

## **Blackfield 391**

Chapter 391: The Dice Are Cast (2)

“Oh!”

Seok Kang-Ho dashed over in shock and pulled Kang Chan’s oxygen mask down to his chin.

“Where’s... Gérard...?” Kang Chan asked weakly.

“He hasn’t contacted us yet,” Seok Kang-Ho replied quickly. “How are you?”

“How long was I out?”

Seok Kang-Ho checked his phone to confirm the time. “It’s... 4:03 p.m. the next day.”

“Help me up.”

“Cap, you just died. You really shouldn’t move right now. Let’s wait for Director Yoo to come and talk to you, then you can get up.”

“Daye.”

“Yes, sir.”

Once Kang Chan had said his name like that, Daye could no longer refuse orders.

“Do you remember when I was seeing stars when you were in Libya? Right now, Gérard is in as much danger as you were back then, so pull me up.”

Despite how pale Kang Chan was, his eyes still glinted.

Left with no other choice, Seok Kang-Ho placed down his rifle on a chair and put his hands under Kang Chan’s armpits to sit him up.

“Argh.”

Blood seeped from the bandages on Kang Chan’s chest.

“I’ll listen to the situation on the road. Find Choi Jong-Il and get ready to move.”

Seok Kang-Ho looked up from Kang Chan’s blood-soaked bandages and met the latter’s struggling gaze with a stern look.

“Cap, you were shot thrice near your heart. I’ll guard Gérard myself and protect him if things seem dangerous, so just stay here. I’ll bring Jong-Il and Hee-Seung and make sure we come back alive. I’ll protect Gérard no matter what. Trust me on this.”

Kang Chan had managed to sit up, but he was in too much pain to move.

“Daye.”

“Sir.”

“Thank you.”

Seok Kang-Ho sighed quietly, remembering what Kang Chan had told him when the Chinese had kidnapped him.

“Asshole! Who am I?”

Kang Chan had been covered in blood back then, but that was simply who he was. He would rather die than lose someone he cared about.

“I’ll make sure no one can touch even a hair on Gérard’s head, so don’t worry,” Seok Kang-Ho said firmly.

*Click.*

The door opened, and Yoo Hun-Woo entered. He initially looked dazed and surprised, but he soon frowned.

“What do you think you’re doing? Lie back down!”

Yoo Hun-Woo set down the IV drip, injections, and blood pack that he had brought with him on the side of the bed. He then grabbed Kang Chan by the shoulders.

“I said lie down!”

Seok Kang-Ho gazed at him with conviction, conveying that he would keep his promise. “Do as the director says. I have already given you my word, haven’t I?”

In response, with Yoo Hun-Woo’s help, Kang Chan finally lay back down.

“How can you be so…” Yoo Hun-Woo scolded Kang Chan as he switched out the IV drip and the blood pack. Unlike before, he sounded quite energetic now.

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Gérard spent the whole day with the TV on.

They were coming.

If not the Star of David, then it would be Seok Kang-Ho who’d come and pull the trigger.

Gérard stared at the TV. He had a loaded pistol, cigarette pack, ashtray, mug of coffee, and roll of toilet paper on the table in front of him.

For nearly the entire day, the TV repeatedly broadcasted the Bangji Hospital and Kang Chan’s achievements until he had memorized them.

The sun that lit up the morning disappeared behind the buildings. Darkness silently filled the room, and the light from the TV bounced around, making the studio look like a small movie theater.

“Haaa.”

Anxious, lonely, and frustrated, Gérard reached for his cigarette pack. There was just one left.

He put the cigarette in his mouth and flicked on the lighter, causing a red glow to cut through the darkness.

It had been a whole day since the incident.

Only Kang Chan and Gérard knew what happened. Kang Chan probably died and took the secret to the grave.

Gérard twisted his head from side to side.

“Fucking Star of David.”

It was absurd. How dare they mess with his head and make him kill the person he liked the most?

Gérard exhaled the cigarette smoke, eyes glinting.

Just then, the doorbell rang.

If it were Seok Kang-Ho, he would’ve punched in the code and let himself in.

Gérard grabbed the pistol from the table and headed to the front door.

“Gabriel!” he heard someone shout outside the door.

Backing himself against the wall, Gérard reached out and pressed the lever on the electric lock.

*Beep. Click.*

The door swung open.

Gérard pointed his pistol at the door. Gabriel, the man he’d seen on the airport security cameras—the man he’d heard was supposedly dead—stood before him with an odd smile on his face.

“There’s a lot of eyes on me. Do you mind if I come in?”

He barged in and closed the door behind him.

“You should turn the light on.”

*Click.*

Gérard flicked on the light with his left hand and gestured to the table with his pistol.

“Whew! What a stench!”

Frowning, the man opened a window as if he didn’t want the smell of cigarettes to get on his fine clothes.

“Let’s sit down.”

*Ha! Fuck it. Do whatever you want.*

Gérard sat across from him and rested his pistol on the armrest of the chair.

“How much do you remember?”

“The name Xairo and his face.”

The man looked at Gérard in amusement. “So you don’t know you’re Gabriel yet, then.”

Gérard tilted his head.

The man smirked again. “Gabriel.”

“You’re Gabriel!”

“Whoa, whoa!”

The look in Gérard’s eyes made the man raise his arms into the air as if to calm him.

“The Mermier family has always been part of the Star of David. We enjoyed wealth and glory until my father, your fool of an uncle, rebelled against the grand plans of the organization!”

It didn’t seem like Gabriel was lying.

“So?”

“Your father offered you, Gabriel, to the Star of David in hopes of getting a chance to rebuild the family name. I don’t suppose you’ve remembered that part yet, have you?”

“Just get to the point!”

“You’re Gabriel. I’m Gérard. Xairo, who raised you since you were young, gave you a mission: find the nuclear warheads hidden by Sergey Gee.”

“That doesn’t make sense. I didn’t have to be locked up for a year after my adoptive father died just to try to remember that.”

The bastard grinned slyly.

“It took you a year to remember Sergey Gee’s every move. Thanks to you, we found the warhead, and you were able to live.”

He glanced around the room like he wanted something to drink. Seemingly giving up, he looked back at Gérard.

“If it weren’t for your father, you would have died in Garnich, Luxembourg. Oh, do I have to say Luxembourg in a Korean accent for you to understand now? Anyway! Since you contributed to the great plan, you were spared and sent to your next assignment instead.”

Another dribble of blood trickled from Gérard’s nose.

“Don’t rebel. Don’t even try to remember. The moment you cross that line, you’re dead.”

Gérard tore off a long strip of toilet paper with his left hand and wiped his nose.

“Korean people are so weird. They wipe their mouths and noses with toilet paper. Seems like you’ve been here long enough to pick up strange habits,” the man spat out as if he found it pathetic. “I was sick of being a cram school teacher, and it was annoying to kill that girl named Kim Mi-Young! I didn’t think I’d get to leave Korea thanks to your achievement, though. Now, let’s get going!”

“To Garnich?”

The man nodded, looking pleased. Then, he put a hand in his breast pocket. Gérard immediately aimed his pistol at him.

*Click.*

“Hey! Put that down. I don’t have any weapons.”

Slowly, he reached into his inside pocket and pulled out a sinister-looking syringe.

“If you want to come with me, you’ll need to take this injection. It will stabilize you and help you make another contribution to the grand plan.”

Gérard cocked his head.

“I’m curious, who was that guy on the airport surveillance? I thought you died there.”

“Why do you care? I picked him up in France and made him have plastic surgery to look exactly like me. If he hadn’t been so clumsy, he would’ve lived longer.”

Seeing Gérard’s gaze, the man wet his lips and shook his head.

“There’s not much time. Give me your arm.”

In the blink of an eye, the man’s expression suddenly turned cold.

Gérard hesitated for a moment, unsure if he would survive the injection.

However, the only way to get to Garnich right now was through the shot that the bastard was offering.

Even if Gérard killed him, without Kang Chan’s help, Gérard wouldn’t be able to leave Seoul, let alone South Korea.

‘To avenge the captain, I have to endure this!’

Gérard thought back to how he had fought off his reaction to the sound of motorcycles.

They didn’t know that secret.

Making up his mind, Gérard held out his left arm.

“Good boy.”

Looking satisfied, the man pointed the syringe at Gérard’s arm. However, before he could inject him with it, they heard numbers being entered on the padlock.

*Beep. Beep, beep, beep, beep, beeeep. Click.*

The door opened, and Seok Kang-Ho entered the room with a ferocious gaze and expression.

“Daye...?” Gérard uttered in surprise.

Choi Jong-Il and Woo Hee-Seung walked in behind him.

*Click. Beep.*

The door slammed shut.

“What are you doing?” Seok Kang-Ho growled at Gérard with more hostility than the man sitting across from him.

Although he was speaking Korean, Gérard could now understand that much thanks to the lessons that Michelle had given him.

The man who was sitting across from Gérard looked at Seok Kang-Ho as he tried to understand what was going on.

“You! Do you know how to speak Korean?” Seok Kang-Ho asked. When the man nodded, he pushed his face closer to him. “Then tell that son of a bitch that the captain is looking for him.”

The man looked at Seok Kang-Ho with dumbfounded eyes.

“Kang Chan’s alive?”

“Fucking bitch! How dare you say his name!”

*Shing!*

Seok Kang-Ho pulled out a bayonet from his right leg and slammed the blade against the man’s throat.

“Just hurry up and tell him, you dumbfuck! I’ll be damned if I have to stop myself from chopping your head off longer than I have to!”

*Gulp.*

Feeling the bayonet pressing against his throat, the man swallowed and frowned.

“God fucking damn it!”

“Okay, okay! I’ll tell him!”

Seok Kang-Ho gritted his teeth, seemingly holding back the urge to slit the man’s throat. He then moved the bayonet away.

“Gabriel! He’s saying I should tell you that the captain is looking for you!”

Gérard looked at Seok Kang-Ho in surprise.

“Let’s go!” Seok Kang-Ho commanded, which Gérard easily understood.

“The captain is alive?” Gérard asked in French.

Unexpectedly, as if Seok Kang-Ho understood, he replied, “What made you think your useless aim and weakass shooting skills can kill him?!”

Gérard found it funny. With the help of Seok Kang-Ho’s expression and tone, he managed to understand him.

Kang Chan was alive!

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The funeral would be five days long.

The plaza in front of the Seoul City Hall and a couple of areas in every neighborhood were set up with incense-burning stations, making the Bangji Hospital relatively quieter.

Nevertheless, the NIS counter-terrorism closely guarded the area. After all, it was where Kang Chan's body was being kept.

Choi Jong-Il returned to the hospital. Only four hours had passed since he left.

*Chk.*

“This is Choi Jong-Il.”

Upon hearing the radio transmission, the armed agent guarding the hospital entrance approached the SUV. Using his radio, he then confirmed with Lee Doo-Hee if the vehicle should be let through.

“Manager Kim has moved to the mausoleum in front of the city hall. Mr. Seok, if you see anything unusual, report it immediately,” the armed agent said afterward.

“Understood.”

Once the armed agent had stepped back, the SUV went straight through the parking lot and around the back of the building.

*Creak.*

Choi Jong-Il and Woo Hee-Seung were the first to get out. They checked the stairs leading down to the basement from the back door.

Seok Kang-Ho got out next, then a tall, black-haired man dressed in baggy, hippie clothes.

Finally, a Frenchman in a neat suit hopped off and looked around.

Lee Doo-Hee fell in behind him, pushing his back.

The stairs led down to the basement and into the room where Kang Chan was.

“Captain...”

Kang Chan, who was lying on the bed, looked at Gérard. He then laughed like he couldn't believe what he was seeing.

“What's with that look?”

Gérard took off his floppy wig and extra clothes and approached Kang Chan's bed.

“That damn glare of yours is gone, huh?”

“It is?” Gérard confirmed.

Kang Chan then turned to the man who came with them.

‘How is Kang Chan still alive? He's been declared dead!’ the man thought.

Gérard quickly told Kang Chan what happened in his hideout. He also revealed that his name had been changed and that was almost injected with a syringe.

Meanwhile, Gabriel could only stare at Kang Chan blankly.

“The hypnosis you put on him has already been broken,” Kang Chan told him in French. “I don’t care what any of you say. This man is Gérard, so cut the bullshit.”

Gabriel gulped.

“This is the only question I’ll ask you. If you try to lie to me, I’ll twist your neck in a heartbeat.”

Gabriel couldn’t defy Kang Chan’s glare, which was only natural. After all, even Seok Kang-Ho couldn’t handle it. Shocked, he focused on what Kang Chan was saying completely.

“Why should I keep you alive?”

“What?”

Kang Chan frowned.

“Sorry, I couldn’t understand your question,” Gabriel immediately added.

Gérard understood French. From the conversation, he could tell that the Star of David members had a primal fear of Kang Chan.

He had thought as much, though. After all, most of them likely imagined Kang Chan as a serial killer with a bad temper and two pointy horns on his head—kind of like a cow.

“Tell me why I should keep you alive even though you’ve targeted Gérard!” the scowling serial killer reiterated. He now looked like he was holding back his annoyance.

“I can be useful to you during your negotiations with Xairo,” Gabriel replied, desperation now evident on his face. “You also need me to go to Garnich.”

“Gérard, you know how to go to Garnich, don’t you?”

“Yes, sir.”

Kang Chan shifted his gaze back to Gabriel.

“Xairo is waiting for me. If I don’t go, Xairo won’t stay still.”

“What’s the injection for?”

“Well...”

Kang Chan’s brows furrowed.

“It’s a drug that enhances the hypnosis you used on Gabriel.”

Upon hearing his reply, Kang Chan looked away. He had learned everything he needed to learn.



“Daye.”

“Sir.”

“Take care of him.”

“Without me, you’ll never get into Garnich.” Gabriel, who understood Korean, quickly interjected.

As Seok Kang-Ho walked over to him, Gabriel took a step back. He then raised his voice and pleaded to Kang Chan for mercy.

“Geez, you son of a bitch! You’re too fucking noisy!” Seok Kang-Ho growled.

Gabriel fell to the ground, his neck twisted in a gruesome fashion.

Chapter 392: You Found Out Too Late (1)

Ten days had passed since Kang Chan woke up.

During that time, a grand funeral was held, and the cremated remains were laid to rest at the Daejeon National Cemetery.

*Click.*

Yoo Hun-Woo Walked into a hospital room with an IV drip and five syringes. As soon as he entered, he looked at Kang Chan in disbelief.

Kang Chan had taken three bullets near his heart just a week ago, yet now, he was eating a sandwich with Seok Kang-Ho.

After Seok Kang-Ho twisted his neck, Gabriel was cremated in a coffin, had his bones finely ground, and was laid to rest at the Daejeon National Cemetery.

“Let’s clean your wounds first.”

Yoo Hun-Woo removed the bandages on Kang Chan’s chest. The sight made him shake his head in shock.

New flesh had formed, filling the holes left by the bullets.

After disinfecting and bandaging it, Yoo Hun-Woo exchanged the IV drip and stuck the syringe of drugs into it.

“What about the blood pack?”

“We have to inject the drugs first and wait two hours.”

“How’s Mother?”

“I’ll be honest. She’s on the brink of death. To make matters worse, she doesn’t have the will to live.”

Kang Chan wiped his mouth with a napkin.

“Please keep transfusing her my blood. All of this will be over in two weeks at most.”

“As you wish,” Yoo Hun-Woo replied with a look of frustration. Standing up from the chair, he added, “Dear Lord. I’m a doctor, yet I agreed to switch out a dead body! If this is discovered, I’m going to be a corpse dumper, aren’t I? I’ll also be the front man for public fraud of the South Korean citizens.”

As the one who treated Kang Chan and the last person to see him alive, Yoo Hun-Woo was inundated with interview requests from news channels, newspapers, and magazines. He was even asked by the government to give an interview to inspire patriotism.

“Mr. Kang Chan,” Yoo Hun-Woo said.

“Yes,” Kang Chan replied.

“I saw what you did in Afghanistan and the International Building on TV. While I was treating you, I found myself moved by your sense of duty. That’s why I joined this crazy project. To be honest, I still don’t understand why you’re doing this or why you’re willing to get shot for it,” Yoo Hun-Woo said with an uncharacteristically serious and heavy expression.

“Even so, leaving your mother like that is dangerous. I know you’re trying to protect Korea, and I know you’re worried about your mother more than anyone else, and the fact that you’re doing this must mean you’re dealing with something I can never imagine.”

Seok Kang-Ho quietly slipped away to get some coffee, likely because he found the atmosphere overwhelming.

“I hope you go see her before it’s too late. I think your father has reached his limit too.”

“Yes, sir.”

Yoo Hun-Woo told him he’d be back in two hours and left.

They decided to transfuse Kang Chan’s blood with Yoo Hye-Sook, who was bleeding uncontrollably, so the plan was to draw some of his blood today.

How could he ask if the sandwich was good? Seok Kang-Ho wanted to rip his mouth apart.

With how much Kang Chan cared about Yoo Hye-Sook, the sandwich was probably the last thing on his mind.

Seok Kang-Ho felt like he was going mad.

Kang Chan was in the basement, so he was only an elevator ride away from Kang Dae-Kyung and Yoo Hye-Sook. Seok Kang-Ho couldn’t even imagine how Kang Chan felt while listening to how his parents were doing from a place so close to them.

However, if Kang Chan stepped in front of Yoo Hye-Sook and something went wrong, everything would be ruined.

They could kiss a powerful South Korea and the plan to crush the Star of David goodbye, and they would go down in history as psychopaths who scammed the entire country.

For Kang Dae-Kyung and Yoo Hye-Sook too, wouldn't a dead son be better than the main culprit behind a national scam? The current government and the NIS would have to bear that burden too.

Kang Chan ate voraciously. He would get up as quickly as he could and twist his enemies' necks while their guards were down.

"Have some of this." Seok Kang-Ho handed him a mug full of herbal medicine.

Kang Chan gulped it down without question, then handed the empty cup to Seok Kang-Ho.

"Don't you think these assholes are too quiet?"

"They're probably nervous since they've lost contact with that Gabriel guy. Where's the chip?"

Seok Kang-Ho turned around and picked up a palm-sized pad from the table.

"Ha! Those punks!"

They got it from Gabriel's body. Initially, they thought it was a device to locate Gabriel, but after checking it a few times, they realized that it was tracking Gérard's movements."

*Those creepy bastards!*

They did all sorts of nasty things to Gérard.

An x-ray revealed a razor-thin chip at the junction of Gérard's back and neck, which was immediately removed.

The pad was as amazing as the chip. Not only could they resize the map with one's thumb and forefinger, but it was also so advanced that it showed everything—countries, regions, and even which building Gérard was in.

"This is..." Seok Kang-Ho adjusted the pad's screen with his thick fingers. "Clermont Ferrand, France... Those motherfuckers are going to be hella confused."

He broke into laughter.

"This will go to Germany, Spain, then Indonesia. Haha! The people who have to go through the airport CCTV footage are gonna have such sore eyes."

*I hope those motherfuckers' eyes hurt!*

"What about the preparations?"

Wiping the smile off his face, Seok Kang-Ho replied, "It'll all be done before dinner. We'll get the passport I asked Manager Kim in the evening. He's been trying so hard to convince me not to go. Why don't we at least let him know that you're alive, Cap?"

Kang Chan shook his head.

“We have to endure for now. I’m going to leave through the evening flight later anyway, so I just need to be careful today.”

Seok Kang-Ho nodded heavily.

“What about Jibril or whatever his name is?”

“Gérard says he picked the perfect location. I’ve checked his itinerary for Dubai.”

“Take one more look just to be safe. Tell him to keep an eye on the National Cemetery too.”

“The Jeungpyeong special forces team are all over that place. Apparently, Dong-Gyun called General Park Chul-Su and told him he got a tip that the enemy is going to vandalize the cemetery. I didn’t know he could use his brains.”

Kang Chan grinned.

If Yoon Sang-Ki and the rest of the Jeungpyeong special forces team were in the area, then he had nothing to worry about. No matter what special forces team came, those men would reign over them, especially on home ground.

“What time is it?”

“Five minutes before two.”

They had two hours left to draw blood from Kang Chan, and five hours until his departure.

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Kim Hyung-Jung’s face was half of what it used to be.

“How are the preparations going?”

“We’re done checking in with the local agents. We’ll do a final check in about an hour.’

In the Samseong-Dong office, Go Gun-Woo checked the passports, which were stamped with Arab photos. He was still not convinced.

Setting the passports to one side of the table, Go Gun-Woo looked at Kim Hyung-Jung with a weary expression.

“Do you think we can do this without the assistant director?”

“Even if we fail, it’ll end with the UIS infighting. They can complain all they want about the Korean agents in disguise, but they won’t be able to dispute it if we claim they’re wrongfully framing us.”

Worry was evident on Go Gun-Woo’s face.

“I wasn’t this concerned when the assistant director insisted we retaliate against our enemies, but for some reason, I feel worried now... Getting rid of Jibril is

something the assistant director wanted, and it's necessary for us too. However, the operation doesn't have a high chance of success. And regardless of whether it succeeds or not, I still can't help but think about the aftermath."

"We've been communicating with the Russian and Chinese intelligence bureaus, most notably Vasili, who even called me personally to make sure I have what I need."

Go Gun-Woo nodded.

Vasili's active support was a big reason he approved the operation.

Russian President Alexei had died of a sudden heart attack. Hence, it was no exaggeration to say that Russia was now under Vasili's thumb even though he was still at the South Korean base in Mongolia.

It was hard not to wonder if Russia was trying to take advantage of South Korea. However, it was impossible to back out now. If they hesitated, they could lose all of Kang Chan's hard-won vested interests to the Russians.

"Every time the phone rings, I see the president, and I remember that I am now the head of the NIS, I am reminded of how reliable the assistant director was." Go Gun-Woo smiled painfully and stood up. "Let's take the fight to them. We'll protect what he left behind and finish what he started."

"Yes, sir."

Go Gun-Woo patted Kim Hyung-Jung on the shoulder and left the room.

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"This is how you stick it on." Michelle placed the mask on the face of a special makeup team member. "When you apply the glue, you just have to make sure it doesn't stick out. Even if someone pulls on it, it won't fall off unless your skin is also ripped off."

Michelle pulled on the employee's cheek after sticking the mask on.

"Ow!"

Michelle quickly let go and apologized.

"It's a synthetic skin that's used to treat burns, so it wicks away sweat, and with a little BB cream for makeup, you can't tell the difference by sight or feel."

Gérard gingerly touched the cheeks and chin of the other mask that Michelle handed him.

"The issue is making the glue last. Hot water and water vapor weaken its hold, so you don't want to be in hot and humid areas."

"What about places without water vapor?" Gérard asked. Michelle then interpreted it for the special effects team leader.

“It’s dangerous to have your face heat up. If you ever sweat profusely, like after an extreme workout, the glue will only hold for another ten to fifteen minutes,” Michelle said, relaying the special effects team leader’s response. “If you can’t avoid situations like that, then the best thing you can do is cool your face with ice. If you don’t have any, you’ll have to make do with cold water.”

With her explanation over, all preparations were now done.

Gérard stuffed several masks, glue, faux leather for hands, and makeup into his bag.

“How much longer do we have to stay here?”

“I don’t know. All this should be over in a couple of weeks.”

Even a fool could have guessed what was coming based on the rifles that Cha Dong-Gyun and Kwak Cheol-Ho were holding and Gérard’s murderous eyes and expression.

The fact that Gérard was carrying the skins of a Frenchman and an Arab made the mood even more sinister and predictable.

“Be careful,” Michelle worriedly said.

Gérard smiled at her, crinkling the scar on his cheek.

That was the first time he had smiled so genuinely.

Just as Gérard was about to walk away, Michelle called out to him.

“Gerry.”

Gérard turned around, and Michelle threw her arms around his neck.

“Come back safely.”

Gérard stood still awkwardly, the bag of masks in his hand.

“Michelle.”

Michelle let go of him and looked Gérard in the eye.

“When you come back, let’s go for a scooter ride and have a nice dinner,” he said.

Michelle looked at him curiously, as if asking what he meant. She then gave him a pleased look, realizing that his hypnosis had likely been broken.

Gérard turned around and stood before Cha Dong-Gyun. Their eyes met.

Cha Dong-Gyun grinned and raised his right hand in front of him like an arm wrestler. In response, Gérard dapped him up and bumped chests with him.

They were comrades who had fought together in France, Afghanistan, and Africa.

There had been moments when Cha Dong-Gyun resented Gérard for what he had done to Kang Chan, but once he realized his true intentions, all those negative emotions vanished.

“Krak!”

Gérard clasped hands and bumped chests with Kwak Cheol-Ho the same way.

After a final farewell, Gérard walked toward the office door. Woo Hee-Seung, who had been waiting for them, emotionally watched Cha Dong-Gyun and Kwak Cheol-Ho leave before walking out the door with them.

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Yoo Hun-Woo continued to scold Kang Chan as he drew his blood.

“Mr. Kang Chan! Take a close look. It’s this medicine. You must apply this at least once a day, but if you have time, apply it more often. For the time being, keep your wounds bandaged as well. I prepared a generous batch for you here, so—”

“Got it, sir.”

“Don’t skip your medication, and no coffee for a while.”

Yoo Hun-Woo then gave Seok Kang-Ho a firm look.

“Alright, alright! He’s not a kid. No coffee! There!”

“I’ll leave it to you, Mr. Seok.”

Yoo Hun-Woo pulled the needle out of Kang Chan’s arms and then stuck a thumb-sized bandage over the needle, finishing all preparations. However, he couldn’t bring himself to leave the hospital room.

“What’s wrong?”

“Strangely, I feel uneasy. Should I follow you?”

Kang Chan and Seok Kang-Ho chuckled. Embarrassed, Yoo Hun-Woo laughed with them.

“Be careful, please.”

“I will.”

“Come to the hospital as soon as you get back.”

“Yes, sir.”

Yoo Hun-Woo didn’t know where they were going or what they were going to do. However, he could feel that Kang Chan was about to do something difficult.

“We really have to get going.”

“Please take care of my mother.”

“I’ll do my best. Don’t take too long.”

Yoo Hun-Woo left the hospital room with a wistful look on his face.

“He’s more affectionate than he looks,” Seok Kang-Ho mumbled. He then brought over a mug filled with herbal medicine.

“Hurry and drink it.”

“Where’d you get this?”

“Why do you care?”

*Why’s he avoiding the question?*

Kang Chan glared at Seok Kang-Ho with his mouth on the mug.

“It’s said to be the best medicine for women to replenish their blood after giving birth. Choi Jong-Il rush-ordered it, so have as much as you can.”

*Damn it! I’ll produce more blood even without it!*

Nevertheless, Kang Chan still finished the medicine.

“They say it’s also good for the uterus, but I think we don’t have that, so it doesn’t really matter... does it?” Seok Kang-Ho quietly muttered under his breath.

*Fucking bastard! You could have just kept that to yourself!*

Kang Chan, who was still lying on the bed, glared at Seok Kang-Ho. Soon, the door opened, and Gérard and Woo Hee-Seung walked in.

Gérard pulled out a bunch of masks and lined them up. They were all different sizes, but Seok Kang-Ho’s mask was instantly recognizable.

Once Choi Jong-Il had also entered the room, they wore their respective masks and listened to the instructions.

“I’ve got your passports. We’ll be picking up the weapons from our agents in Dubai.”

Now, only that final step stood between them and the operation.

Gérard put a thick layer of glue on the mask that copied Gabriel’s facial features. He then wiped Kang Chan’s face with a damp, warm towel, then dried it with another towel.

Afterward, he put the mask on Kang Chan starting from his nose. He pushed out the air bubbles, securing the mask to his face. Strangely enough, it didn’t have the thickness or feel of a mask.

“Huh!” Seok Kang-Ho exclaimed, seeing Kang Chan blink.

“You just need to wear the lenses to finish the look.”

“Hand them over.”

Kang Chan took the lenses from Gérard and put them on.

“Whoa!” Seok Kang-Ho exclaimed again.



Gérard held a mirror in front of Kang Chan, who laughed at the absurdity of it all.

“Let’s practice laughing first. You look weird laughing like that with a French face.”

“That’s true.”

While Kang Chan touched his cheeks, Choi Jong-Il put on the mask of an Arab man.

Watching the process felt different, but Kang Chan still laughed in disbelief and admiration afterward.

Seok Kang-Ho, Woo Hee-Seung, and Lee Doo-Hee disguised themselves as Arab men as well, completing their disguise.

Kang Chan thought it would be easy, but it took longer than he thought.

“Here’s your passport.”

How could they make the flesh on the hands seem so real too?

An Arab spoke Korean fluently and handed out the passports.

Everything was finally ready.

While Kang Chan got out of bed and changed, Seok Kang-Ho, Choi Jong-Il, Woo Hee-Seung, and Lee Doo-Hee put on clothes that Arab people generally wore.

*Damn it!*

They had to do all kinds of things just because of those motherfuckers.

Kang Chan slowly looked around the room and took a deep breath.

Their final battle was about to begin.

Having put up with so much shit already, Kang Chan was determined to end this once and for all. He would make sure no one would ever come at him again.

Jibril, the yellow-eyed bastard, and the Star of David—why couldn’t they just quietly live their own lives? Why did they have to mess with South Korea and its people?

*I guess you didn’t know any better, but it’s too late now.*

South Korea had the God of Blackfield now!

Chapter 393: You Found Out Too Late (2)

The building had eye-catching golden columns of varying sizes seemingly supporting it. It also had escalators expertly concealed behind black marble sculptures with gushing water.

The yellow floor; the lobby with its colorful, glowing patterns; and the luxurious sofas next to the walls—everything vied for the attention of those who entered.

Nevertheless, seemingly disinterested in all of it, four men in white suits walked straight up to the desk like wolves amid a cornfield.

“Welcome.”

Despite the manager's greeting, Choi Jong-Il just stared at him arrogantly.

Seok Kang-Ho quickly stepped forward.

"This is Mr. Mohammed bin Walad."

"We've been waiting for you. I thank the Lord for blessing me with the honor of meeting such a precious guest."

The manager of the Burj Al Arab Hotel clasped his hands together and greeted the group politely.

"I assume the room is ready?"

"Of course, sir." The manager flashed a toothy grin. "How would you like to make the deposit?"

Seok Kang-Ho nodded at Woo Hee-Seung, and Woo Hee-Seung placed a square Chanel bag on the information desk.

*Click, click.*

The bag was filled with 100-dollar bills.

"Thank you for preparing this! No deposit is required."

Seok Kang-Ho carefully whispered something in Choi Jong-Il's ear.

Choi Jong-Il nodded and looked at the manager.

"Mr. Mohammed bin Walad would also like to extend to you and your employees a blessing from the Lord," Seok Kang-Ho stated quietly as he pulled out three 100-dollar bundles and handed them to the manager.

"May God bless you, Mr. Walad," the manager replied with a moved expression. He accepted the money, then practically flew around the desk.

Woo Hee-Seung took the bag, and Lee Doo-Hee—also holding a bag—stood beside Choi Jong-Il.

"I will escort you personally. The Burj Al Arab takes pride in the room we've prepared for you. This way, please."

The hotel's exclusive room, which Seok Kang-Ho had booked, cost about \$30,000 a night.

Riding up the elevator with a view of the ocean, the manager opened the room on the right side of the hallway.

It had golden columns and red carpeting, a bed so big that four people could lie on it and not overlap, a sofa that looked like it could suck somebody in, and three other rooms.

What was the purpose of the big bed in the living room? Was it for people who'd be using the room alone?

"There's an iPad on the table to help you with your room. If you need anything, please let me know."

The manager politely walked away. Lee Doo-Hee then pulled out a phone from his breast pocket and pressed a button.

The sound of four Arabs chatting animatedly came over the speaker.

Lee Doo-Hee put the bag he had been carrying on the table and opened the lock. Afterward, he pulled out three palm-sized anti-bugging devices and handed them to Choi Jong-Il and Woo Hee-Seung. After a quick look around the room, the two placed and installed the devices in the most efficient places. They then regrouped.

Choi Jong-Il nodded, and Woo Hee-Seung nodded back.

They still couldn't let their guard down, however.

Lee Doo-Hee flipped the switch on the main device on the table.

*Blink, blink, blink.*

The red light flashed three times. Finally, the anti-eavesdropping device gave a steady blue signal.

“No bugs, sir.”

Lee Doo-Hee picked up the phone and cut off the men's conversation. He then removed the lining of the bag, revealing a pistol, silencer, bayonet, and magazines.

“Time check,” Seok Kang-Ho ordered.

“We have three hours,” Choi Jong-Il replied.

“Why is it so damn hot in this expensive fucking room?”

Seok Kang-Ho grabbed a white towel from a basket and wiped the sweat off his face.

Much like the room they were in, the ocean, anchored yachts, and buildings that looked like slices of watermelon created a view that reminded them that they were in an entirely different world.

Woo Hee-Seung pulled a map out of his bag and spread it out on the table.

“I saw a staff earlier stationed in front of the elevator connecting to the fifth floor.”

Seok Kang-Ho nodded in response.

This was something they were going to do anyway. One more staff member didn't matter.

“Check our weapons. Just to be safe, keep an eye on the entrance as well.”

“Yes, sir.”

Woo Hee-Seung and Lee Doo-Hee moved to the window of the first room inside, where they could see the entrance to the hotel. They'd be able to see Jibril entering easily.

Click.

Seok Kang-Ho chambered a round in his pistol and closed the chamber.

After dinner, Jibril had appointments to meet with three people in a row.

That was their opportunity.

The only way to get up to the special room was the private elevator, so they reserved a room that was worth tens of millions of won a night.

Seok Kang-Ho viciously glared at the door to the hallway.

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Alman bin Jibril looked down from the 139th-floor reception room of the Burj Khalifa.

The Burj Khalifa was named after Khalifa bin Zayed Al Nahyan, whose name meant flower. It was also the person that Jibril had met an hour earlier.

Jibril breathed out to stifle the laughter that kept coming. This must be how it felt to pour iced tea down a throat that had just swallowed ten dates at once.

He remembered the scene that he had seen on TV. Koreans weeping, holding white chrysanthemums and candles.

The Arab warriors in the heavens had to have clung to God. In response, for Jibril's sake, the great God threw the disgusting murderer into hell!

Jibril wondered if there had ever been a more exhilarating moment in his life. All that remained now was to hurry up and complete the next generation of energy facilities, join hands with the Star of David, and crush Russia's economy.

An infinite supply of oil would halve Russia's economy. Once it had, they'd launch a large, powerful attack on the ruble.

"Hahaha."

Although there were still many things to do, Jibril couldn't help but burst out laughing. After a moment, he composed himself and turned around. An attendant in a white dress quickly approached and leaned over.

"Cancel everything after dinner."

"Yes, sir," the attendant answered, then stepped aside.

It was time to show his power. He needed to show people that he wasn't like Abibu, who died in Korea like a fool.

Some people could think that he was already satisfied with everything he had. He had enough money to last a lifetime, so why hadn't he given some of it away?

People who were never wealthy always spat out words that showed how lowly they were.

For Jibril, wealth was a measure of ability.

How could insects who lived from paycheck to paycheck imagine the pleasure of accumulating wealth? He couldn't believe those things leisurely shopped and visited foreign countries when they were beneath him.

They thought they were equal to Jibril, to whom God had given a mission.

This world was doomed.

How could those insects, whom he could easily step on and force to tremble with his gaze, think they were his equals?

That was why Jibril hated people like Kang Chan—men who rebelled against money, power, and God-given authority.

The pathetic bastard could have enjoyed wealth and power for the rest of his life if he only bowed his head. Instead, he stood up for his country, people, and comrades.

In the end, someone he cherished sent a bullet through his heart.

Jibril let out a sigh as he felt exhilarating chills run through his body.

After dinner, he would cancel his schedule and get some rest. That way, he could display some more of his authority to the idiots who had been waiting days to see him.

“Moon Jae-Hyun?”

Jibril laughed like he was sobbing.

He pictured the South Korean president, who would probably stick his neck out to meet him just like the idiots staying downstairs.

Jibril would do whatever it took to make that happen. Now that Kang Chan had gone to hell, it would be easy to organize such an event.

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Kang Chan and Gérard sat in a small cafe in front of the old European architecture of Garnich. With a face filled with mixed emotions, Gérard then looked at the four-story building to their left.

“Calm down,” Kang Chan said under the Gabriel mask he wore. “They’ve probably checked the chip in your body now. Once Jibril is out of the way, they’re bound to move in some form or another. Maybe they’re already tracking our movements.”

“Oui.”

Kang Chan lifted his cup and sipped the strong coffee.

Yoo Hun-Woo’s warnings about drinking coffee were still fresh in his mind. Unfortunately, due to their long flight, his body kept demanding strong coffee.

*Click.*

As Kang Chan put down his cup, a polite-looking middle-aged white man sat down at the next table.

The man opened a newspaper. Soon, an employee approached.

“Coffee.”

The employee took his order and moved to the cash register.

“The building you mentioned is owned by the PEP Investment Bank,” the man said quietly in French.

German and French were common here.

“Investment counseling is currently taking place in the building, but the public is only allowed up to the second floor.”

The man buried his head in the newspaper, and Gérard scanned their surroundings while sipping his coffee.

“I’ve left the weapons in a gray van across the street.”

Kang Chan lifted his coffee cup as he looked diagonally across the street, finding the van that the man had mentioned.

“The agents in Dubai are waiting in a special room at the Burj Al Arab.”

The cafe employee served the middle-aged man his coffee.

“Thank you.”

He leisurely took the coffee up and raised it to his mouth.

When the employee left, Kang Chan began to speak without turning around.

“We’re going to the van.”

Gérard followed Kang Chan up.

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Ziegfeld glared out at the sea.

“You must be mad to call that a report!” he shouted into the phone, his voice unusually high and shrill. “Gabriel is roaming around a foreign country unattended? That would mean he has uncovered the secret, but how? He’d die if he ever refused to follow our orders! What about Gérard?”

After listening to the caller’s reply, he laughed in disbelief. However, he quickly regained his composure.

“Check Kang Chan’s grave! Cut off all contact with the outside world for the time being, and close the Garnich base until we get concrete results,” he ordered.

“I’m moving to Hawk Bay. Make sure you inform Parthal.”

Ziegfeld slammed the phone down on the table.

“Has the South Korean National Intelligence Service always been like this?”

He laughed hollowly, like a man who’d been ambushed.

“So Scorpion was correct? Or is someone toying with us from the South Koreans’ shadows?”

Even now, he still refused to believe in the South Koreans’ capabilities.

“Vasili...?”

Ziegfeld tilted his head and pushed himself up from the table.

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The container that Vasili was using had a wall that could be raised all the way, revealing the barren Mongolian landscape. It stretched out in front of him like an IMAX movie.

Vasili was sitting with the head of his bed propped up. Beside him was a table and Yang Bum sitting next to him.

Yang Bum lit his cigarette and blew out a puff of smoke. He then turned to Vasili. “How long will you be staying here?”

“Until the French snake contacts me,” Vasili replied firmly.

“So you think Mr. Kang Chan is alive after all.”

Vasili tilted his head with an unreadable expression.

“Don’t you think the French DGSE has been acting weird? Romain has been awfully quiet. Knowing him, he should be causing a scene right now.”

Yang Bum looked as if he agreed, but he simply stared off into the distance.

“We already know what the NIS is capable of. However, that doesn’t explain why they would be set on assassinating Jibril. What’s even more ridiculous is that the reports of the men we dispatched to Monsieur Kang’s office are too ordinary.”

Vasili’s lips curved into a mysterious smile.

“You’d do better to learn from Lanok than from me if you want to lead an intelligence bureau. That snake is always doing things that are hard to predict like him not contacting me yet. He’s more brutal than I am in that sense.”

“Isn’t brutality inevitable in the world of intelligence?”

“Hmph! He’s ordered the death of a whole French gang before and even killed the vice boss of the organization inside the embassy.”

“Well, that’s not too...”

Vasili glanced at Yang Bum and shook his head.

“The order was given on the assumption that they were involved with the Star of David, but Lanok had a completely different reason behind their deaths. Even the Star of David failed to realize that Lanok had done it to keep them in check.”

Was that such a big deal?

Yang Bum stubbed out his half-smoked cigarette in the ashtray. Since he had taken charge of China’s intelligence bureau, he had been hoping to learn from Lanok and Vasili. Unfortunately, though, he couldn’t see the importance behind Vasili’s story.

“Iran.”

What was Vasili talking about now?

Yang Bum looked at him curiously.

“Why the Quds rushed in during the UN mission, why Abibu and Jibril had control of the Quds, and why Iranian fighter jets came out when Monsieur Kang headed to Afghanistan.”

“What are you talking about?”

“The next-gen energy facility they’re building in Saudi Arabia is a decoy. The real one is being built in Iran, and Jibril is using it to normalize relations between Shiite Iran and the United States.”

“What does the US get out of that?”

“If Jibril offers Iran a share of the next-gen energy facility in exchange for its nuclear weapons, wouldn’t the US be tempted?”

Yang Bum laughed in disbelief. Truly, there were no eternal enemies or eternal allies in this business.

“I never thought I’d see a man like Monsieur Kang in the intelligence world. He’s the kind of person I’ve dreamed of since my days in the Spetsnaz and the KGB...”

Vasili sighed.

“A man with clear enemies and allies, someone who sticks by me through thick and thin, even when the odds are against me. That’s the kind of man I wanted to be in the intelligence world.”

Vasili’s eyes seemed to search for something in the distance. However, in the blink of an eye, he regained his stoic expression.

“That’s it. If Monsieur Kang is alive, then my actions right now will surely help him. If he truly has been killed, then this will be my final sign of respect for how he lived.”

Vasili shot a sharp glance at Yang Bum. Yang Bum held his gaze.

“If I return to Russia now, Russia and France will be fighting a bitter fight against the United States, Britain, Germany, and China over the development of the next-gen energy facilities...”

Vasili smiled coldly.

“... until a new power emerges to re-establish the balance that Monsieur Kang once maintained. Either way, the eventual winner will be the Star of David.”



With a weary expression, Vasili turned his gaze to the open plains.

\*\*\*

Creak.

Gérard and Kang Chan opened the doors of the van, finding it empty.

Gérard sat down in the second row, closed the doors of the van, and jumped over to the third row.

“Here they are.”

He carried a large sack forward. Pistols, MP5SD, rifles, magazines, bayonets, and grenades were inside.

Kang Chan attached a pistol to his waist and left ankle, and a bayonet to his right leg. He then strapped a leather belt with seven pistol magazines to the back of his waistband for extra ammo.

He loaded his rifle with a magazine and pulled the breechblock. Bringing a rifle into an investment bank that the public frequented would make him look like a bank robber, but he had no other choice.

European roads were often bumpy with stones. They were made for carriages and horses, and it was common to keep them that way in areas that didn't have much vehicular traffic.

The old European buildings seemed quite eccentric and creepy to Kang Chan.

He felt like there would be a terrified child somewhere in the buildings or a nobleman accusing an innocent woman of being a witch and torturing her.

He didn't know why he felt that way, though.

A throbbing pain made Kang Chan move his upper body around.

He wanted to end all of this once and for all and go back to Korea with Daye, Gérard, Choi Jong-Il, Woo Hee-Seung, and Lee Doo-Hee.

Kang Chan twisted his upper body to look at the cafe where he had coffee earlier.

“Captain,” Gérard sharply called.

Kang Chan's chest throbbed when he quickly turned back around, but he didn't pay it any mind.

“Xairo! That bastard is Xairo.”

He followed Gérard's gaze and saw the yellow-eyed bastard walking toward them.

Chapter 394: Don't Touch South Korea Even in Death (1)

Darkness swallowed up the day and swished its wicked tail.

The Jumeirah Beach Hotel at the front and the old buildings behind it shone brightly that night. Despite the spectacular evening view from the window, Seok Kang-Ho's face was full of ferocity.

“Where the hell is that bastard?”

It was long past the time they expected him to arrive.

Jibril was supposed to be staying in one of the hotel's suites for two days. He should also have at least three appointments scheduled for this evening. Unfortunately, it was already eight o'clock, yet he still hadn't shown up.

Seok Kang-Ho and his men hadn't contacted the National Intelligence Service agents since receiving weapons, equipment, and funds from them since they wanted to prevent any blame from falling on South Korea in the worst-case scenario. That was also the reason they only brought the phone that the agents stationed in this country had given them.

"How long has it been?" Seok Kang-Ho asked even though he had a rough guess.

"He's two hours late."

At the very least, to uphold his prestige and dignity, Jibril would definitely stay at this hotel.

Seok Kang-Ho looked out the window, his eyes glinting. Going out there to eavesdrop and observe until they learned more about the situation had to be wiser than standing around.

"Gather 'round."

Choi Jong-Il, Woo Hee-Seung, and Lee Doo-Hee approached Seok Kang-Ho.

"Let's use dinner as an excuse. We can try to eavesdrop on others while we eat to assess the situation."

Seok Kang-Ho picked up the iPad and selected a table, food, and time to eat.

"This is rice mixed with spices and topped with lamb. When you eat it, you gather the rice with three fingers and push it in your mouth like this."

Seok Kang-Ho zoomed in on the food and gave details about what he ordered and how to eat it.

"Establishments like this will probably offer a spoon, but I've honestly never eaten at a place like this before, so I'm not entirely sure. Let's just adapt to the situation."

"Yes, sir."

"I ordered some pitas as well. You can put some meat on them or dip them in curry or something. Also, you probably already know this, but never use your left hand to eat," Seok Kang-Ho advised, then stood up.

While he checked the pistol and bayonet strapped to his leg, Lee Doo-hee deposited the rest of their gear and weapons in the safe and locked it.

"If anyone tries to talk to you, look at me as arrogantly as you did earlier. I'll take care of it and whisper to let you know what's going on. You just have to act accordingly," Seok Kang-Ho reminded them one last time.

He headed out of the room first, walking into a corridor monitored with CCTVs. The three leisurely followed him to the elevator.

There were only two rooms on this spacious floor. It seemed like they wanted to make sure the guests had both ocean and city views in whichever room they stayed in.

Seok Kang-Ho stood in the front, followed by Choi Jong-Il. Woo Hee-Seung and Lee Doo-Hee brought up their rear, guarding Choi Jong-Il's back as they waited for the elevator.

*Ding.*

The elevator doors opened.

Seok Kang-Ho felt his heart sink. Five sharp-eyed Arab men stepped out of the elevator.

“Min Fadrick[1].”

They quickly blocked Seok Kang-Ho and Choi Jong-Il, giving the person inside the elevator safe passage to the hallway.

Seok Kang-Ho looked down to hide the flames in his eyes.

Jibril and his attendant were walking out together from inside the elevator.

*I should've waited a bit longer! Should I take care of them now?*

Jibril glanced at Seok Kang-Ho and Choi Jong-Il, then looked back away.

Unlike the other battles they had fought, Seok Kang-Ho and his men had to eliminate Jibril quietly and disappear. They couldn't start shooting and stabbing in the hallway and create an international conflict that would be difficult to resolve.

The bastard was already here anyway. They could simply go to his room later. For as long as they could make him open the door for whatever reason, then they'd be able to put an end to all this. A few bodyguards were nothing.

As Jibril disappeared into the hallway with his entourage, Seok Kang-Ho pressed an elevator button and waited for Choi Jong-Il. It was hard to talk since they didn't know if people were listening to them.

Just then, Choi Jong-Il raised his hand and called Seok Kang-Ho over.

Seok Kang-Ho politely leaned toward Choi Jong-Il.

“That was Jibril. Should we still eat?”

Seok Kang-Ho nodded, then silently pressed the elevator button.

There was no knowing where that bastard was going and when.

*Ding, ding, ding.*

The elevator doors opened on the third floor, and the four headed to a restaurant.

“Pretend you're being capricious. I'll tell them you don't feel like eating here anymore because there are other customers and ask them to bring the food back to the room instead. Act accordingly,” Seok Kang-Ho whispered, then led the way into the restaurant.

Since it was dinner time, there were quite a few customers in the restaurant.

A staff approached them.

Choi Jong-Il arrogantly raised his hand and called for Seok Kang-Ho. He then whispered something in his ear.

Seok Kang-Ho looked at the scantily clad white woman with a disgruntled expression. "It seems Mr. Mohammed bin Walad doesn't like the atmosphere of the restaurant. Bring the food to his room."

"Yes, sir," the employee quickly responded, ending the situation.

Choi Jong-Il turned around, and Seok Kang-Ho hastily moved in front of him.

The four then stepped inside the elevator and pressed the button for the 59th floor. The digital numbers changed quickly. Soon, they heard a ding.

The doors opened. Standing in front of the elevator were two Arabs whom Seok Kang-Ho believed were the bodyguards from earlier.

With Seok Kang-Ho at the front, the four stepped out of the elevator.

One of the guards approached the elevator, and Lee Doo-Hee stepped out of the way. Just then, the guard pressed the button to go up. He spoke into his radio.

"Elevator ready."

Things just kept getting out of hand.

Although only Seok Kang-Ho understood Arabic, the three behind him understood the word "elevator."

Was Jibril headed up to the 60th floor?

Seok Kang-Ho concealed his gaze and cautiously walked toward the room.

Click.

At that moment, Jibril's door opened, and over ten Arab bodyguards stepped out into the hallway.

Seok Kang-Ho felt like he'd been slapped in the back of the head.

A helicopter!

Based on the blueprints he'd studied, this hotel definitely had enough space on the rooftop for a helicopter to land on.

If they missed this opportunity, the bastard would fly away, and all of their efforts would be for nothing.

"Excuse me," Seok Kang-Ho said in Arabic. Jibril's bodyguards rushed to block his way. "My name is Dayeru, Mr. Mohammed bin Walad's attendant. Are you not Crown Prince Alman bin Jibril?"

*Du du du du du du.*

Amid the silence, they could hear the helicopter's propellers coming closer.

"The crown prince has an appointment. You'll have to contact him at a later time," the man at the front replied.

At that moment, Seok Kang-Ho looked back and raised his right foot.

*Shing. Spurt! Spurt! Spurt!*

Instantly, lines were drawn across three of the bodyguards' necks. A gush of blood followed.

*Whoosh! Whoosh!*

At the same time, Choi Jong-Il and Woo Hee-Seung rushed forward, pushing past the bodyguards who stood in their way.

*Spurt! Spurt! Spurt! Spurt!*

Seok Kang-Ho slit the throats of the bodyguards around him, and Lee Doo-hee did the same to the two who had run over from the elevator.

Screams filled the hallway as blood spurted from the men's necks.

*Click. Spurt! Spurt! Spurt!*

Seok Kang-Ho cut open the wrist of an enemy who tried to pull out a pistol, then repeatedly slit his throat.

*Whoosh! Jab! Jab!*

Choi Jong-Il grabbed another by the head and stabbed him repeatedly in the neck.

*Spurt! Jab! Jab! Jab!*

Meanwhile, Woo Hee-Seung thrust his bayonet into the nape of another bodyguard three times.

"Hurry!"

*Whoosh!*

Choi Jong-Il and Woo Hee-Seung rushed in, snapping Jibril's arms back and dragging him before Seok Kang-Ho.

Jibril, his eyes wide with terror and his face pale, stared at Seok Kang-Ho as if he were a ghost.

"I have a message from Assistant Director Kang Chan," Seok Kang-Ho said in swift Arabic.

Perhaps because of Kang Chan's name being mentioned, the sight of Seok Kang-Ho holding a bloody bayonet, or his arms being locked back, Jibril looked like a man possessed.

"Don't touch South Korea. Not even in the afterlife."

Seok Kang-Ho pulled back his bayonet and thrust it straight toward Jibril's heart.

*Jab!*

"Kegh!"

*Jab! Jab!*

He stabbed Jibril's heart two more times, rapidly turning Jibril's white garb red and making his face twitch.

*Shing!*

Finally, he slashed Jibril's throat so deeply that it was halfway open, completely eliminating any chance of recovery.

“Move!” Seok Kang-Ho commanded, and Choi Jong-Il and Woo Hee-Seung let go of Jibril and ran out into the hallway.

Lee Doo-Hee was already holding onto the elevator. The four jumped in and immediately pressed the button labeled “Lobby.”

*Ding, ding, ding.*

The doors closed and opened again because they had pressed the up button.

The elevator took only a moment to close its doors again, yet it felt like a thousand years.

“Good job.”

“You too, sir.”

Once the elevator doors opened again, there was no knowing who would survive.

This wasn't their original plan. Seok Kang-Ho was supposed to stop by Jibril's room and say hello. As soon as the doors opened, he would have dove in and eliminated him quietly.

However, they had no choice but to take out Jibril in the hallway. There was a good chance that someone had seen the whole thing on the cameras. If so, it would be hard to avoid a run-in with hotel security or the Dubai Police.

Seok Kang-Ho smirked as the digital numbers rapidly went down. Choi Jong-Il, Woo Hee-Seung, and Lee Doo-Hee drew their pistols.

*Uuurng.*

The elevator stopped in the lobby, and the doors opened with a ding.

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Xairo looked older than Kang Chan imagined.

Kang Chan lowered himself from the second-row seats and inhaled sharply as Xairo walked past the passenger seat.

He didn't expect to see an old man who reminded him so much of Kang Chul-Gyu.

The man's gait and body language alone told Kang Chan that he had mastered his special forces training to perfection, and his years of experience added to that. His broad shoulders, angular jaw, gaze that took in the slightest movement around him, and balance that kept him ready to take on any foe at any moment all proved that he was no pushover.

‘Damn it!’

Kang Chan swallowed a curse as he felt the pain in his chest.

The van's sliding doors took too long to open. It was plenty of time for Xairo to prepare.

Kang Chan wasn't afraid of him, but it didn't seem cost-effective to fly all the way here just to start a ruckus in the streets to get him.

He glanced at Gérard. The latter looked ready to pounce, yet his eyes were wavering. It wasn't easy to overcome one's primal fear of someone who oppressed them when they were young.

In the end, Kang Chan would have to deal with Xairo.

The man he was looking for had finally appeared, but the odds were stacked against him. They were right in front of the enemy's stronghold, the doors would take too long to open, his wounds still hadn't healed, and Gérard seemed to be losing confidence.

Xairo glanced at the van as he passed by it.

The tint was too dark to see past it. Still, his eyes glinted as if he could see through the glass of the second and third rows.

Seemingly disliking what he saw, he suddenly walked toward the van. Surely people could only see out from the inside, not in from the outside.

Gérard grew smaller as Xairo looked around the back and front of the van. If he moved toward the windshield, there would be no way to avoid him.

Kang Chan cocked his head and glared at him.

Then, Xairo resumed walking, as if he'd lost interest.

Kang Chan's gaze watched him walk past the van.

It would be difficult to chase after him if he went too far away, but they would catch his attention if they opened the door now.

"He went into the cafe," Gérard soon said, turning his upper body from the back of the van to Kang Chan.

Kang Chan stared at Xairo's back for a moment, gathering his thoughts.

*Then how about...*

"Gérard, do you have any way to remove the mask?"

*Ah, right. We have to immerse ourselves in hot water or make our bodies heat up.*

Kang Chan had a sudden thought.

"Go order about ten cups of hot coffee from the cafe where we had coffee."

"Do you think that will work?"

"Let's give it a try. Hurry."

"Yes, sir."

Gérard opened the door and got out.

It was just dark enough for the ominous buildings to light up one by one.

\*\*\*

Xairo walked into the freshly lit cafe and ordered a simple sandwich, coffee, and fries.

The cafe was deserted for the evening, which was unusual for Garnich.

Xairo glanced toward the entrance with a disgruntled look.

He understood Ziegfeld's concern, but there was no need to be worried about South Korea.

Even if Kang Chan was alive, even if Gabriel had come to his senses and run away, he was confident he could handle it.

*Click, click.*

As a large plate of sandwiches, fries, and a cup of coffee were placed on the table, a white-haired Parthal walked into the cafe.

*If only it wasn't for him...*

If it wasn't for that fool that Ziegfeld continued to shield and defend, things wouldn't have turned out the way they did.

Why would anyone trust a genius in economics and math to manage the intelligence world?

Receiving Xairo's gaze, Parthal walked over and sat down in front of Xairo.

He looked like he'd just returned from a round of golf.

The orange glow of the lampshade made the color of Parthal's hair look even more colorful.

"I assume you heard the order to come to Hawk Bay?"

"Isn't it safer to be with you? I'd rather stay here and go with you than be bored on the way there."

Parthal glanced at Xairo's plate. He then raised two fingers to get an employee's attention.

"Scrambled eggs, toast, and hot coffee."

The owner, who had looked over, nodded and headed to the kitchen.

"C'mon. Eat, Xairo."

Xairo picked up the sandwich and took a bite. "I feel like these orders are a bit too much..."

"I don't see why we need to go to Hawk Bay now that Kang Chan is dead and gone," Parthal said persuasively. "Why don't we take this opportunity to destroy the Korean facilities and take them out one by one like we did last time instead?"

Xairo, who was listening, took a large bite of his sandwich as if he wasn't interested in what Parthal was saying.

"What do you say? I think it'd be possible with your help."



Xairo set the sandwich he was eating on the plate and took a sip of his coffee.

“We still haven’t confirmed that Kang Chan is definitely dead.”

“Not you too! It’s been all over TV that he is.”

“I’m not interested in why everything I’ve been doing has gone so wrong. I’m only interested in fulfilling Mr. Ziegfeld’s orders,” Xairo said firmly.

As Xairo picked up his sandwich again, Parthal’s order was served.

Parthal picked up the pepper shaker and sprinkled it all over the eggs.

“When are you leaving?” he asked.

“Tonight,” Xairo responded.

“Have you already shut down everything here?”

“As Mr. Ziegfeld ordered.”

Parthal shoveled the eggs into his mouth with a fork. He looked surprised by its taste.

“I heard he told you to check on Kang Chan’s corpse,” Parthal remarked.

“We can do that when the opportunity presents itself—” Xairo paused mid-sentence, glaring at the entrance.

*Huh? Why is the legendary Xairo looking so nervous?*

Parthal turned to follow Xairo’s gaze. An Asian man was walking straight toward them.

Instantly, goosebumps rose on Parthal’s neck and cheeks. He hadn’t felt this way about anyone since the first time he’d laid eyes on Xairo.

How could someone have a gaze like that? Someone with eyes more intense than Xairo’s existed?

Parthal never thought it was possible.

Chapter 395: Don’t Touch South Korea Even in Death (2)

It would be foolish for Xairo to draw the gun at his waist right now. Sitting down with his hands on the table, he was at a hundred times the disadvantage of his opponent, who was on his feet.

‘Kang Chan...!’

More importantly, the man coming at him was Kang Chan—an Asian powerful enough to make him feel more terrified than he could ever imagine.

*If only Parthal could fight!*

The fool probably didn’t have a single pistol with him since Xairo was with him. He was so used to having others back him up that he likely didn’t even see this coming.

Xairo locked eyes with Kang Chan as the latter approached from two tables away, striding without any hesitation despite not having drawn his pistol either.

He was slender and unusually tall for an Asian. Most terrifying of all was the way he looked at Xairo.

Xairo saw the corners of Kang Chan's mouth curve up.

'That's it!'

Making up his mind, Xairo immediately threw the plate with the sandwich at Kang Chan.

Kang Chan tilted his head to avoid it.

*Whoosh!*

Xairo grabbed the knife next to the plate and lunged forward.

*Pow! Pow! Pow! Pow!*

In a split second, they traded such quick blows that they weren't visible anymore. Amid the flurry of attacks, Kang Chan jabbed Xairo's raised knee with his elbow.

*Swish!*

Afterward, he aimed for Xairo's throat with his second knuckles.

*Whoosh!*

Their hands collided twice.

*Pow! Pow!*

Kang Chan's elbow smashed into Xairo's jaw, and Xairo's fist hit Kang Chan's chest, causing blood to seep from it. Right after, Xairo jabbed Kang Chan's eyes.

*Pow! Pow pow!*

Seeing the owner of the cafe pick up the phone, Parthal shook his head at him and moved to the entrance. Seeing the blood on Kang Chan's chest and watching Xairo triumphantly stab Kang Chan in the eyes made Parthal confident.

*Of course! Everyone in Garnich knows Xairo doesn't take any losses!*

*Pow! Pow pow pow!*

Within the next moment, Xairo relentlessly slashed Kang Chan's left chest while also aiming for his eyes with his pointed index and middle fingers.

*Pow! Pow! Pow!*

Amid the ceaseless collision of fists and elbows, Kang Chan was once again punched in the chest.

*Pow! Pow!*

In response, he elbowed Xairo's jaw in quick succession.

*Clang! Crash! Clang!*

Xairo fell back onto a table, knocking over chairs, plates, and glasses across the floor.

If it was any other man, this would've marked the end of the fight.

*If only it wasn't the pain in my chest!*

Kang Chan didn't even get the chance to lunge forward.

*Swish!*

Xairo threw the checkered tablecloth at Kang Chan's head, then launched himself at him.

*Crash! Bang! Bang! Pow! Pow! Pow!*

Entangled, they knocked over two more tables before hitting the wall of the cafe.

They barely managed to regain their footing. With Kang Chan's chest covered in blood, at first glance, it would seem that Xairo was close to winning the fight.

*Whoosh!*

However, Kang Chan kept hitting Xairo's jaw with his elbow, and Xairo kept punching Kang Chan in the chest.

*Pow pow pow! Pow!*

More blows were exchanged as they moved away from the wall.

*Whoosh! Pow!*

As Kang Chan's elbow smashed into Xairo's jaw, Xairo punched Kang Chan in the chest with eerie force.

*Pow pow pow! Pow!*

After another collision between fists and elbows, they again targeted each other's chin and chest.

Their willpower and determination to take the other down brought forth this rare sight. Their opponent was too strong to emerge victorious without sacrificing something.

Xairo was covered in blood from his nose and mouth, while Kang Chan had blood all over his chest.

Gritting his teeth, Xairo threw another punch. At the same time, Kang Chan swung his elbow with a venomous glare.

*Pow! Crack!*

They both got what they wanted.

*Pow! Pow! Pow! Crack!*

They traded elbows and punches again, repeating the same motion so many times that they almost looked idiotic.

Kang Chan couldn't breathe because of the pain. He chewed on his cheek to steady his fading consciousness.

Every time Xairo's fist slammed into his left chest, he felt like long needles were piercing through his veins. He had never met a special forces soldier who seemed as strong as Kang Chul-Gyu.

*This must be how it feels to have that old man as an enemy.*

*Pow! Crack!*

He punched Xairo's jaw again and took another to his chest.

He had to breathe. He needed to hear him breathing.

At that moment, he heard Kang Chul-Gyu's voice and saw him smirking.

'You'd let that man defeat you?'

*What the hell is that old man saying?*

*Haah. Haah.*

Kang Chan caught a glimpse of Xairo's crushed nose and mouth. His nose had been twisted into a bloody mess. Right after, he saw Xairo throw another punch.

*You son of a bitch!*

*Thwack!*

Kang Chan swatted the punch away like a fly.

*You're nothing compared to that old man!*

A moment of panic flashed across Xairo's eyes.

*Crack! Crack! Crack! Crack!*

Kang Chan elbowed him repeatedly in the nose.

*Crash! Crash! Clang! Bang!*

Xairo fell to the floor along with a couple of tables. A heavy silence then filled the restaurant.

When Kang Chan turned to the owner of the cafe, who had picked up the phone, the latter backed away with his hands raised.

Kang Chan then looked at Parthal, his eyes still glinting fiercely.

*Flinch!*

What kind of pathetic bastard was Xairo meeting?

*Rustle.*

Just then, Xairo stirred from among the broken crockery and overturned chairs.

'Huh?'

Kang Chan didn't miss the brief moment when Xairo turned toward Parthal. His eyes were filled with regret for not being able to protect Parthal.

For now, Kang Chan had to prioritize immobilizing Xairo and getting out of the cafe.

*Crack!*

Kang Chan mercilessly kicked Xairo in the face.

*Thud.*

The bastard fell lifelessly to the floor.

“You!” Kang Chan growled at Parthal in French.

Parthal, who was looking at Kang Chan, flinched.

“Pick this asshole up.”

Parthal, who seemed to be in a trance, obediently approached Xairo.

Kang Chan looked at the cafe owner as if to warn him one last time. He found it ridiculous that he had to treat a civilian this way, though.

“Argh.”

*Motherfucker!*

The white-haired bastard was only sitting Xairo up, yet he sounded as if he was lifting the weight of the Earth.

Xairo’s face was covered in blood, making him look as if he was smeared with red paint.

Kang Chan grabbed Xairo’s left shoulder and arm, then pulled him to his feet.

‘Argh!’

Kang Chan grimaced as a shocking pain ripped right through his chest.

“Argh!”

However, his expression only made Parthal stick his shoulder under Xairo’s right shoulder and noisily exert even more strength.

Kang Chan and Parthal dragged Xairo out of the cafe.

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The moment the elevator doors opened, Seok Kang-Ho blocked Choi Jong-Il, Woo Hee-Seung, and Lee Doo-hee with his left hand.

How could they be so fast?

*Click, click, click!*

Security guards with pistols, police in black body armor with machine guns, and uniformed cops.

The red laser crosshairs from the machine guns eerily illuminated the foreheads, necks, and hearts of the four men.

Choi Jong-Il and Woo Hee-Seung glanced at Seok Kang-Ho with their pistols lowered.

If they moved now, they’d be honeycombed from the bullets, and it would all be over.

“Don’t move!”

*Fucking bastard! Nobody moved in the first place!*

Seok Kang-Ho glared at the cops in front of him with glinting eyes.

What would Kang Chan have done if he was faced with this crisis?

“Drop your weapons!”

Seok Kang-Ho turned his head to Choi Jong-Il, Woo Hee-Seung, then Lee Doo-Hee.

“Drop your weapons!”

*Click!*

The nervous cop tightened his grip on his pistol.

*What should I do? Should we go out with a bang since we've already accomplished our goal anyway?*

At that moment, Seok Kang-Ho made eye contact with Choi Jong-Il. Seeing Choi Jong-Il's fearless gaze, he cursed inwardly.

‘Son of a bitch! What am I thinking!’

If Kang Chan, who had flown to Libya in an F16 for his men, were to choose what to do in this situation, would he pull the trigger and let them die? Or would he tell his subordinates to live on?

“Drop the guns,” Seok Kang-Ho ordered.

Woo Hee-Seung and Lee Doo-Hee stared at Seok Kang-Ho in confusion, and Choi Jong-Il swallowed hard.

“Hurry up and drop your guns!” Seok Kang-Ho shouted.

*Son of a bitch! Lower your weapons already!*

“If we die here, they'll know we're Korean anyway. Let's just say that the four of us are here to avenge the death of our captain rather than have our country take the fall.”

The three men gritted their teeth.

“The torture will be severe, and the outcome will be a public execution. We'll probably only see each other then. Don't forget. I convinced you to come on this operation to take revenge for our captain.”

Choi Jong-Il shook his head briefly. It would be too much for Seok Kang-Ho to carry alone.

“You don't know Arabic, so just tell them that I prepared everything, from the weapons to the rest of it. If you give a half-assed answer, it'll be worse.”

Seok Kang-Ho then turned around and slowly crouched to the ground.

*Click.*

He then set his gun down on the floor.

*Click! Click! Click! Click!*

The rifles and pistols in front of them turned to Choi Jong-Il, Woo Hee-Seung, and Lee Doo-Hee, seemingly hurrying them to set down their guns.

Grimacing, the three lowered their stances and dropped their pistols to the ground.

“Push your weapons forward!”

As ordered, Seok Kang-Ho pushed the pistol away with his foot. The others did as well.

*Whoosh! Whoosh!*

An officer wearing body armor charged forward.

Seok Kang-Ho saw a man on the third-floor ledge across the street filming the scene on his phone.

“Allahu Akbar[1]!”

*Pow! Pow! Pow!*

The rifle’s buttstock was aimed at Seok Kang-Ho’s face and chest.

“Allahu Akbar!”

The three men didn’t know why, but there must have been a reason Seok Kang-Ho shouted those foreign words in his final moments.

Choi Jong-Il, Woo Hee-Seung, and Lee Doo-Hee shouted words they didn’t even understand as they were beaten in the face, chest, and neck.

*Pow! Pow! Pow!*

The horrific beating continued as their hands were tied behind their backs and their mouths were gagged.

Afterward, the four bloodied men were dragged out of the hotel like dogs.

\*\*\*

Crumpling Xairo into the second-row seat of the van, Kang Chan slid Parthal in next to him and closed the door.

*Vrooom!*

Gérard quickly jerked the van into high gear.

It was a dark evening. The only silver lining was that the roads were not lined with CCTV cameras like in Korea.

As they drove along the stony road, Kang Chan felt a sharp pain in his chest.

*Clunk! Clunk!*

Gérard turned off the road and onto a quiet country lane.

A large tree loomed over the van like a one-armed monster amid the European grasses, its branches hanging down to stare at the van.

Parthal flinched as Kang Chan turned his eyes away.

‘Is this guy a bit dull?’ Kang Chan wondered. The man’s white hair and gaze didn’t seem normal.

*Clunk! Clunk!*

The van veered off the tolerable country road and onto a path that couldn’t even be called a road.

*Creak.*

As Kang Chan looked around, Gérard got out and came back around to the back door.

“I’ll go take a look just to be safe.”

Kang Chan nodded. Gérard then headed toward a wooden shed. It looked like an abandoned country house at first glance—the kind of place one would store a bale of hay or tools.

*Crank!*

Gérard opened the old door and stepped inside, then came back out.

“You can go in now.”

“Bring this bastard with you.”

Gérard grabbed Xairo’s upper body from behind and pulled.

*Rustle.*

A hard kick to the face like earlier would put Xairo in a drunk-like stupor.

Kang Chan watched Parthal as Gérard dragged the staggering Xairo to the warehouse.

Parthal was trying to look relaxed, but he ended up looking quite pathetic instead.

“Go on in.”

Parthal awkwardly entered the warehouse.

*Creak. Clunk.*

Kang Chan closed the door and looked around.

It looked just like any other warehouse. It was covered in dust and had a pitchfork and hay bundled in squares. Its second floor was lined with a railing.

*Riip! Rip! Rip!*

Gérard sat Xairo against a pole and wrapped him up with the tape he had brought.

They hadn’t told him to, but Parthal obediently stood meekly beside Xairo.

Gérard dusted off a dusty chair and brought it to Kang Chan.

‘Argh.’

As he sat down, pain shot up once more from the chest area where he’d been hit earlier. He could also taste fresh blood on the inside of his cheek, which he had bitten.

Kang Chan turned to the white-haired man.

“What’s your name?”

“Parthal, sir.”

This is the bastard that Xairo looked at with pity earlier.

*Was I tricked by him?*



“What was your mission?”

At that moment, Xairo, finally coming back to his senses, gave Parthal a pitying, frustrated glance.

“Don’t tell him!” he yelled through a mouth full of blood.

“Tape his mouth too.”

Gérard jumped to his feet and wrapped Xairo’s mouth with tape.

Gérard and Xairo’s eyes met, but Gérard had shaken off some of the timidness from earlier. The blood that had stained Kang Chan’s chest seemed enough to make him feel murderous.

“Give me a cigarette.’

Gérard dusted off his hands and pulled out a cigarette and lighter.

*Flick.*

“Whew. I’ll ask you one more time. What do you do?”

Looking at Xairo, Parthal kept his mouth shut.

They couldn’t afford to waste any more time.

“Xairo, you remember the injection you sent?”

Receiving Kang Chan’s gaze, Gérard pulled out the evil-looking syringe from his inner pocket.

“I heard you become obedient after being injected with this. I was originally planning to use it on you, but I’ll test it out on him now.”

“Urrgh! Urrgh! Urgh!”

“You think that bastard will be able to escape from this place?” Kang Chan asked. He then nodded at Gérard, who walked toward Parthal with the syringe.

Amid his hesitation, Parthal drew back. However, Gérard punched him in the stomach, making him bend forward.

They were running out of time.

Gérard immediately injected the syringe into the nape of the toppled man’s neck.

*Stab.*

*Thud.*

The moment the man fell to the side, Xairo’s gaze also dropped. He looked like a man who had given up on everything.

*Why would you attack us, huh?*

Chapter 396: Uncovered Secrets (1)

Go Gun-Woo turned off the TV and set the remote control down on the side of his desk.

First came a report from a National Intelligence Service agent, then a video on the internet, and then a foreign news organization reported Jibril’s murder as breaking news.

“Using Mr. Seok’s shout at the end, I think we can negotiate behind the scenes... Why don’t we try to talk to Vasili in Mongolia?”

With Kang Chan gone, the realization hit him again. The head of South Korea’s National Intelligence Service was not even in a position to meet with Vasili. It was painful and embarrassing, but the reality was sobering.

“Director, why don’t you go see former Ambassador Lanok in the hospital first? He has a direct line to Vasili. We’ve established friendly relations with him, and he’s just in the Bangji Hospital, so I’m sure you can request a meeting right away,” Kim Hyung-Jung suggested.

Go Gun-Woo’s face lit up. “Good idea. Let’s make an appointment with him.”

“We need to know how Mr. Seok and Choi Jong-II will confess. Coming clean by saying that we ordered the assassination is something we need to consider.”

Go Gun-Woo exhaled loudly. “Hmm.”

He had gotten ahead of himself. He had never done anything of this magnitude before and he was far too inexperienced. His connections in the intelligence world were too few and far between.

This moment taught him the importance of a world-class talent.

“I didn’t think it through.”

Although Go Gun-Woo had been showing his emotions quite frequently lately, he was an administrator through and through. He knew how to listen to the opinions of Kim Hyung-Jung and other advisors.

“Let’s wait and see what our agents have to go on, but go ahead with the meeting with Ambassador Lanok. We’ll move accordingly afterward.”

Go Gun-Woo glanced out the window and remembered the two men.

The always confident Kang Chan and Lanok, who always seemed to have a mask on.

\*\*\*

Lanok was leaning against the bed with his head propped up, his eyes glued to the TV. It was a satellite broadcast specializing in international news.

“More tea, please.”

“Yes, sir.”

Raphael, dressed in a suit, lifted a fine china teapot and poured black tea into cups that seemed to be a set.

*Glug.*

The white porcelain cups were filled with rich black tea. Wisps of steam rose from them.

Raphael set the cups on a tray, and Lanok lifted one with difficulty and took a sip.

“I wish I had a cigar.”

Raphael turned and set the tray down on the table as if to hide the smile that tugged at the corners of his mouth.

“Raphael.”

“Sir.”

Raphael turned back around and politely bowed.

“Who do you think will contact the other first? Me or Vasili?”

Raphael’s expression remained ever-faithful as he stood before Lanok, who had turned his head slightly toward him.

“You look like you’re going to say you can never predict the future.”

“In the thirty-five years I’ve served you, Commissioner Lanok, I’ve always been in the dark.”

Lanok grinned, his gaze returning to the TV.

“I’m afraid I’m going to have to lose this one. Vasili’s patience has grown quite a bit. In the past, he would’ve already—”

*Ring, ring, ring.*

Lanok turned his gaze in amusement, and Raphael brought the phone to him.

\*\*\*

Setting the phone down on the table, Vasili looked at Yang Bum across from him with a displeased face.

The still-cool air outside felt good as it rushed through one side of the open container.

There was a short beep to indicate that the other person had picked up.

- Vasili, it’s been a while.

“Hmph! I was hoping to confirm you were dead, but as always, you disappointed me.”

- It’s all thanks to your interest in me.

The call was on speaker.

Yang Bum, who was listening, gave Vasili a sideways glance that said, “You two are certainly something.”

“Yang Bum is listening,” Vasili said.

“It’s nice to hear your voice again, Commissioner Lanok.”

- The hard times have passed. It’s only a matter of time before we meet face-to-face again.

After the two men exchanged greetings, Vasili said, “Jibril is dead.”

- I saw it on the news a little while ago.

Vasili gazed at the wilderness with a wry smirk.

“A Korean agent could never do that on his own. If you insist on displaying the sly and dark mind of Frenchmen, I’ll also step aside now.”

A short silence permeated the call.

- Let’s take it easy, Vasili. We’re both wounded.

It was an unusually generous answer for Lanok.

Vasili was smiling happily, something Yang Bum had only ever seen today.

“I should prepare a gift for the main character, then.”

Yang Bum whipped to Vasili in surprise.

- The least we could do is repay him with a small gift.

Lanok’s response was even more surprising.

How could these people be so sure that Kang Chan was alive?

Before Yang Bum’s bewildered gaze, Vasili’s cold eyes curved into a smile.

\*\*\*

Parthal’s answers made Kang Chan feel as if he had lifted a fishing rod thinking he had hooked a small fish only to get a carp the size of a forearm.

“Who ordered the deaths of the South Korean agents in Libya?”

“Xairo.”

Under Kang Chan’s gaze, Xairo looked like he’d given up on everything now.

“Why were they killed?”

“To silence the agent who leaked information to the head of the Korean National Intelligence Service.”

Kang Chan exhaled quietly, pushing down his rising frustration.

He had so many questions that needed to be answered. Unfortunately, he didn’t know how long the medicine would last, and he didn’t know when the enemies would come running over.

“Is Xairo also the one who targeted the Korean agents who went to Libya to retaliate?”

“Yes. I heard he almost ran into you there.”

Kang Chan tilted his head.

“I heard you bumped into him while exiting the truck.”

The memory flashed through Kang Chan's mind.

That motherfucker!

Kang Chan glared at him mercilessly, yet Parthal just stood there, his face as ecstatic as if he were dreaming.

"Who's in charge of the Star of David?"

"Right now, Ziegfeld."

*Thud. Thud. Thud. Thud.*

"Mmmrphh! Mmmmrphh! Mmrph!"

Xairo, who seemed to have given up all hope, slammed the back of his head onto the pole in an attempt to stop Parthal from talking.

"Where is Ziegfeld now?"

"I believe he's in Hawk Bay."

"Hawk Bay? Tell me exactly where that is."

*Thud. Thud. Thud. Thud.*

Kang Chan signaled to Gérard, and Gérard walked over to Xairo.

"If you're going to ruin someone's life like this, at least show some remorse at the end."

Xairo looked at them with disregard.

"If Captain died by my hands..."

Gérard, who had been glaring at Xairo viciously, delivered a powerful kick to Xairo's head.

*Pow! Thud!*

Xairo's head hit the pole, then dropped to the ground.

Kang Chan repeated his question.

"It's a port in Bermuda. About two hundred kilometers from there is an island that isn't on the map."

"What are its defenses?"

Parthal's face lit up with pride. "Surface-to-air missiles, two submarines, a radar station, air defense artillery. That's all I know."

"Is that where the Star of David is headquartered?"

"It's where the Star of David hides when they feel they're in danger. The Star of David is not an organization but the operator who runs the finances of those in power. If Ziegfeld dies, the next Star of David will be me."

Parthal couldn't be more ecstatic. His expression almost made Kang Chan punch him in the face. However, Gérard seemed to have other ideas.

"I think it would be fun if we can control him well," he suggested.

Since Kang Chan had already started asking questions anyway, he decided to ask a few more things, from Moon Jae-Hyun's assassination attempt to the attack on the International Building.

"It's something I planned with Abibu."

"How do you contact Ziegfeld?"

"I have a phone," Parthal answered. Suddenly, he started shaking all over. He trembled so profusely that he fell backward.

*Thud!*

Around twenty minutes had passed. It would be foolish to stay here any longer.

"Gérard, take care of that bastard."

"Yes, sir."

Following Kang Chan's instructions, Gérard walked toward the cage and lowered himself to one knee.

*Thud.*

Gérard propped Xairo's forehead with one hand and his chin with the other. "It's infuriating that taking this revenge has been so easy. Even so, remember one thing."

Xairo blinked and twitched, his consciousness seemingly returning. The blood from his nose made him breathe with an odd gurgling sound.

"Never play with another man's life again..."

Like a master trying to ignore the rebellion of a lifelong servant, Xairo just kept staring at Gérard with disdain.

"And don't ever go against the captain again. Not even in death."

The corners of Xairo's eyes twitched briefly.

*Swish! Crack!*

Gérard twisted Xairo's neck perfectly so that his chin ended up pointing skyward. He then pushed himself to his feet.

"Let's get that asshole in the car," Kang Chan said.

Gérard grabbed Parthal's arms and dragged him out of the warehouse.

"Ziegfeld..."

Kang Chan's brows furrowed as he stood up.

\*\*\*

Sitting in his private airplane, Ziegfeld couldn't take his eyes off the TV report.

He felt uneasy. Something was off. He felt a strange tingling in his heels even when he said he'd killed the Great Ant.

“Was it a scorpion in the end?”

What he found most frustrating was his inability to objectively confirm if the bastard was dead or not.

Vasili or Lanok could have simply pretended to be the Great Ant using the Korean National Intelligence Service.

“Hmm.”

It was best to get out of a bad investment as quickly as possible.

The two men he went to Korea with were both dead, and the NIS agents he barely managed to lure over to his side had all been arrested.

“That idiot...!”

They wouldn't be in this predicament if it weren't for Abibu's stupidity.

It was all fine and dandy until he recruited a Libyan agent to send fake information, orchestrated the timing through a South Korean agent, and Abibu used that to kill the agents. If he hadn't been so stupidly egotistical enough to target the International Building...

*Ring, ring, ring, ring.*

Just then, the phone rang, interrupting Ziegfeld's thoughts.

Picking up the phone to see who it was, he smiled softly, which was unbecoming of the situation.

Today's failure was just an ant bite.

In the long run, there were dozens, maybe hundreds, of ways to bring Korea down. The thriving Parthal would push Korea into a quagmire within the next decade.

Ziegfeld pressed the call button with satisfaction.

“Where are you? I said we should go together.”

However, instead of Parthal, a young, strong voice called out to him.

- Ziegfeld.

Ziegfeld quickly lowered the phone, checked the caller ID again, and hurriedly brought the phone to his ear.

“Who are you?”

- I asked if this was Ziegfeld.

*Could this guy be...?*

Ziegfeld shook his head. Even if the man was alive, he couldn't have Parthal's phone.

At that moment, an eerie slap was heard over the call.

*Pow!*

A familiar scream followed.

- Argh!

“Parthal! Was that Parthal?”

- This is fun. Try the other side this time.

*Pow!*

- Argh! Aaargh!

A surge of both horror and anger made Ziegfeld’s hair stand on end.

“Who are you? How dare you hurt that child...?!”

- Should I kill him?

Ziegfeld’s mouth clenched shut.

- Ziegfeld?

“State your demands.”

A chuckle came from the other end of the phone.

- Choose. Will you die after Parthal dies, or will you live a life of eternal submission to the Republic of Korea? Did you think I’d die so easily, you idiot?

Ziegfeld felt a chill run down his spine.

He thought this could be the case. Somehow, he had expected that this horrible Korean wouldn’t die.

- It seems like you’re having a tough time choosing, so I’ll decide for you instead. Food always tastes better when it’s ordered by someone else, after all.

Ziegfeld couldn’t think of anything to say in response.

- I’ll kill you in order. Go hide where you want.

“What are you going to do to Parthal?”

- He’s going to apologize to our NIS Director, the Director of the Energy Resource Department, and our fallen soldiers and agents.

Ziegfeld couldn’t understand what Kang Chan meant.

‘Is he going to take them to a memorial or something?’

After a brief pause, he asked, “Are you going to take him to Korea?”

Kang Chan chuckled.

- Korea, my ass. He’s going to hell and waiting for you there.



The call ended with his signature laugh.

*What an arrogant bastard!*

Feeling upset that he couldn't talk back to him due to his panic, Ziegfeld immediately called Xairo.

After a few beeps, the phone was answered.

- I'm disappointed, Ziegfeld.

The call dropped after he heard Kang Chan's voice.

Ziegfeld initially thought that Kang Chan was simply a Great Ant. However, he then turned into a scorpion, and then a cobra far larger than a man. Now, the snake was baring its venomous fangs at him.

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Seok Kang-Ho was strapped to a chair in an interrogation room. He had injuries all over him.

"Fine. Let's say you're telling the truth. Then tell me exactly where you got the weapons and money."

With eyes as swollen as the man's face, Seok Kang-Ho struggled to look up.

"A Saudi royal was killed in our country. If not at the behest of the Korean National Intelligence Service, then we need to at least know who supplied you the weapons and money so we can clean up the mess, don't you think?" an Arab with a neatly oiled haircut said with a frustrated expression.

"Look, you're going to die anyway." The man grabbed the mask that Seok Kang-Ho had worn and waved it in front of him. "Tell me where you got this mask, weapons, and money."

He then added, "If this is how you're going to be, we'll have no choice but to expose you and your companions' faces. As someone who speaks Arabic so well, I bet you also know that the murder of a royal won't just tide over quietly."

After a short silence, Seok Kang-Ho said, "Cigrt."

The man sighed. As if he didn't have any other choice, he pulled a cigarette out of his pocket, lit it, and popped it into Seok Kang-Ho's mouth.

"Hoo."

Cigarette smoke wafted out the side of Seok Kang-Ho's mouth.

"Let's make this easy. It was an order from the NIS, wasn't it?"

"It was revenge for killing our assistant director."

The man laughed in disbelief. "Fine, fine. What about the weapons?"

"We got them from Ivan."

“That’s crazy. Ivan doesn’t even show up to missile deals, yet he sold you mere pistols and bayonets?”

Another puff of smoke rose from Seok Kang-Ho’s mouth.

The man, who had been glaring at him with sheer hatred, shook his head to control his temper. Afterward, he looked up again.

“What about the money?”

The man stared at the half-burnt ashes clinging to the cigarette. “You told me you got it through an illegal foreign transactions dealer, but you don’t remember his number?”

Seok Kang-Ho nodded, then laughed. “Phuhuhu.”

*Pow!*

The man punched Seok Kang-Ho in the face, cigarette and all.

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

Seok Kang-Ho’s blood splashed, dyeing the man’s waist red. Nevertheless, the man didn’t stop punching.

Chapter 397: Uncovered Secrets (2)

*Clunk!*

As the van bounced loudly, the lights outside and the glow from the vehicle’s dashboard pushed back the darkness.

*Shit!*

Kang Chan couldn’t help but frown due to his aggravated injury. Parthal peered at his expression.

*This bastard is the next Star of David?*

Kang Chan glared at the man in annoyance just as they passed by the country road, a perfect place to twist the neck of a white-headed carp.

He felt like he was looking at an enemy he couldn’t bring himself to kill. This bastard caused all the recent strange turn of events.

Kang Chan’s original plan was to show up and kidnap Xairo by surprise. The Star of David wouldn’t know what to do, and the world’s intelligence bureaus would be confused. That would be especially true for Sherman, who was always testing the waters before taking a side. That was why Kang Chan took off his mask and walked into the cafe alone.

However, a stupid white-headed carp bit the bait and easily spilled everything he knew instead. Catching him proved worth it since they learned the location of the enemy’s base from him and used him for provocations, but it was still quite unexpected.

As Gérard had said, though, this carp would likely be worth the cost of the fish food if they kept him in a tank and raised him well.

*Well, things have already turned out this way anyway.*

Kang Chan made up his mind.

“Keep an eye on this guy.”

He stopped the van and stepped out onto the dark country road alone. Judging by the smell of the village wafting through the clear air, there was likely a grazing field nearby.

Stars dotted the night sky above the grassland. Kang Chan couldn't believe that instead of being with someone he loved in such a romantic place, he was with the key to ending a fight to the death.

Kang Chan pulled out his phone and pressed the power button.

There was no point in confusing the intelligence bureaus when he had already shown his face and learned the name of the enemy's leader. Moreover, he had already given Lanok a brief word about what was to come.

*Beep. Ring, ring, ring, ring, ring.*

As soon as he turned on his phone, he received a flood of texts and missed calls. The bright light from the screen didn't quite match the scenery.

Exhaling quietly, Kang Chan watched the caller's names appear one after another. Kang Dae-Kyung, Kim Hyung-Jung, Park Chul-Su, Cha Dong-Gyun, Kwak Cheol-Ho, and even Kim Gwan-Sik and Kim Mi-Young's numbers were there.

Kang Chan wondered for a moment if the reward would be worth the pain that he was putting them through, but he soon shook his head. Right now, he had to focus on making the planned calls.

He contacted Lanok first. The dial tone made his heart pound strangely. Wasn't Lanok supposed to be the one feeling this way?

Soon, the tone stopped, and he heard a voice on the other end.

- Mr. Kang Chan.

Lanok sounded so calm that Kang Chan wondered how that was possible. He felt his anxiety leave him instantly.

“Mr. Ambassador, this is Kang Chan.”

- I saw the magnificent mission your men have completed in Saudi Arabia.

“I haven't gotten the report for that task yet.”

The conversation went on so naturally that it was as if they had just spoken to each other recently.

With his usual calm tone, Lanok gave Kang Chan an update on the situation in Dubai, which Kang Chan had been curious about.

- Vasili and I have finalized a deal with Uzman, a Saudi Arabian royal. I'll send you his number. I suggest you give him a call.

*Those scary snakes!*

The fact that Lanok and Vasili negotiated with Uzman meant they didn't believe that Kang Chan was dead in the first place.

“Does Vasili know I was alive?”

- He never seemed to have believed you were dead in the first place.

Kang Chan couldn't help but grin. These snakes completely outmatched him.

- It was a brilliant plan. I only managed to catch on thanks to the reports from satellite offices and a few other hints.

It somehow felt like Lanok was trying to comfort him. Kang Chan let out a quiet sigh.

“Sir, I'm currently...”

Kang Chan immediately began to relay his current location and situation.

- Ziegfeld!

*So Lanok knew!*

As if trying to explain Kang Chan's assumption, Lanok provided an explanation.

- The DGSE has some control over Luxembourg. Order the DGSE to cover the incident up before it gets out of hand. You can get all the support you need afterward.

“Copy, sir. Everything will be taken care of if I call Uzman, then?”

-That is correct.

“Thank you, Ambassador Lanok,” Kang Chan said with utmost sincerity.

- Vasili said it was a small gift for you since you're doing a big job right now.

“I see.”

- Now that we know where the enemy is and have Parthal in custody, there's no need to push yourself too hard anymore.

“Understood, sir.”

After briefly asking about Anne's well-being, Kang Chan hung up and immediately called the DGSE.

- Hugo speaking.

“This is Kang Chan.”

- We'll have to verify your voice. Please hold on a minute.

A dead man was calling. How could he analyze Kang Chan's voice without panicking?

These assholes sure had a different way of doing things.

- Confirmed. It's good to have you back, sir. We await your orders.

“Can you track my location?”

- Please hit the accept button on the notification that we'll send you.

“Alright. Anyway, I’m near Garnich, Luxembourg. I want you to send agents over here and cover a fight at a Garnich cafe and the kidnapping of two adult men as quickly as possible. Can you do that?”

- We’ll get on it. Please give me a minute.

Kang Chan glanced at the van.

*Buzz.*

The short text woke his screen up, lighting up his surroundings.

- It should ask to confirm your location.

Kang Chan immediately pressed the accept button.

*Buzz.*

Another text arrived. It was a phone number from Lanok.

Kang Chan didn’t expect to become so busy the instant he turned his phone back on.

- I’ve called off the police search. The agents will reach you in about twenty minutes.

Maybe it was because of his close proximity to France, but this was nice.

“Thanks, Hugo.”

- Just doing my duty, sir.

*I don’t have much of a bond with these people.*

Kang Chan opened the car door and told Gérard about the situation. A glance inside revealed the white carp wrapped in duct tape in the second-row seat.

Should I spray him with water?

Kang Chan smirked at the carp’s predicament. He then turned to Gérard.

“Come on out. Let’s have a smoke.”

Gérard stepped out, and Kang Chan sat down on the step of the van.

Click.

“Hoo.”

The smoke slowly dissipated into the still air.

After taking a moment to catch his breath, Kang Chan dialed the number that Lanok had sent him.

The default dial tone rang a few times.

-Allo?

The older man spoke in French with a heavy Arabic accent.

“This is Kang Chan. Ambassador Lanok sent me your number and told me to contact you.”

Kang Chan heard a deep sigh from the other end.

- I headed to Dubai as soon as Vasili and Lanok contacted me, but let us talk about the details in person later, Monsieur Kang. For now, I'd like to express my regrets on behalf of the Royal House of Saudi Arabia for the attack on South Korea's International Building, the death of two of your directors, and the countless sacrifices of your agents.

The head-scratching polite apology was delivered in heavily accented French.

- I would like to put the matter of Abibu and Jibril behind us. To that end, I will personally take the four Koreans to South Korea. I hope this can be used as an opportunity to improve the relationship between our two countries.

“That is not for me to decide.”

- All I ask is that you acknowledge it and promise not to retaliate any further. I'll take care of the rest of the diplomatic matters with Lanok and Vasili.

Kang Chan sighed quietly. It was better to tie up loose ends neatly than resort to endless bloodshed.

“Fine. If the four arrive safely in Korea, and Saudi Arabia does not provoke me any further, I will accept your offer.

- Thank you, Monsieur Kang. I'll be sure to meet with you personally once this is all sorted out.

After hanging up, Kang Chan turned to Gérard, who was standing in front of him. He then told him about the conversation.

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*Crash!*

A kick to the chest sent Seok Kang-Ho tumbling backward with his chair.

*Click.*

The door to the interrogation room opened. An elderly man in a white robe and black gutra, two attendants, and the interrogator's superior then walked in. At a glance, they looked like they held high positions.

The old man looked around the room, his eyes reflecting his age and experience. He maintained an elegant posture, while the two attendants serving him carried themselves in a way that made them seem overly polite.

The interrogator instinctively stood straight.

“Allow us to introduce to you all Crown Prince Uzman of Saudi Arabia.”

“I thank God for the honor of meeting you, sir.”

Meeting Uzman's eyes filled the interrogator with a sense of duty. He became even more determined to find out who was behind Jibril's murder and why—even if it meant tearing Seok Kang-Ho to pieces.

“Can you help this man up?” Uzman asked.

“Pardon?”

Though puzzled, Uzman’s gaze made the interrogator quickly sit Seok Kang-Ho up.

“Please untie him and give us a moment.”

The interrogator looked at his superior, who then gestured with his eyes to quickly follow orders. As urged, the interrogator removed Seok Kang-Ho’s handcuffs and shackles and headed to the door.

“Please call me if you need anything,” the superior said extremely politely. He waved at them and left the room with the interrogator.

Because of his swollen eyes, Seok Kang-Ho had to tilt his head back to look at Uzman, leaving his bloodshot nostrils open for the world to see.

In Arab culture, when someone this high up came, that meant that their life was over. One word from him, and interrogation and torture would be damned; they would go directly to a public execution.

Seok Kang-Hu laughed. He was a little disappointed to die before he could even see Kang Chan one last time.

That realization and Kang Chan’s face made tears stream down his cheeks and mix with his blood.

‘Fuck!’

He swallowed a curse. He felt as if he had just shown a pathetic side of him.

The tears were definitely not shed because he was afraid of dying or of this situation. Back in Africa, when he had no one he longed to see, he couldn't care less about a knife slitting his throat.

Uzman turned around. He took the phone his attendant handed him and pressed the call button.

“Just a moment, Monsieur Kang.”

He held out the phone to Seok Kang-Ho.

‘What kind of trick are they playing?’

Seok Kang-Ho kept on tilting his head back to get a better look at Uzman.

His eyes were swollen, his nose crooked, and his mouth torn and cracked.

“Monsieur Kang wants to speak with you. We’ll talk after your conversation with him,” Uzman quietly said in Arabic.

Kang Chan called? This damn old man!

“He’s dead. That’s why I came to avenge him.”

Uzman shook his head with a weary expression.

*Fine, I’ll answer! And I’ll spew a whole bunch of curses! I can see through your goddamn tricks!*

Seok Kang-Ho held out his bloody hand and took the phone. He watched Uzman wipe his hand with a handkerchief as he raised the phone to his ear.

“Allo?” he greeted in French out of concern that these assholes would pin something on him for using Korean.

- You son of a bitch.

The Korean curse, spoken by an all too familiar voice, caused a lump to form in Seok Kang-Ho’s throat.

Were they trying to deceive him somehow?

- Are you alright?

Seok Kang-Ho just swallowed dryly.

- Hey! Say something!

That was enough for Seok Kang-Ho to believe. Kang Chan’s accent and frustration made it clear that he wasn’t being deceived.

“Captain?”

- Are you crying?”

“Phuhuhu...”

Due to his hoarse throat, Seok Kang-Ho’s laughter sounded like he was crying.

- We’ve reached a deal with Uzman. Take the men back to Korea. We still have a bastard to kill, so don’t even dream about sitting this one out.

After a quick gulp, Seok Kang-Ho replied, “Got it.”

- Daye.

“Sir.”

- You made the right call to kill Jibril and make the tough decision to surrender. Had you chosen differently, you wouldn’t be able to find peace even in death.

“Phuhuhu.”

- Recover. I’ll see you soon.

Seok Kang-Ho didn’t want to hang up just yet.

“Captain.”

- What is it?

“Be careful.”

A chuckle came through the receiver. Seok Kang-Ho never knew it could sound so reassuring. However, Kang Chan’s next words made his relief disappear.

- Gérard says you looked so stupid being dragged away.

“That son of a bitch would have died in the elevator!” Seok Kang-Ho growled.



Kang Chan laughed in amusement.

- Let me talk to Uzman.

“Got it.”

Seok Kang-Ho told Uzman that Kang Chan wanted to speak to him and handed him the phone. Uzman wiped the blood off with a white handkerchief before bringing the phone to his ear.

“We will keep our word. I trust you will also honor your promise as Lanok and Vasili assured me,” Uzman spoke in broken French before hanging up.

“Can you move?”

“Of course,” Seok Kang-Ho replied.

Uzman turned around. His two attendants helped Seok Kang-Ho to his feet.

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A broadcast specializing in overseas correspondence played on the TV.

[This is rare breaking news!]

The reporter’s fast, high-pitched voice conveyed his disbelief.

[The Dubai government has promptly executed the killers of a Saudi royal. Saudi Arabia has also released a statement saying that they are satisfied with the sentencing.]

The screen blurred to show four masked men—Seok Kang-Ho, Choi Jong-Il, Woo Hee-Seung, and Lee Doo-Hee, lying dead on the ground.

“What...?”

Go Gun-Woo forced his face to stiffen to contain his swelling emotions.

They hadn’t even received any information regarding this sentencing, and he hadn’t met with Lanok yet. To be honest, he didn’t expect the Saudi Arabian government to sentence the four to death so quickly.

Go Gun-Woo became acutely aware of his inadequacies, making his heart ache. If only he was just a bit stronger, if only South Korea and the South Korean National Intelligence Service were more powerful...

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NIS Samseong-Dong office.

Kim Hyung-Jung stared at the TV blankly.

Although he knew that he should meet up with Go Gun-Woo right this instant, he couldn’t help but need five minutes or even just a moment to collect himself.

Something was strange. Surely the Dubai government wouldn’t have shown the men with their masks on because they didn’t know they were masks...?

Did the French or the Russians have something to do with this?

*Ring, ring, ring.*

Go Gun-Woo seemed to be calling.

Kim Hyung-Jung cleared his throat and picked up the phone.

There were times when people froze up unexpectedly. This was one such moment for him.

Why on earth would Kang Chan's number pop up at this time of day, or, for that matter, at all? After clearing his head to collect himself, Kim Hyung-Jung pressed the call button with a thumping heart.

"Kim Hyung-Jung speaking."

- Manager Kim.

What? How was this possible?

He was suspicious, but for reasons he couldn't understand, tears sprang to his eyes. His heart heated up, and his eyes turned red.

He had to check if it was really Kang Chan or not. It could be another country's intelligence bureau trying to distract South Korea or perhaps Saudi Arabia doing this to obtain evidence, but...

- I know this must come as a surprise. I apologize.

Kim Hyung-Jung swallowed dryly again in an attempt to contain the emotions that kept coming over him.

- Seok Kang-Ho, Choi Jong-Il, Woo Hee-Seung, and Lee Doo-Hee will leave for Korea soon. If the Saudi government asks permission for Uzman to visit Korea, please grant them entry.

Kim Hyung-Jung remained speechless.

The man sounded like Kang Chan! Only he could say something like this!

It made sense that the public execution had been done with the masks on now.

"Assistant Director Kang Chan...? Is that really you?"

Laughter came from the other end of the line.

- Yes, Manager Kim. The very person who saved you in Mongolia.

Kim Hyung-Jung laughed like an idiot. South Korea still had hope. They could continue to run unimpeded like before.

- Seok Kang-Ho will give you a more detailed explanation, but for now, we need to take some action.

Kim Hyung-Jung couldn't even ask where Kang Chan was or if he was okay. Hence, he simply grabbed a notepad and pen. "Awaiting orders."

- I need the Jeungpyeong special forces team deployed to a small island two hundred kilometers off Hawk Bay, Bermuda. It's armed with surface-to-air missiles, two submarines, and anti-aircraft guns, so they'll have to approach by rubber boats and infiltrate from the shore.

Kim Hyung-Jung was certain now. Who else but Kang Chan would be willing to take South Korea's special forces team on such a wild operation?

- I have to ask you to only inform the president or Director Go. If you need confirmation, ask Ambassador Lanok or Vasili.

*Yes! This was how easy it was to get to Lanok and Vasili with him!*

“Understood, sir. When should they depart?”

Before Kim Hyung-Jung knew it, he was back to his normal self.

- Seok Kang-Ho and his men will probably insist on coming along, so please send the team with those four. Cha Dong-Gyun and Kwak Cheol-Ho are in my office. Please send your agents there and make sure no word gets out.

“Yes, sir. The president and Director Go may want to speak to you directly, though.”

- That should be fine. Please have them call me. Just make sure to keep it a secret from the hospital staff and D.I. employees in the office. On another note, I have one more difficult favor to ask.

Kang Chan told him what it was, and Kim Hyung-Jung firmly replied that he would take care of it.

- It’s nice to hear your voice again, Manager.

Kang Chan hung up right after.

Kim Hyung-Jung checked the caller ID several times. He then looked at his notes again.

“Oh, right!”

Jumping to his feet, he dialed Go Gun-Woo with his left hand and grabbed his jacket with his right.

Chapter 398: He’s Alive? (1)

*Clatter, clank.*

As lunch ended and the afternoon began, a guard inserted a key attached to his key ring and unlocked the door.

“2133, you’re being transferred,” he ordered.

The inmates looked at Kang Chul-Gyu with bewilderment. A prisoner would only be transferred during a trial when they had other cases that required them to be tried in another court.

The younger inmates spent the next five minutes helping him pack his things. Afterward, they said their farewells to Kang Chul-Gyu with rueful looks. Ever since he had quieted their troublesome cellmate down, they had been living in comfort.

“Take care of yourself, sir.”

Kang Chul-Gyu picked up his pack, left his cell, and walked down the hall. The guards handcuffed him before guiding him onto a bus.

He knew there had to be a reason he was being transferred, but he didn’t even wonder where he was going. Right now, he just wanted to hear about Kang Chan.

Upon reaching their destination, Kang Chul-Gyu turned down the halls and passed by two sets of bars.

“Sunbae-nim!”

“Director Kang!”

Nam Il-Gyu, Yang Dong-Sik, and Oh Gwang-Taek greeted him.

Kang Chul-Gyu thought they were letting them see each other since they were accomplices. The men all wondered what was going on.

*Clunk.*

The iron bars connected to the main gate opened, and Kim Hyung-Jung approached the prison warden.

Oh Gwang-Taek was about to greet him awkwardly when he saw Kim Hyung-Jung’s stiff expression.

“Let’s go.”

Kim Hyung-Jung’s face remained tense.

As seasoned veterans in reading the ins and outs of signals and motions, they all quickly understood that Kim Hyung-Jung didn’t want them to say anything.

‘Could it be...?’

Kang Chul-Gyu tried to shake off his hopeful anticipation and looked up at the sky.

He had definitely seen a bright light in Kim Hyung-Jung’s eyes and face. If Kim Hyung-Jung had come to pick them up, wouldn’t it be safe to assume that Kang Chul-Gyu’s hope had come true?

Kang Chul-Gyu had eaten three square meals every day to ensure Kang Chan couldn’t call him stupid.

The men trudged on. The mere fifty meters to the main gate felt like fifty kilometers.

Upon reaching the main entrance at the end of the small passageway, Kim Hyung-Jung signed one last set of paperwork before heading out with the four men. He then turned his head toward the civil petitioner’s waiting room.

Three vans stopped in front of them, and agents stepped out of the car to surround them.

*Creak.*

“Please get inside.”

This was the kind of place that made people worry about being told to stay. Hence, they all quickly climbed in, and the cars pulled away.

As they drove by the prison wall and turned into a parking lot, Kim Hyung-Jung began to speak with an unreadable expression.

“The assistant director made a special request. You’ll be attacking a fully armed island of Bermuda. The President and the Director of the National Intelligence Service have given their assurances about your standing. After this operation, you will be imprisoned again.”

Kang Chul-Gyu awkwardly turned to the window to hide the smile tugging at the corners of his mouth.

Oh Gwang-Taek leaned toward Kim Hyung-Jung as if demanding an explanation. “The assistant director?”

“Yes. Assistant Director Kang Chan.”

Nam Il-Gyu, Yang Dong-Sik, and Oh Gwang-Taek all looked between Kim Hyung-Jung and Kang Chul-Gyu.

“What...? Are you saying he’s alive? That mother—! I mean, Kang Chan? Fucking hell! Is he actually alive?”

“Yes, sir,” Kim Hyung-Jung answered.

Kang Chul-Gyu’s eyes turned toward the van’s window, and the prison wall’s sentry post came into view.

He was glad to have forced himself to eat now. Otherwise, Kang Chan would have called him a stupid old man.

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“You son of a bitch!”

Park Chul-Su normally didn’t swear this badly. However, he was now screaming into the phone so hard that his wounds had begun throbbing.

“You two bastards! I’m never going to forget this!”

- I apologize, sir.

Soon, in front of his nervously watching deputy, Park Chul-Su started laughing like he was completely out of his mind.

“As you damn well should be. When are you leaving?”

- As soon as we choose the men who’ll be going on this mission.

“Have you made your decision yet?”

-Yes, sir.

“You motherfuckers! Haha! Fucking bastards! Hahahaha!”

To the deputy’s eyes, Park Chul-Su looked like he was in bad condition.

“Have you gotten permission?”

- The director said he would ask the president for authorization himself. It looks like this will be another NIS dispatch.

“You little—no, that’s good! Haha! You motherfuckers! Hahahaha!”

The deputy gulped. Park Chul-Su still couldn’t regain control of his wild temperament.

“Tell me the roster.”

Park Chul-Su made a gesture of writing something on the desk, and his deputy quickly grabbed him a notepad and a pen.

“Yoon Sang-Ki! Lee Chung-Do! Punks! Just say their fucking names without their ranks!”

Even while taking notes, Park Chul-Su still couldn't calm down his excitement.

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The ways of the world were harsh. As if the sun had finally risen long after the grim news, the seemingly neverending requests for interviews about Kang Chan's death instantly stopped.

“Assistant Director Kang, how...?” Moon Jae-Hyun trailed off in disbelief. He sat down before the green grass in the Blue House's backyard.

“How are you?” he asked the person on the other end of the call.

Moon Jae-Hyun looked at Go Gun-Woo with bloodshot eyes. He seemed relieved.

“I see. I called because I felt like I had to hear your voice before approving the operation. I will discuss the specifics with the director, so you only bother yourself with returning safely.”

After ending the call, Moon Jae-Hyun calmly handed the phone back to Go Gun-Woo.

“He had spoken to Saudi's Crown Prince Uzman himself. I have also confirmed that Agent Seok Kang-Ho and his men are on their way back to South Korea,” Go Gun-Woo reported.

Moon Jae-Hyun looked like he was trying to control his laughter and emotions.

“Deceiving the president like this... I think we should give the assistant director a pay cut.”

Go Gun-Woo burst out laughing but quickly fixed his expression.

“There will be no more mention of Abibu and Jibril's deaths. However, we were asked to dismiss the International Hotel bombing and Director Hwang and Director Song's assassinations.”

“What does the assistant director think?”

“I'm not sure yet. We were scheduled to speak after discussing it with you, sir. However, Uzman has suggested a public apology on his visit, and since we've removed the two men involved in this incident, I believe we should take this opportunity to improve relations with Saudi Arabia.”

Moon Jae-Hyun nodded.

“Let’s do that. Be sure to talk to the assistant director and ask if there’s anything else we need to know.”

“Understood.”

Moon Jae-Hyun raised his gaze as if something had occurred to him. “I was worried that many are jealous of us, but the assistant director neatly cleared up that matter as well.”

“I haven’t thought of that.”

Standing up from his seat, Moon Jae-Hyun slowly looked around the backyard.

“People are the only resource we have. I think that’s why the great powers are so wary of our talent. For some reason, world-class people always seem to come to us.”

Moon Jae-Hyun looked at Go Gun-Woo, then turned his attention back to the backyard.

“The sun is really nice today.”

The warm sun stretched across the green grass.

“It would have been nice to have Director Hwang and Director Song with us. Our failure to protect them fills me with regret.”

Moon Jae-Hyun looked up at the sky.

“I’m sure they protected us. The other spirits who sacrificed themselves for our country must have helped too.”

At a time like this, what else could he say?

With some newfound ease, Go Gun-Woo shifted his gaze to the grass.

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*Creak. Creak. Creak. Creak.*

One after another, the four people in the ambulance were loaded onto stretchers and wheeled into the hospital.

Kim Hyung-Jung, who had traveled with them from the airport after escorting Kang Chul-Gyu and the others, ran next to Seok Kang-Ho. Cha Dong-Gyun and Kwak Cheol-Ho, who had been waiting at the hospital, rushed to Choi Jong-Il.

Their eyes, nose, cheeks, and lips were all so swollen that they just looked like big watermelons.

Yoo Hun-Woo and the medical staff worked on the men with shocked faces while mobile x-rays and IV drips came in one after another.

“Out of the way, please! Now!”

*Swish! Swish!*

The medical staff pushed Kim Hyung-Jung, Cha Dong-Gyun, and Kwak Cheol-Ho out of the way, while the others pulled the curtains around their four new patients.

*How can they torture men to such an extent?*

Kim Hyung-Jung swallowed his emotions and walked out into the yard. Cha Dong-Gyun and Kwak Cheol-Ho followed right behind him.

The Bangji Hospital was once again filled with armed, suited agents, making the atmosphere quite fearsome.

“Would you like some coffee?” Cha Dong-Gyun asked.

Kim Hyung-Jung narrowed his eyes at him.

“We had no other choice. The assistant director gave us his orders, and we were stuck in the office too.”

Cha Dong-Gyun signaled with his eyes, and Kwak Cheol-Ho quickly headed inside.

They could never resent each other even if they tried.

Kim Hyung-Jung chuckled as he took the cigarette that Cha Dong-Gyun was offering him.

“Here, here! Coffee.”

The three all took a cup and cigarette each.

“This won’t do. Let’s go over there.”

This was a hospital. There was a lot of attention from people walking by. Hence, the three moved between the buildings and walls.

“You two! I’m going to have a talk with General Park Chul-Su to make sure you’re punished!”

“Hey! You took the coffee and cigarette, so you can’t say that anymore. Like I said, we were also tied up.”

“At gunpoint?”

Cha Dong-Gyun burst out laughing at Kim Hyung-Jung’s quirky response. Kim Hyung-Jung laughed along.

After wiping away his laughter, Kim Hyung-Jung turned his attention to the hospital building.

“Whew! I hope they’re all okay...” Kim Hyung-Jung said.

“They will be,” Cha Dong-Gyun assured him.

“You’re right.”

Kim Hyung-Jung flicked away the ash from his cigarette and gulped down his coffee.

“Have you chosen who’ll be coming with you?”

“Yes. I’ve already given the list to the general.”

Kim Hyung-Jung nodded. “I can’t be here in the evening. The Saudi royal family is making a joint statement with the president, so all hands are needed on deck.”



“Don’t worry Half of the men will be here by the end of the day.”

“You have no idea how much that puts my mind at ease.”

Kim Hyung-Jung looked at Cha Dong-Gyun and Kwak Cheol-Ho with reassurance.

“There’s going to be a lot of eyes on this operation,” Kim Hyung-Jung said.

“That won’t change anything.”

Cha Dong-Gyun looked no different from a moment ago, but Kim Hyung-Jung could see the glinting determination in his eyes now. At that moment, Kim Hyung-Jung realized that Cha Dong-Gyun and Kwak Cheol-Ho had changed more than he thought.

Was this what world-class special forces team commanders looked like? When did they grow up so much?

Now that he stood face-to-face with them like this, feeling the intimidation they exuded, he learned that not even rumors and reports could do them justice.

“Why are you looking at us like that, sir?”

“Because I hate your guts!”

Kim Hyung-Jung was their senior, and they saw each other frequently since the NIS supported their operations. They also shared the pain of losing Choi Seong-Geon.

“Oh! I’m having a third child.”

“What?”

Cha Dong-Gyun grinned. “It’ll probably be another boy. We have even already chosen his name. Cha Seong-Chan! He’s going to have General Choi Seong-Geon’s ‘Seong’ and Assistant Director Kang Chan’s ‘Chan.’”

“It hasn’t even been that long since you came back, though.”

“Testers these days work wonders.”

Kim Hyung-Jung congratulated Cha Dong-Gyun with a handshake.

This wasn’t the time for laughter. After all, Seok Kang-Ho and their three other agents had just returned in a mess. However, Kim Hyung-Jung couldn’t treat Cha Dong-Gyun and Kwak Cheol-Ho stiffly when they would be faced with a deadly battle soon.

“I should leave now. Make sure Mr. Seok and... Never mind.”

He didn’t need to nag these two.

As Kim Hyung-Jung was about to leave, four men entered the hospital.

Now, this hospital would be safe from the special forces team of any country.

Kang Chul-Gyu, Nam Il-Gyu, Yang Dong-Sik, and Oh Gwang-Taek exchanged pleasantries with Kim Hyung-Jung, who soon left.

“Hello, sirs.”

“You juniors must have your work cut out for you. What’s it like inside the hospital?”

“They’re being treated, so we’re just waiting right now.”

Yang Dong-sik, who was on his way back from Yang So-Mi’s urn, patted Cha Dong-Gyun on the arm.

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Kang Chan sat down on the single-seater couch with a freshly-changed bandage.

He had just finished a late meal with Gérard and the white-headed carp. Hence, he found himself craving coffee and cigarettes.

The hotel was provided by the DGSE and had a first-class security perimeter, which provided Kang Chan some relief.

“Come here.”

The white-headed carp quickly sat down in front of Kang Chan.

He looked very frightened and scared of Kang Chan, who had beaten and killed Xairo, but he didn’t seem to have any understanding of his own actions.

“Where should I send you?”

“Pardon?”

“Do you want to stay under the surveillance of the DGSE? Or do you want to go to Korea?”

“What will happen to me after all this?”

Why was this bastard worrying about the future?

As Gérard raised his cigarette to his mouth, he looked at the bastard as if he had never seen anyone so stupid before.

“You don’t seem to realize what you’ve done, but a lot of people have been killed because of you. You’ll have to take responsibility for that.”

“I only gave plans and orders.”

*Ha!*

Kang Chan almost twisted the bastard’s neck.

When his eyes flashed, the white-headed carp jumped in surprise and blinked.

“Those plans of yours killed those people. Hence, you and Ziegfeld will die the same way you killed others. Consider yourself warned.”

Seeing the dubious look on Parthal’s face, Kang Chan sighed.

“When you’re killing other people, don’t forget you’re also putting your own head on the line. Also—”

“Yes, sir.”

“I’ll decide what to do with you after I get rid of Ziegfeld. Until then, come up with a reason why I should keep you alive. Otherwise...”

Some people might suggest letting Parthal off because he was so foolish, but Kang Chan found that absurd. The moment one showed their back to assholes like these, they would pull the trigger without any guilt.

These motherfuckers only cared about themselves.

*You bastards can keep fighting. I’ll watch from a safe distance. It would be great if things were to go according to my plan, but I could just come up with a different plan if I were to fail.*

That was the kind of mindset these punks had.

‘At this rate, I’ll probably end up twisting that bastard’s neck.’

Kang Chan shook his head and turned to Gérard.

“Tell the agents outside to hold onto him. It’s fine to shoot him if he resists, but if they do, I’ll have to confirm his identity before they get rid of the body.”

“Oui.”

Gérard stood up and went to the door. Parthal just kept flinching. He seemed to have something he wanted to say, but he couldn’t bring himself to speak.

“Um...”

Just before the carp could voice his thoughts, two DGSE agents followed Gérard inside.

“Take him away.”

One of the two agents responded affirmatively, and Parthal obediently pulled himself to his feet.

*What the hell is with this guy? How can he be the next leader of the Star of David?*

Kang Chan glared thoughtfully at Parthal’s back as he left the room.

“He’s gay, isn’t he?” Gérard asked out of nowhere. “ He’s gotta be.”

“What?” Kang Chan replied.

“The ecstatic look on his face when he was injected with the syringe, the way he walks, and the way he looks at you...”

“You punk...”

Chills ran down Kang Chan’s back, and his brows furrowed.

“Why don’t you test it then?” Kang Chan asked.

“What?”

“You’re the one who said he’s gay. Why don’t you try seducing him?”

“That son of a bitch! The moment he looks at me weird, I’ll gouge out his eyes.”

“You little shit.”

It had been a long day.

“Stop talking nonsense and go to sleep! We’ve only got one enemy left now.”

“Alright.”

Kang Chan and Gérard from the sofa and went to bed.

He took off his shirt and pants, hung them up, and lay down on the crisp bed. It was a fantastic feeling.

‘Huh?’

However, unexplainable discomfort began to creep up Kang Chan’s back like someone had splashed water on the bed.

*Pft.*

Kang Chan didn’t expect Ziegfeld to be as meek as the white-headed carp, so he was probably scheming something.

Whatever it was, Kang Chan would still get some sleep when he could.

He fell into a deep sleep as if sinking into the depths of the ocean.

Chapter 399: He’s Alive? (2)

A bus pulled up to the hospital, and members of the Jeungpyeong special forces team got off with their faces covered.

“Your uniforms are in the car.”

Yoon Sang-Ki, rifle slung over his shoulder, walked over and pointed at the bus with his chin.

“Sir?” Yoon Sang-Ki called out to Cha Dong-Gyun, who was heading to the bus, with difficulty.

“What?”

“Is the assistant director really alive?”

“Shut up, punk! Manager Kim and the general kicked the shit out of me because of that.”

“Is he?”

“Yes, he’s alive!”

Cha Dong-Gyun and Kwak Cheol-Ho stepped onto the bus.

Soldiers approached them, wanting to confirm the facts, but when they saw Yoon Sang-Ki grinning like an idiot, they turned away in satisfaction.

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Kang Myung-Gu of the counter-terrorism team switched shifts with the Jeungpyeong special forces team and left the hospital to check on the agents.

If another terrorist attack were to attack this place right now, the situation would be unmanageable. That was why Jeon Dae-Geuk, the security room staff, Kim Hyung-Jung, and the members of the counter-terrorism team were furiously scanning the reporters and the participants.

*Chk.*

“Situation report,” Kim Hyung-Jung commanded over the radio.

*Chk.*

“Counter-terrorism team speaking, all clear,” Kang Myung-Gu replied.

The presidential security office had taken over internal security, the 35th Brigade took charge of the perimeter, and the counter-terrorism team—commanded by Kang Myung-Gu—focused on the buildings and entrances.

“... and that is how the Republic of Korea and Saudi Arabia will continue to prepare the necessary measures for the developmental future of both countries,” Moon Jae-Hyun read his speech and gazed at Uzman, who was standing next to him on the podium.

Uzman, dressed in traditional Arab attire, with mature eyes and a wiry beard, gestured toward Moon Jae-Hyun with a thank-you before turning his attention to the front.

“First of all, I would like to thank the people of the Republic of Korea and President Moon Jae-Hyun. Saudi Arabia expresses its regret for the terrorist attacks in South Korea and acknowledges the South Korean investigation results and announcement that our former Crown Prince, Abibu, was the mastermind behind the attacks.”

Surprised gasps came from the reporters.

“We apologize unequivocally and surely for that.”

*Snap, snap, snap, snap! Snap, snap! Snap, snap, snap, snap!*

The announcement was unusual in terms of international diplomatic protocol. Hence, the shock of the reporters was not easily contained.

Uzman looked at the reporters for a moment, waiting for the excitement to subside.

“Saudi Arabia strongly supports South Korea’s next-generation energy projects and has expressed its willingness to invest its technology and capital. We will discuss this issue in more depth with the Korean government and at an advanced level.”

As Uzman finished speaking in formal English, a series of flashes went off, and reporters scrambled to raise their hands.

Uzman pointed to a white reporter with a long face.

“This is Robert, from CMN,” an interpreter from the newscast in South Korea said in an unaccented voice.

“Crown Prince Jibril was killed in Dubai. Is that incident related to this visit?”

Uzman leaned closer to the microphone, his face showing no change in expression.

“I came here after a meeting with the king of Dubai. The Dubai government has announced that Jibril was killed in an act of terrorism by anti-government forces, and the Saudi government has also acknowledged this.”

“What prompted you to make this sudden announcement with South Korea?” Robert asked, refusing to back down.

“South Korea is a country with many talented individuals.” Uzman glanced at Moon Jae-Hyun. “We hope to establish a friendly and progressive relationship between our country and the Republic of Korea—one that is not prone to becoming cold due to a series of recent events.”

*Snap, snap. Snap, snap, snap.*

“The Republic of Korea is at the forefront of the next generation of energy projects, and Saudi Arabia is eager to contribute to and cooperate in projects that will develop the economy, which is currently dependent on fossil fuels.”

A few other reporters were given a chance to speak, but none of their questions were particularly important. Uzman announced that he was taking one last question and then chose a white woman reporter.

“In your first answer, you said that there’s a lot of talent in this country. Can you name someone in particular or someone you know personally?”

Uzman, who had answered the question about Jibril’s murder without missing a beat, paused for a moment before speaking into the microphone.

“As you know, South Korea has made an incredible impact on the international community in recent years. I think that all of this is due to the people who have been working hard and doing their best,” Uzman finished, giving a response that seemed to be a nonanswer.

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“That’s enough of this conversation,” Ziegfeld coldly stated into a slender microphone, making Sherman lower his posture.

- Ziegfeld, calm down and listen to me.

Sherman, whose upper body was visible on the video screen up front, brought up Xairoa in hopes of shifting the blame to him.

- I know what you're capable of, but since we trusted Xairo's word, this recent incident has dealt us with a loss. A man who was supposed to be dead showed up out of nowhere and took Xairo out. How was I supposed to expect that?

Ziegfeld remained silent.

- I'm sorry to hear about Xairo, but this puts us in a difficult position as well. We have to consider our relationship with Iran, and we have to contact Mr. Kang too.

"Sherman."

Ziegfeld didn't seem to care, though.

"The United States cannot interfere in this operation."

- Ziegfeld, we have no choice but to step in, even if only formally.

"So you want to show off the American military might?"

- We've covered up the events in Bermuda all this time. Isn't that enough to show you the goodwill of our government? Why don't you try to negotiate with Mr. Kang instead?

"Negotiate?"

Ziegfeld's expression made Sherman bite his lower lip.

- I'll mediate for you. Meet with Mr. Kang and tell him what you want. The world you're in and the world he's in are completely different anyway, aren't they?

Ziegfeld glared at Sherman with a mixed expression.

Meet the Great Ant?

That would be a blow to his pride, but it didn't seem like a bad idea.

- Shouldn't you rescue Parthal as well?

"I've already abandoned him."

After a moment of awkward silence, Ziegfeld glowered at Sherman. "How will you guarantee my safety?"

- He's a man of his word.

"What do you want in exchange for your mediation?"

- A stake in the Federal Reserve and abandonment of the new gold standard.

Ziegfeld burst out laughing.

"Unless the condition is that you kill Kang Chan, you're asking too much just to see his face once."

- Ziegfeld.

Sherman now used a more serious tone.

- You may hold the world's economy in your hands, but Mr. Kang is currently the most powerful man in the world of intelligence. It would serve you well not to take him too lightly. France, Russia, China, and Germany respect his word. He also has the South Korean special forces team, the world's new most powerful infantry unit, in his palms.

“Who cares about those insects? None of them can survive a nuclear war!”

Sherman nodded at Ziegfeld's outburst.

- I said I know what you're capable of. However, their unity has dropped the success rate of your plan. Besides, you've been exposed, and that's not something to take lightly either.

Seeing Ziegfeld's expression, Sherman spoke again.

- Korea has never had anyone so in tune with their president, which makes it hard to use the Korean regime to get rid of him. What makes him even scarier is his lack of greed.

“How can someone with no greed build the next generation of energy facilities, connect the Eurasian Rail, and get an undersea tunnel?”

- He has no personal greed. That's the scariest kind of person. Moreover, as I said earlier, the South Korean special forces team he created is the strongest in the world. There are some things you have to accept even if you don't want to admit it, no? Respect Mr. Kang's wishes and try to have a meeting with him.

Ziegfeld found it hard to respond.

- Have you ever seen a man that America couldn't handle?

Sherman's final question struck a chord with Ziegfeld.

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It was well past midnight.

Kim Hyung-Jung walked over and handed him a phone.

“Just press the call button.”

Kang Chul-Gyu never knew he would feel this kind of excitement in his life. It was different from the one that came from meeting an enemy and being in a point-blank situation.

He glanced at Kim Hyung-Jung, seemingly to excuse himself, then headed toward the back of the hospital waiting room.

Nam Il-Gyu and Yang Dong-Sik watched on curiously.

*Click.*

In the dim light, where he could barely make things out, Kang Chul-Gyu pressed the call button.

The dial tone rang twice.

- Hello?

Kang Chul-Gyu couldn't help but smile. He didn't know that Kang Chan's confident, calm voice could be so pleasing to hear.



- Hello?

“It’s me.”

Kang Chul-Gyu heard Kang Chan chuckle. Although it could be irritating, at times like these, it was reassuring.

- How are you?

“I feel a little heavy from sitting around and eating.”

This time, Kang Chan laughed weakly.

- This was the best plan I could come up with. I need help to execute it properly.

“I heard it’s an island. We’re not trained for sea infiltration, so you’ll have to factor that into your calculations.”

- You’ll probably be moving with the Jeungpyeong guys. I’ll see if there’s anything I can do that’s effective. What about jumping and parachuting down?

“Easy enough.”

- Alright. That aside, I have a difficult favor to ask.

Kang Chul-Gyu listened to Kang Chan for a moment and nodded.

“I’ll see what I can do. Oh, if I call you, will you pick up?”

- This number is my public one. I can answer calls to this number at any time.

“Understood. When do we head out?”

- I’ll let you know. Probably within the next three days.

“Got it.”

Kang Chul-Gyu awkwardly looked at the vending machine in front of him. Strangely, when talking to Kang Chan, he found it especially awkward when he had to hang up.

- I’ll see you at the operation.

After ending the call, Kang Chul-Gyu looked at the phone once and went back to Kim Hyung-Jung.

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Kang Chul-Gyu had already visited this room when he first arrived at the hospital.

*Creak.*

It was time to sleep. However, when he opened the door to the room, he saw Kang Dae-Kyung still sitting on the bed with his head in his hands.

“What brings you here at this time, sir...?”

“I apologize for the late visit. There’s something I want to talk to you about. Do you have a minute?”

Kang Dae-Kyung looked at Yoo Hye-Sook, who was lying in bed, then picked up his cardigan and pulled himself up.

His eyes were bloodshot, and exhaustion was evident on his face.

Perhaps that was to be expected after losing his son and watching his wife stand at death's door.

Kang Chul-Gyu headed straight for the elevator.

Ahead of them, the Jeungpyeong special forces team was standing on guard with rifles.

Once the elevator doors closed, Kang Chul-Gyu pressed the button to the top of the building.

*Whoosh.*

A completely distraught Kang Dae-Kyung and the not-so-talkative Kang Chul-Gyu in the same elevator naturally meant the elevator was going to be silent on the way up.

*Ding.*

The elevator stopped, and the doors opened.

“There’s a park on the roof. I was thinking of going there.”

“Alright,” Kang Dae-Kyung replied with a curious face, wondering why Kang Chul-Gyu had asked him to come here. He wanted to know, but there was only a flight of stairs to the rooftop. Kang Chul-Gyu would tell him soon, so there was no need to rush him.

*Clunk!*

The rooftop doors opened noisily.

*Click! Click!*

Two soldiers walked over and saluted Kang Chul-Gyu, then went back to their spots.

“Let’s sit over there for a moment.”

Kang Chul-Gyu went to a wooden bench with Kang Dae-Kyung.

The buildings around them were glowing brightly, seemingly defying the night.

Under Kang Dae-Kyung’s gaze, Kang Chul-Gyu began to speak with difficulty.

“Someone must have been given an assassination mission.”

“To kill me?”

“No, not like that,” Kang Chul-Gyu replied quickly. “I heard someone close to him tried to assassinate him. That was why when he was shot, he had no choice but to announce that he was dead and hide the truth from everyone.”

Kang Dae-Kyung waited for Kang Chul-Gyu to continue. He was confused, but his eyes held a strand of desperate hope.

Kang Chul-Gyu looked him straight in the eye. "It's about your son."

*What...?*

Kang Dae-Kyung looked as if he had been slapped hard on the cheek. Kang Chul-Gyu nodded at him.

"I heard the president found out today too."

"Wait... Wait."

Kang Dae-Kyung shifted his gaze toward the light and looked back at Kang Chul-Gyu.

"So are you saying our Channy, my son, is alive?"

"Yes, sir."

"Haah!" Kang Dae-Kyung gasped, completely taken by shock.

He heard Kang Chan was dead. He knew his son was the leader of the NIS's counter-terrorism team, that he subjugated the terrorist attack on the International Building, and that the UIS deemed him a public enemy.

However...

All those chrysanthemums and citizens surrounding the hospital, the newscasts that had been repeated over and over again...

Kang Dae-Kyung gazed back up at Kang Chul-Gyu.

"Then.... Where is my child... Where is my son?"

"He's in France. He will pick up if you call him."

Dazed, Kang Dae-Kyung looked through his pocket and pulled out his phone. His hands were shaking so hard that Kang Chul-Gyu had to look away.

Kang Dae-Kyung pressed the call button and raised the phone to his ear.

A moment later...

- Hello? Father?

Kang Dae-Kyung broke into tears.

- I'm sorry, Father. I'm so sorry.

Kang Chan tried multiple times to talk to him, but Kang Dae-Kyung just kept crying.

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*Click, click.*

Cha Dong-Gyun and Kwak Cheol-Ho entered the hospital room with helmets, masks that covered half of their faces, black military uniforms, and body armor. They also carried magazines, pistols, bayonets, and rifles over their shoulders.

Seok Kang-Ho, Choi Jong-Il, Woo Hee-Seung, and Lee Doo-Hee had stitches all over their faces, reminiscent of Frankenstein.

“Why did you come in so scary-looking?”

Seok Kang-Ho’s words came out slurred because he was on a strong drug and his lips couldn’t move properly.

“Got any cigarettes?”

“They say you should hold out for today.”

“Who said that?”

“Me. Let’s just wait for the stitches to heal, at least,” Yoo Hun-Woo rebuked just then, entering the room after Kwak Cheol-Ho. “You’ve got severe injuries in your mouth that won’t close if you smoke. You also have an appointment with the dentist tomorrow.”

Seok Kang-Ho groaned regretfully.

“Until your dentist evaluation tomorrow, no cigarettes or coffee.”

“Okay, okay.”

“I’ll probably collapse first treating you men. What’s so good about a damn cigarette anyway?”

Yoo Hun-Woo glared at Cha Dong-Gyun and Kwak Cheol-Ho suspiciously.

“We’ll never give him any.”

Yoo Hun-Woo left the room with a skeptical expression.

“Is everything with that incident settled?” Seok Kang-Ho asked with difficulty, then swallowed hard.

“The Saudi royal family made a joint announcement with the president today. They apologized for everything that happened, including the International Building incident.”

Seok Kang-Ho laughed with satisfaction.

“Manager Kim came by earlier. Did you see him?”

“No.”

Seok Kang-Ho turned his gaze to ask what he was talking about when the door slid open. Kim Hyung-Jung walked in.

“Mr. Seok!”

Kim Hyung-Jung quickly approached the side of the bed.

“I came by earlier and heard you were sleeping, so I just left. How are you?”

“Alive. Got any cigarettes?”

Kim Hyung-Jung glanced at Cha Dong-Gyun and Kwak Cheol-Ho, who simply avoided his gaze and shrugged.

“I don’t think you should smoke right now.”

“Hey! Not you too!”

Seok Kang-Ho struggled to turn around, finding Choi Jong-Il, Woo Hee-Seung, and Lee Doo-Hee looking at Kim Hyung-Jung.

“I didn’t treat you this way when you came from Mongolia,” Seok Kang-Ho decisively said.

“Fine. Open the windows and turn on the air purifier.”

As if he didn’t have any other choice, Kim Hyung-Jung lit four cigarettes and placed one each in the men’s mouths.

Seok Kang-Ho laughed once more. “Phuhu.”

“Did you get in touch with the captain?”

“Yes. I just got off the phone with Kang Chul-Gyu Sunbae-nim earlier as well.”

“When are we leaving?”

“In a few days, I was told.”

Ash was starting to form on the cigarettes, so Kim Hyung-Jung and Kwak Cheol-Ho took paper cups and tapped them off.

“I’ll be up tomorrow,” Seok Kang-Ho remarked.

Kim Hyung-Jung shook his head, but he couldn’t say no.

Who would want to sit out on a mission with Kang Chan right now? Even Kim Hyung-Jung wanted to go!

#### Chapter 400: Be Grateful For His Steadfastness (1)

If one were to take a handful of hot peppers, chew them to numb their tongue, and then pronounce “Mont-Saint-Martin” as if they were making the sound only through their nose, it would still sound the same.

Kang Chan woke up in a hotel in Mont-Saint-Martin, which was on the border of France and Luxembourg. He then went to a restaurant with Gérard.

He had slept well. The uneasiness still hadn’t subsided, but Gérard had refreshingly twisted Xairo’s neck, and they had collected a white-headed carp the day before.

Kang Chan had taken a bullet near his heart to shake the damned hypnosis out of him.

The pitiful look in Gérard’s eyes from his youth was gone, and Kang Chan had spoken to Kang Dae-Kyung on the phone yesterday, so he was in a good mood.

However, after sitting down at the restaurant, he narrowed his eyes and looked around.

Damn it!

He didn't want to eat in his room, which was why they were here, but perhaps that was a mistake.

The hotel they were staying at wasn't grand, but it was still mid-range. Nevertheless, only Kang Chan and Gérard were seated in the restaurant likely because the DGSE had blocked off the entire establishment.

Moreover, even though there were only two of them, at least ten people were standing around them.

Kang Chan hated uncomfortable things. How could he eat in peace in front of a dozen French agents? He had a natural dislike of such things, which was why he had gotten into the habit of eating with the agents in the first place.

Kang Chan turned around and looked at the agent closest to him.

The tall, pointy-nosed, stereotypical Frenchman with sunglasses approached him quietly.

"Have you had breakfast?"

"Pardon?"

"Have the agents here had breakfast?"

"We eat when we change shifts."

A glance was enough to tell that ten agents were in the room. If so, then at least ten more agents had to be positioned somewhere Kang Chan couldn't see.

"Sit down and eat with us."

The agent looked at Kang Chan as if he couldn't understand what he was saying.

"I'm not comfortable with this kind of security, so sit somewhere close by and eat with us. That shouldn't cause any issues with security."

The agent glanced behind him, then gazed back at Kang Chan. This seemed so unheard of that he looked as if he didn't know what to do.

"Before the commander of the Foreign Legion's special forces team, there is no risk to my safety, so let's eat in peace. Otherwise, I'll just head back to my room to eat."

"Can you issue that as an order?"

*Ha! These inflexible bastards.*

"Fine. This is an order. All agents are to sit nearby and enjoy their breakfast."

"Oui."

The agent stepped back and gave the other agents instructions.

The agents sat down at the table in groups of two around Kang Chan and Gérard.

Now, with all these Frenchmen dressed in black suits, the two felt like they were at a funeral dinner.

Kang Chan smirked. If Oh Gwang-Taek, Seok Kang-Ho, and Choi Jong-Il's party were dressed in black suits like them, it would've seemed like a gangster meeting.

"What is it?" Gérard asked, looking at him curiously.

"I'm just happy to be alive. Have you ordered yet?"

There wasn't much to a French breakfast. It was usually a baguette, croissant, boiled eggs, cheese, yogurt, and depending on where one lived, some kind of cereal or fruit.

Kang Chan tore off a piece from a finger-length slice of baguette and began to eat it with sliced hard-boiled eggs and cheese.

"When are we going to make our move?"

"We'll see in a day or two. I'm going to try and get more information first. They have submarines, missiles, and anti-aircraft guns, so we need to be careful. We also have no idea how many combatants they have."

Gérard nodded. He tore off a piece of the baguette and ate it.

They finished eating in about half an hour. They talked about a few things, but nothing of particular importance.

When Kang Chan and Gérard ordered coffee, the other tables did as well.

"Can I smoke here?"

"I'll open the windows," the middle-aged manager replied sensibly, setting the coffee down.

Kang Chan lit up a cigarette and puffed on it.

Just then, a short man balding in the middle of his scalp entered the room. He looked at the agents curiously and walked straight to Kang Chan.

The man standing before Kang Chan had dark, double-lidded eyes, a large, round nose, slightly puffy cheeks, and a belly that looked like it could pop off his shirt buttons at any moment.

"It's a pleasure to meet you. I'm Hugo."

Kang Chan thought Hugo would look sharp and snappy. He wasn't one to judge based on looks, but Hugo was too different from how he imagined him, which made him feel awkward.

"Nice to meet you. This is Gérard. Gérard, this is Hugo, my handle at the DGSE."

"Gérard."

"Nice to meet you. I'm Hugo from the DGSE."

The two exchanged greetings and shook hands like they couldn't be bothered.

"Take a seat. Coffee?"

"Thank you. I'll order mine."

“Want a cigarette?”

“I don’t smoke.”

*Okay, then.*

Hugo ordered coffee, then turned his attention back to Kang Chan.

“Uzman and Sherman have both sent requests to see you, sir.”

“You came all the way here to tell me that?”

Hugo glanced at Gérard.

“He can be trusted. If there’s anything you want to say to me, you can always deliver a message through Gérard.”

The manager served Hugo his coffee, briefly pausing their conversation.

*Click.*

Once the manager was out of earshot, Hugo said, “Sherman has sent word that he wishes to see you with the Star of David.”

*Ziegfeld wants to meet me? In this situation?*

Kang Chan’s expression prompted an explanation from Hugo.

“Never before has this generation’s Star of David requested such a meeting. It’s an offer that I wouldn’t have believed if Sherman didn’t offer to mediate.”

Was a meeting with Ziegfeld really that big of a deal?

“What’s the agenda?”

“They only informed us that Sherman requested to meet and that the Star of David would accompany him. If you accept, I’ll arrange a location and security and let you know.”

Kang Chan extinguished his cigarette and sighed.

“Tell him I’ll decide after they tell me about the location and the security they’d be bringing. And ask Sherman why he went through the DGSE when he has my number.”

“Considering there are reports that you’ve died, sir, he likely wants to make sure his request is clear through the DGSE. He probably also thinks that the DGSE’s credibility is riding on this meeting.”

That was understandable. Based on the way that Hugo was analyzing the situation and reporting it, Kang Chan could see Hugo wasn’t just some backroom agent.



“I see. In that case, forget about the question and just tell him about my demands. When and why does Uzman want to see me?”

“We weren’t given a reason. However, we suspect he has contacted you through the DGSE because he wishes to meet you without informing the Korean government. If you grant him a meeting, he will come over directly from Korea.”

Kang Chan gazed at Gérard, who just gave him a look that seemed to say, “You decide!”

“Pick a suitable place and time and let Uzman know.”

“Yes, sir. I believe he’s on his way already and should arrive sometime this evening.”

Hugo dropped three sugar cubes into his coffee cup.

“By the way, Hugo. I heard there’s an island in front of Hawk Bay, Bermuda that isn’t on the map.”

Hugo lifted his cup and looked at Kang Chan. Only then did Kang Chan realize that he hadn’t taken a proper sip of his coffee yet.

“Apparently, that’s where the Star of David is hiding. I was told there are two submarines, missiles, and anti-aircraft guns, but I’d like to know their exact weapons and numbers. If necessary, you may interrogate Parthal, the man I brought to the hotel.”

“Understood, sir,” Hugo replied. Somehow, it seemed like he knew something but was keeping his mouth shut.

There were too many suspicious people.

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*Beep, beep, beep.*

Raphael politely took the ringing phone to Lanok.

Current Ambassador Pierre and DGSE Director Romain were sitting next to him at the bedside table.

“Mr. Kang Chan,” Lanok greeted. Pierre and Romain’s eyes quickly darted to the phone.

- Mr. Ambassador. How are you feeling?

“I feel better and better every time I hear from you.”

- Then I should call you more often.

A smile tugged at the corners of Lanok’s mouth. He listened in silence as Kang Chan described Hugo’s arrival this morning and their conversation.

“That was an excellent decision. However, I do have one piece of advice.”

- Yes, sir.

“Ziegfeld is a man that everyone in the intelligence community has had suspicions about. The fact that he’s been officially confirmed to be the head of the Star of David and that he requested a meeting is a first since the Star of David was created. They’ve always passed the title on to their successors as soon as they were exposed.”

Lanok looked at Romain meaningfully before speaking again.

“I didn’t expect you to get your hands on Parthal. Still, I suggest you play it a little safer from here on out. After all, France has managed to get our hands on the next Star of David and beat out the United States, the nation with the closest ties to their organization.”

Unlike Raphael, Romain sucked in his breath as he tried to hide his surprise.

- Wouldn’t Ziegfeld abandon Parthal then?

“You mustn’t think of it lightly. I’m sure you’ll be a better judge than anyone else, but I’d be more careful about the location of the meeting and the number of bodyguards.”

- I’ll keep that in mind, sir.

“Mr. Kang Chan,” Lanok softly said, “You have been delegated the authority of the DGSE director, and you’ve been given the chairmanship of the European Intelligence Committee from me. You don’t need to make calls like this anymore.”

Funnily enough, of the three people listening to the call, Raphael, who was standing on the foot of the bed, looked the most pleased.

- Mr. Ambassador, I plan to return to Korea after getting rid of Ziegfeld. After that, I’m going to beg you and Anne to teach me how to play golf. I would also like to introduce a girl to you.

Lanok burst out laughing but soon clutched his chest and frowned. Still, he couldn’t wipe the smile from his face.

Pierre looked surprised, while Romain looked flustered, having never seen Lanok laugh so loudly. Raphael lowered his head to hide his smile.

“I look forward to that day.”

- Me too, sir. I’ll call you again.

Once Lanok set the phone down, Pierre took it from him.

“Romain.”

“Yes, Commissioner.”

“Do you understand why I told you not to make any hasty moves upon hearing of his death?”

“I do now.”

Lanok sharply looked at Romain, making him seem like a completely different person from the one who had just laughed.

“If you had insisted on your ill judgment, you would have put France in irreparable danger. You should be grateful for his steadfastness, especially since in the world of intelligence, his influence has already surpassed mine.”

Romain was about to say something but stopped himself.

“If you’re going to use his being given the DGSE director’s authority as an excuse, then you are not worthy of the position. One glance from him, and the United States, Russia, China, Israel, Germany, and Britain will be fighting for his hand. The oil-producing nations of the Middle East will work together to cling to him, too.”

“I’ll be more careful, sir.”

Lanok glanced briefly at Pierre, then gazed at Romain.

“The DGSE is where the lowest, ugliest things are done for the glory of France. If you want to stroke your little ego, find a job that suits you.”

Romain swallowed dryly as he waited for Lanok to continue. Lanok’s fierce and sharp expression demanded all his attention.

“Lastly, if you ever oppose him again, I will eliminate you for the honor of France. Do not forget that he is now beyond your power.”

“I will keep that in mind.”

Lanok watched him for a moment before turning to Raphael.

“Will you prepare some black tea? I think I’ll enjoy a cigar today,” he gently requested.

“Yes, sir,” Raphael politely replied.

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*Ring, ring, ring.*

Vasili looked at the phone. He then pressed a button instead of picking it up from the table.

“Vasili speaking.”

- Kang Chan speaking.

Yang Bum burst out laughing in disbelief.

‘Are these two serious?’

“I never knew I’d get to speak with the dead in this lifetime.”

Kang Chan chuckled in response.

“Yang Bum is listening next to me.”

“It’s good to hear your voice again, Mr. Kang Chan. Are you alright?” Yang Bum asked.

- I’m sorry I wasn’t able to contact you right away.

“Since you’re alive, and you’ve disappointed me, I hope you have good news. I’m sick of being stuck in this base,” Vasili coldly interjected, seemingly hoping that Kang Chan didn’t just call to exchange pleasantries.

Another chuckle came through the line. Afterward, Kang Chan repeated to Vasili what he had told Lanok.

“You’re not so simple-minded to believe Sherman and Ziegfeld’s promises, are you?”

- I’ll call you when I’ve gotten a location and how many bodyguards they’ll be bringing.

“The Bermuda territory is under strict US control. The few times we tried to get in, they fought us tooth and nail. However, we turned a blind eye because they weren’t doing us any particular damage, not because we were scared of them.”

Vasili glanced at Yang Bum before adding, “At the very least, negotiations with the US would be a prerequisite to attacking Bermuda. If not, you might have to prepare for an actual war. Imagine the trouble the US will be in if it’s revealed that they covered up the events that occurred in that area.”

- I’ll keep that in mind. How are you feeling?

“Did you think I would die from such an injury?”

Kang Chan snorted. Yang Bum saw the smile flash by Vasili’s lips.

- Take care of yourself, Mr. Yang Bum. I’ll leave the base in Mongolia to you.

“You should say that to the person who brought you missiles here!”

- Thanks, Vasili.

“Mr. Kang Chan, I’ll see you once everything’s wrapped up,” Yang Bum said.

Vasili pressed the end call button afterward. Seeing Yang Bum grin, he turned his gaze toward the wilderness in the distance.

“What a scary man. He’s managed to drag Ziegfeld out and even has Parthal.”

“Did you already know about the two?”

Vasili nodded.

“The Star of David hands over the title once their identity is revealed, so there’s no point in taking them out. If they’re hiding, there’s no way to find them either. I had a strong suspicion they were in Bermuda, but for the reasons I mentioned earlier, it had been difficult to search the area.”

“So it’s not a coincidence that civilian airplanes or ships kept getting lost there.”

Vasili glanced at Yang Bum and looked back away.

“The head of an intelligence bureau shouldn’t be so simple-minded. Many of the civilian aircraft that passed by in that area had agents on board. They were trying to photograph the area below with specialized equipment due to suspicions that the Star of David could be hiding there.”

“China has a lot to learn.”

Vasili spoke without even looking at him.

“Are you not a lion that has just awakened from its slumber? It’s a blessing for China and a misfortune for other countries to have a man like you at the head of the Chinese intelligence bureau.”

Yang Bum followed Vasili’s gaze on the wilderness.

“Monsieur Kang,” Vasili muttered to himself as he shook his head. “When Lanok first suggested this, I thought he was mad.”

“Are you talking about supporting Mr. Kang Chan?”

“No. What he first proposed was unconditional cooperation between the intelligence bureaus. When I first heard about it, I found it ridiculous because it was the exact opposite of the physiology of intelligence bureaus, which were created to serve their own interests.”

“So that’s why the European Intelligence Committee was created.”

Vasili nodded.

“I never thought I’d meet a man I’d approve of. That vexing man! My life would have been so much richer if he had died.” Vasili turned to Yang Bum.

“It is thanks to him that I’m sitting here with the head of China’s intelligence bureau, though.”

Since the look in his eyes wasn’t unkind, Yang Bum responded with a quiet laugh. However, Vasili’s next words, which sounded genuine, quickly put a stop to his joy.

“If it wasn’t for Monsieur Kang, someone with your potential for advancement in the world of intelligence would have already been eliminated.”