were to target this place...?

With that possibility in mind, the members of the NIS counter-terrorism team darted around like madmen, pushing their way through the crowd, while Kim Hyung-Jung barked instructions into his radio like crazy.

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Aside from Yoo Hun-Woo occasionally popping in to change his IV drip and blood pack, Seok Kang-Ho was mostly alone in the hospital room.

Cup noodles, kimbap, triangular kimbap, lunch boxes, instant coffee, and chocolate bars were piled up on one side, but Seok Kang-Ho didn't even touch them.

His heart broke even more when he heard that Kim Gwan-Sik and Kim Mi-Young had come to visit, but there was nothing he could do.

Seok Kang-Ho's eyes were bloodshot, and his unkempt beard made him look even more grim.

"I'm hungry," he grumbled as he salivated. "Wake up already. I want to have some spicy stir-fried octopus with rice with you."

Seok Kang-Ho complained as if Kang Chan was listening.

"Don't you think we should return the favor to that Arab and the yellow-eyed bastard? It's getting late!"

Seok Kang-Ho stood up from his seat. He ached from sitting in the same position all night.

*Crack, crack.*

As he twisted and stretched from side to side, he heard refreshing pops come from his spine.

He then craned his neck from side to side while looking at the IV drip with curious eyes. Somehow, it seemed to be dripping more slowly.

*Could it be?*

“Don’t you fucking die on me, Captain! I’m going to kill you if you die like this!” Seok Kang-Ho growled like a beast, his red eyes glaring at Kang Chan. “What? Leave Gérard alone?”

From the darkest parts of his mind, venom rose and accompanied his every word.

“I’ll fucking twist Gérard’s neck—!”

Seok Kang-Ho swallowed the rest of his sentence with a gulp.

Kang Chan, although still pale, was now looking at him with barely open eyes. He then tapped the oxygen mask covering his nose and mouth.