

Blackfield 401

Chapter 401: Be Grateful For His Steadfastness (2)

Struggling to open her eyes, Yoo Hye-Sook melancholically looked at Kang Dae-Kyung. Her husband had always foolishly stood up for her and always protected their family.

They naturally had arguments every now and then. There had been times when she resented him and felt angry because she couldn't understand him. Even then, he never deviated away from their family.

Finally, Yoo Hye-Sook noticed the people standing around her husband—Yoo Hun-Woo, Kang Chul-Gyu, Kim Hyung-Jung, and a man in a black military uniform. To her surprise, the uniform was similar to the one that Kang Chan had worn.

“Honey,” Kang Dae-Kyung quietly called. “Try to stay calm and just listen to me, okay? I asked them to be here because I didn't think you would believe me if I told you about it alone.”

They had lost their son. What could be more surprising in the world?

However, people were strange. Yoo Hye-Sook's face paled as the shock of losing Kang Chan came rushing back.

“It seemed some people were after our son, so they falsely announced that he was dead,” Kang Dae-Kyung said, taking Yoo Hye-Sook's cold hand in his own. “If he was announced alive, they would have tried to assassinate him again. Director Yoo here declared him dead, and NIS Manager Kim helped.”

What was he talking about?

Yoo Hye-Sook, unable to understand, looked at Yoo Hun-Woo and Kim Hyung-Jung, then at Kang Chul-Gyu and Cha Dong-Gyun.

“Honey, our son is currently safe in France. I've already spoken to him on the phone, and he's waiting for your call right now.”

Yoo Hye-Sook swallowed hard.

“He said he was really sorry, but he decided it was too dangerous at the time to let us know otherwise, so the men here announced that he was dead.”

Yoo Hye-Sook's hand began to tremble in Kang Dae-Kyung's grip.

“You believe Manager Kim, Director Kang, and Director Yoo, right? These people kept our Channy safe, and this man here guarded him. Thanks to them, Channy is in France unscathed. He looked for you as soon as he woke up, and he's waiting for your call now.”

“Our... son?”

“Yes. Our Channy.”

Yoo Hye-Sook still looked like she didn't believe him. However, she also clung to the thin strand of hope that blossomed deep within her heart.

"Can you talk to him?" Kang Dae-Kyung asked.

"A-are you sure he's alive?" Yoo Hye-Sook replied unbelievably.

"Yes."

"Really?"

"Let's give him a call. Give me just a minute." Kang Dae-Kyung pulled out his phone

"Then we'll be outside," Kang Chul-Gyu said and looked at the group of people standing with him.

Creak.

The four men opened the door. As they stepped out into the hallway, they heard Yoo Hye-Sook say, "Channy? Is that really you?"

Creak.

Cha Dong-Gyun quickly shut the door.

The four walked to the chairs that were in the center of the hallway.

"President Kang is truly incredible."

No one denied what Yoo Hun-Woo said when he peered at the room. They didn't disagree, nor could they find any words to say.

Kang Dae-Kyung had asked the four men here for a favor, and he made up a lie for Kang Chan and Yoo Hye-Sook. Who could blame him?'

"This is a relief," Kang Chul-Gyu said. He then let out an assured sigh and brought his gaze back to the door of Yoo Hye-Sook's room.

After finishing his call with Yoo Hye-Sook, Kang Chan took a moment to compose himself. Upon feeling better, he called Ludwig and spoke to him for about half an hour. Once done, he put the phone on the table and craned his neck from side to side. He had never called people for so long multiple times in his life.

"Are you about done yet?"

Gérard was still next to Kang Chan.

"I think so. I'd rather go fight a battle somewhere. I'm really not good at these things."

"They suit you."

"You wanna try?"

Gérard resolutely shook his head. “Absolutely not. I’m made for the scene.”

Buzzzzz.

At that moment, the bell in the room loudly rang. This hotel stuck to using old things, including its elevators and doorbells.

Gérard jumped to his feet and headed to the door. He returned with Hugo.

Hugo bowed awkwardly and sat down across from Kang Chan. It seemed like he had picked up on Asian greetings somewhere.

“Uzman will be here at the hotel by eight this evening.”

“Eight...”

Calculating the time, Kang Chan caught sight of Hugo’s short legs on the couch. He must have bought a pair of pants and cut off the bottoms. People would usually hem them...

“Sherman also contacted us.”

Kang Chan looked at Hugo’s forehead. The man seemed to have a way of distracting others with his whole body. Maybe it would be more effective to just get the report over the phone. Anyhow, Kang Chan needed to focus on their conversation now.

“He had designated Playa Santa Lucia, Cuba, as the meeting spot. He wishes there to be a security detail of thirty men on each side, plus five attendants.”

“What is the DGSE’s analysis on that? Is it a satisfactory demand?”

“It is disadvantageous for us, considering the location is Cuba.”

Kang Chan looked at Hugo, demanding an explanation.

“Cuba is close to the United States, and it’s directly connected to Bermuda. If something unwanted happens there, we have nowhere to turn for help.”

Gérard focused on Hugo’s words with a sharp gaze.

“Hugo, if I were to refuse this meeting, what is the worst thing that could happen?”

“Your question is too broad to answer, sir.”

Kang Chan didn’t think so, but he changed the question anyway.

“If I continue to try to eliminate Ziegfeld, what’s the biggest thing that he could do? I’m guessing he’s not hiding in Bermuda just to be safe.”

“That would be correct, sir.”

Hugo’s response revealed nothing. However, he soon added, “Ziegfeld can start a world war.”

“Don’t you think it’s a bit excessive to think that one person’s decision can start a world war?”

“With Ziegfeld, it isn’t. You must remember that he’s the Star of David. The vast sums of money that the Star of David has at their disposal can mobilize entire African rebel armies and launch all the missiles that arms traffickers trade at the same time.”

Kang Chan tilted his head doubtfully. “Rebels and missiles alone can cause a world war?”

“The moment he decides to start a war, Mexico, Iran, and a few countries in Africa will change leadership, and those countries will immediately begin a civil war.”

Kang Chan groaned and glanced at Gérard. That did make another world war seem possible.

“That’s the dark side of the economy that the Star of David controls. They’re willing to support rebels for profit because there’s nothing like international unrest and localized warfare to bring in the big bucks.”

Kang Chan listened in silence.

“Add to that the countries surrounding Russia and China’s ethnic minorities demanding independence, and you’ve got the markings of a world war.”

“Sounds like he’s someone we’ll have to kill eventually.”

Hugo didn’t answer Kang Chan’s statement, but the look on his face said it all.

“The judgment is yours,” his expression seemed to say.

“How long do I have to give them an answer?”

“As soon as you decide, the DGSE will notify Sherman.”

“Okay. Let’s agree to the meeting. However, tell him I’ll decide when I’ll be meeting with him.”

“Copy, sir.”

Hugo stood up, bowed in yet another awkward way, and left the room.

Click, click.

There wasn’t much to a disassembled rifle, but the same could be said about an assembled one as well. It was just a clunky body, muzzle, and trigger.

However, when it was slung over the shoulder of a strong-looking soldier, it exuded a tremendous sense of power.

After speaking with Kang Chul-Gyu, Kim Hyung-Jung took time to speak separately with Cha Dong-Gyun and Kwak Cheol-Ho.

Right after, the hidden threatening gazes of the Jeungpyeong special forces team members began to surface. An inexplicable sense of excitement and nervousness filled the hospital.

The busy Kim Hyung-Jung headed to Seok Kang-Ho's room and stepped back out.

“This isn't right.”

Riip! Rip!

Seok Kang-Ho tore off the tape that was securing the IV drip needle and pulled it out in one swift motion.

“Mr. Seok.”

“You can't think of sending them without me.”

The swelling hadn't subsided yet, and Seok Kang-Ho's nose and ear were taut, not to mention the dark, nasty bruises.

“Look at them!” exclaimed Seok Kang-Ho, turning to Choi Jong-II, Woo Hee-Seung, and Lee Doo-Hee.

The three couldn't defy Kim Hyung-Jung's orders. However, their glinting eyes clearly showed their desire to go as well.

“We risked our lives to get rid of Jibril.”

“Mr. Seok! I'm not disregarding your abilities—I decided based on your condition.”

“While we were beaten up, unable to see each other's faces, we only had two things in mind: we must not bring fire to our country, and we must not cause the captain trouble!”

Kim Hyung-Jung knew that. Unable to find a proper response to Seok Kang-Ho, he exhaled loudly.

“I'll call the captain, so please make arrangements for the four of us to go. It's our job to protect the boss. If he goes to that kind of place and something happens... Manager Kim!”

Kim Hyung-Jung, who was looking at Seok Kang-Ho, had suddenly burst out laughing like a madman.

Fortunately, Uzman looked more like what Kang Chan had expected.

After shaking hands, Kang Chan introduced him to Gérard and sat across from him at the table.

They were at a hotel restaurant.

Behind Uzman stood half a dozen attendants and bodyguards in white dresses, and behind Kang Chan stood Gérard, Hugo, and a dozen or so DGSE agents in sunglasses.

“You're younger than I expected.”

“I hope you’re not disappointed.”

Uzman smiled at Kang Chan. “The look in your eyes says it all.”

It wasn’t clear what he meant by that, but Kang Chan assumed he meant it in a good way, so he didn’t say anything.

“I didn’t mean anything else when I asked to see you,” Uzman continued, gently steering the conversation. “I wanted to see what you were like, and I was hoping that we could use this opportunity to develop a more friendly relationship.”

Uzman spoke accented French that might have been unintelligible had Kang Chan heard it word for word, but he had no trouble understanding it in sentences.

“Monsieur Kang.”

Pulling Kang Chan’s gaze, Uzman added, “There is a saying that our ancestors passed on. ‘Sow with your back to the wind.’”

Seok Kang-Ho could have recognized the proverb instantly, but Kang Chan had never heard it before.

“I believe it’s teaching us to sow with the belief that someone will harvest it, even if it’s not yourself. I sowed the seeds by forgetting Abibu and Jibril’s sacrifices and returning the four men to South Korea. With you, the wind, at my back.”

Conversations with old people were definitely scary. Stinging comments could come out of nowhere, just like now.

“I hope that when the time comes for someone to harvest, even if it’s one of us, we will find ourselves at your mercy, Monsieur Kang.”

Uzman was trying to say the same thing with his eyes.

“I understand. I will not antagonize anyone in the future just because they are from Saudi Arabia.”

“Thank you, Monsieur Kang. I’ll take my leave then.”

Uzman stood up to leave.

Had he come all the way here just to say those few words? Not that Kang Chan wanted to talk to him longer.

Kang Chan also stood up.

“May I formally invite you next time?” Uzman asked genuinely.

“I will accept your invitation if I can. I thank you for your wise way of ending what could have been an uncomfortable situation,” Kang Chan gently replied. He wanted to at least respond similarly to Uzman’s demeanor and gratitude.

“I thank Allah that Saudi Arabia is no longer standing in the way of the wind. No man can go against the winds that drag the world and survive. May He give you much more to do.”

Uzman then exited the restaurant with his entourage and bodyguards, leaving Kang Chan wondering if his words were good wishes or a curse.

Seok Kang-Ho, dressed in a black military uniform with weapons clutched at his sides, stuck his swollen head out to study the map. Choi Jong-Il, Woo Hee-Seung, and Lee Doo-Hee all looked the same as he did.

At that moment, Kim Hyung-Jung delivered Kang Chan’s instructions to them.

“You’ll be going to Mont-Saint-Martin in France, which is a forty-minute drive from the airport here in Villers-La-Bresse. Once you arrive, or even before, if the assistant director gives you any further instructions, please follow them.”

Kang Chul-Gyu, Seok Kang-Ho, and Cha Dong-Gyun nodded.

“I heard he’s planning to go to Cuba with thirty-four men. You all will move together. I know it’s a hassle, but he ordered you all to go straight to Mont-Saint-Martin with plenty of heavy weapons and ammunition.”

All else aside, Kang Chan’s command to bring heavy weaponry and plenty of spare ammunition was enough to convey his intentions and give them a gist of the situation.

“We’ve chartered a private plane for this operation. The departure is at 22:00 today, Seongnam Airport, so we’ll be leaving the hospital at around nine. Until then, feel free to have dinner and get some rest.”

After a brief pause, Kim Hyung-Jung added, “We didn’t want to overwhelm the hospital, so we’ve arranged for dinner at a restaurant near Seongnam. We’ll leave when the counter-terrorism team members take over the hospital perimeter.”

Seok Kang-Ho winced as he straightened up. However, he immediately pretended he was fine.

“That wasn’t because of the pain.”

Kim Hyung-Jung and Kang Chul-Gyu couldn’t help but laugh as they avoided eye contact. If anyone saw Seok Kang-Ho pretending to be fine with his already big head even more swollen, they would’ve laughed too.

No one was a stranger to each other now. Everyone knew what operations others had been on and what results they achieved.

After traveling from the hospital in two buses, the group dined at a restaurant near Seongnam that Kim Hyung-Jung had prepared.

It was a converted house on the outskirts of the city, so it was the best place to eat privately and away from prying eyes.

After the meal, the group gathered around to chat over coffee in paper cups.

Kang Chul-Gyu sat on a red plastic chair off to one side of the garden. Nam Il-Gyu, Yang Dong-Sik, and Kim Hyung-Jung sat around a peeling table, also drinking coffee from paper cups.

Kang Chul-Gyu hadn't spoken since they left the hospital.

Nam Il-Gyu and Yang Dong-Sik didn't seem to pay him any mind, but Kim Hyung-Jung couldn't bring himself to ask him if anything was wrong. Hence, their table had the heaviest atmosphere one could expect of men going out to battle.

"Sunbae-nim," Nam Il-Gyu called as if in passing. "Are you getting a bad feeling?"

Kim Hyung-Jung glanced at him, and Kang Chul-Gyu nodded with certainty.

Kim Hyung-Jung knew Kang Chan also sometimes got signals like that. Nevertheless, seeing Kang Chul-Gyu nod at Nam Il-Gyu's question made him look at Kang Chul-Gyu with a puzzled expression.

"I'm getting the usual inexplicable sense of uneasiness. Be extra vigilant from today onward."

"Yes, sir," Nam Il-Gyu and Yang Dong-Sik replied firmly.

"Do you feel certain ways about battles?" Kim Hyung-Jung asked.

"Sometimes my gut warns me of danger. When something's about to happen, my heart starts racing or something like that..."

Kang Chul-Gyu laughed at how awkward it was to explain.

"I've heard the assistant director say something similar."

"So I was informed. We seem to have a similar sixth sense."

Kim Hyung-Jung nodded. "I think so too."

He then asked if the feeling was severe. At times like these, he understood why people went to have their fortunes read.

"I heard that the assistant director called us here. He's got a better sense than I do, so he must be getting warnings about the danger ahead as well. There's no telling what's going to happen where."

Kang Chul-Gyu gave an uncharacteristically kind explanation to Kim Hyung-Jung.

With twilight rising, the setting sun turned red as if it had been struck by a sword.

"Phuhu!"

Seok Kang-Ho's happy laughter came over from the other side while Kang Chul-Gyu was staring at the distant blood-red sky.

Chapter 402: Right Under Our Nose (1)

Kang Chan spent another day at the hotel. Although the room was always clean, he could really see why people often said hotels were different from homes.

He got up from bed, went to the living room, and grabbed a water bottle.

What's wrong with me?

He opened the bottle and drank while looking out the window. This city was in the countryside that bordered Belgium and Luxembourg.

The bright morning sun disguised itself as peace and made the world look calm. The buildings looked just as they did in Medieval Europe—he could even see a sharp tower among them.

As if he had woken up in a swamp, Kang Chan felt uncomfortable and displeased. However, he began to feel better as soon as he looked at the view outside. It seemed as though the sun was drying up the mud on him little by little.

At times like this, having a cup of sweet instant coffee was the best way to change his mood...

Kang Chan slowly twisted his shoulder, arm, and waist. Like magic, the wound on his chest had already healed to the point where he no longer had to be careful.

Click.

Gérard came out to the living room, looking as if he had just woken up.

“Hey, you're up. Here you go,” Kang Chan said.

He picked up a bottle of water next to him and handed it to Gérard. For some strange reason, seeing the fucker made Kang Chan crave coffee even more.

“Order coffee for us,” Kang Chan said afterward.

“Oui.” Du du du Du du du du! Du du du. Du du du Du du du du! Du du du.

Normally, they would've ordered breakfast first before getting coffee. Nevertheless, Gérard obediently picked up the phone while drinking water from the bottle.

The man was naturally attractive. He had long eyelashes, a tall and sharp nose, and green eyes that were even more mesmerizing now with the morning sunlight illuminating them. He also had a scar on his cheek that made him look even cooler. However, he was using his mouth to hold the bottle of water. A bit more sophistication would've made the fucker look more handsome.

Kang Chan shook his head and looked away from Gérard. Just as he was about to start stretching, the doorbell rang.

Gérard walked to the door with his long legs and crudely accepted the coffee cups and coffee pot, making him look like a Westerner delivering jjajangmyeon.

After pouring coffee into one of the cups, he put it on the table next to Kang Chan. “Drink up.”

“Daye and the special forces team are arriving from South Korea today,” Kang Chan said.

“I heard. At one this afternoon, right?”

Kang Chan picked up his coffee as he nodded. "I have a shitty feeling about this. I'm informing Daye about it as well."

"I'd find it weirder if an operation involving you were to end without a twist."

Is that how it usually is?

Kang Chan looked at Gérard, finding him smiling. The scar on his cheek crinkled.

"This will probably be the last fight for me, you, Daye, and even the special forces team. Everyone better fucking live through this, so you better keep your guard up once you've finished your coffee."

Kang Chan had never spoken in this manner before. Perhaps that was why Gérard stopped smiling and focused on what he was saying.

The two were wearing shorts and a short-sleeved t-shirt, leaving many terrifying scars on their thighs, knees, chest, and forearms exposed. Kang Chan didn't know what their scars would look like to others, but to them, they were evidence that they survived a hell-like war together.

Kang Chan drank his nicely cooled coffee and then placed it down on the table.

"You'll have to stand behind me in a suit during the meeting. We'll have to see how things go, but if even Daye has to do that with us, then all three of us will have to fight in the war," Kang Chan explained. "Although the Jeungpyeong special forces team have become world-class soldiers, we don't know how well they'll handle the situation if things go awry."

"Do you think Ziegfeld will target this opportunity?"

Kang Chan nodded.

"Why don't we take him out the moment we meet him, then?" Gérard asked.

Kang Chan had naturally already considered the idea before. However, it simply wasn't possible.

"Don't you think that son of a bitch Sherman is mediating for that exact reason? If we take action first, then the United States will request something. What if it's the opposite?"

"You mean if Sherman sided with our enemies?"

Kang Chan smirked. "We already know that he did. What I mean is what if Ziegfeld's great plan succeeds and he kills everyone, including us and Sherman?"

"How would that be possible with you there? I'll be there too. Daye will probably also do his part, albeit barely."

This fucker always said things that would surprise and anger Seok Kang-Ho as if it was the truth.

"But if Ziegfeld could eliminate me and Sherman at the same time, then he'd have nothing to lose. Considering his wealth, he could probably just open his bag and give the United States something valuable. He'd basically just be

investing in an opportunity that could earn him a lot of money anyway, wouldn't he?"

Gérard downed the coffee that he had been holding and placed the cup on the table. "You really seem like the head of an intelligence bureau now."

When Kang Chan gazed at him, Gérard continued as if he was making an excuse, "I was actually a bit surprised when we met Uzman yesterday. You talked to him in such a dignified manner that it made me wonder if you've worked in this field and talked to the heads of intelligence bureaus before."

Kang Chan smirked, then shook his head. "You saw him, didn't you? What would I gain from yelling at a man who acted with dignity? Anyway, let's put a proper end to all of this with this operation. The three of us should go out and get some rest after."

After their conversation, Kang Chan headed to the bathroom and decided not to think about this matter any longer. If thoughts were enough to solve this, then they wouldn't be risking their lives right now.

"Order breakfast for us—let's have an American breakfast today!" Kang Chan told Gérard.

"Oui!"

A new day was starting.

Lanok barely had enough time to put his phone down. He had been continuously talking to not only Vasili, but also Ludwig, Yang Bum, and the heads of other European countries' intelligence bureaus.

Lanok leaned back on his bed, deep in thought. The head of the bed was elevated upright, like the backseat of a car.

"Would you like a sandwich, sir?" Raphael asked.

"Black tea would be better."

"Of course, sir."

Raphael respectfully poured tea for Lanok and placed it on the bed table.

"Thank you. Prepare cigars for me as well," Lanok ordered. He didn't even look at Raphael.

Nevertheless, Raphael didn't look offended or upset. He brought over cigars, a lighter, and an ashtray in an oval tray.

"Hmm.

”

Lanok held a cigar in his mouth and lit it up with a lighter.

Chk chk.

The fire from the lighter flickered closer to him whenever he inhaled the cigar. Soon after, its tip finally burst into embers.

“Hooo. So it’s not Africa and Europe. Considering we haven’t found traces in Iran, China, and Russia, does that mean the United States plans to use their troops?” Lanok asked himself.

Even though he had just lit his cigar and had just been served tea, Lanok no longer touched either of them. Instead, he just stared out his window.

Ring. Ring. Ring.

Raphael quickly handed the ringing phone to Lanok.

“Vasili. Got anything for me?”

- I searched everyone, from those from the Soviet Union’s special forces team to those involved in NATO, but we found no trace of their troops being mobilized.

“Have you heard anything from the UK?”

- It’s just as the DGSE has reported. Ethan has already backed out of this matter, and he’s only hoping that South Korea will quickly finish constructing the next-generation energy facility.

Lanok looked at the clock on the wall with somber eyes.

“Would Sherman risk everything that the United States owns for this matter?”

- Lanok, Sherman isn’t that different from us; he won’t do such a thing. If the US military makes a move and fights us, then Ziegfeld will get what he wants most: a world war. Sherman knows that as well as we do.

A sharp and heavy silence permeated the call for a moment.

“Do we really have to watch Monsieur Kang and South Korea’s special forces team first before we decide again?”

- Weren’t you prepared to do that when you made him our main character? It seems as though you’re only feeling the woes of supporting characters now.

Lanok smirked.

“Let’s examine everything again for the last time and see how things play out, then.”

- Alright.

The call ended.

An hour past noon, the sunlight enveloping the Villeroy Rasch Boch Airport began to heat up. Except for grape vines that had just started growing, it was difficult for anyone or anything to endure the heat.

DGSE agents in black suits and sunglasses had restricted the public from accessing the airport.

Kang Chan stood in front of the runway with Gérard.

The final battle was starting. There was no turning back from it now.

Kang Chan didn't know who would return to South Korea alive or in a body bag. However, he couldn't stop this fight anymore.

Brrrrr.

The commercial aircraft touched down on the runway, took a wide turn, and approached Kang Chan.

A truck drove a set of stairs and attached it to the aircraft. Then, the aircraft door opened, and Kang Chul-Gyu climbed down onto Villers-La-Bresse.

When their eyes met, Kang Chan and Kang Chul-Gyu asked each other questions with their gazes.

'Are you okay?'

'Did you eat while I was gone?'

Right after, they answered each other by smiling in a way that was difficult for other people to understand.

If they were alone and had a lot of time, Kang Chan would've just talked to Kang Chul-Gyu instead of just smirking.

Nam Il-Gyu and Yang Dong-Sik got out of the aircraft after Kang Chul-Gyu. They approached Kang Chan, shouting, "Assistant Director! You must've had to go through a lot to get here!"

"Hey, you fucker!"

Oh Gwang-Taek rushed toward Kang Chan and tightly hugged him. Kang Chan hugged him back to show that he was happy to see him, but it made his chest wound hurt a little.

Seok Kang-Ho, Choi Jong-Il, Woo Hee-Seung, and Lee Doo-Hee headed out of the aircraft next.

"Captain!" Seok Kang-Ho exclaimed.

"You crazy fucker!"

Kang Chan was happy to see him. He was always happy to see this fucker.

"You guys went through a lot," Kang Chan told the others.

Kang Chan shook hands with Choi Jong-Il, Woo Hee-Seung, and Lee Doo-Hee, then patted their right arm.

He could no longer remember when he had met them and formed this kind of relationship with them, but he genuinely cared about them now. He had also learned to depend on them.

The Jeungpyeong special forces team soon got out of the aircraft as well, starting with Cha Dong-Gyun, Kwak Cheol-Ho, and Yoon Sang-Ki.

“Please put in a good word for us to General Park and Manager Kim,” one of them told Kang Chan.

“What are you talking about?”

“Please tell them that you’ve detained us in the hospital.”

Leaving behind the three and their absurd greetings, Kang Chan shook hands with the other soldiers who had gotten out of the aircraft.

From only having Daye and Gérard, he now had so many dependable comrades.

Among the many emotions he felt were happiness, gratitude, and reassurance.

They split up into the prepared buses and headed to the hotel. Upon arriving at their destination, Kang Chan ordered everyone to head into their respective rooms and get an hour’s worth of rest.

However, some naturally didn’t listen. Instead of going to his assigned room, Seok Kang-Ho looked around the room that Kang Chan had been using and suddenly placed his luggage there.

Kang Chan was with him and Gérard again.

They prepared coffee and cigarettes as they caught each other up. Kang Chan heard about what was going on in Saudi Arabia, and then explained what had happened in France.

“Doesn’t that mean that fucking Ziegfeld will be targetting you? Let’s break his fucking neck as soon as we see him,” Seok Kang-Ho said afterward, proving that his and Gérard's thoughts didn’t differ all that much.

I can't believe I keep having to watch these bastards argue about how they're better than the other!

Smiling, Kang Chan relayed what Seok Kang-Ho said in French, making Gérard smile as well.

“Some people might be aiming for this opportunity. They could try to take me and Ziegfeld out at the same time,” Kang Chan said.

Seok Kang-Ho nodded, his face still puffy.

“I’m thinking of deploying tomorrow. I’ll be holding a briefing in a bit, so just rest for now. I need you both ready for combat.”

“Is there something to eat here?” Seok Kang-Ho asked.

After ordering a sandwich for Seok Kang-Ho, the three spent an hour hanging around.

Soon, Kang Chan called Hugo, calculated the time it would take them to fly to Cuba, and made an appointment based on when they would arrive there.

At 3 pm, Kang Chan asked for coffee and light snacks to be prepared in the hotel's restaurant. All employees were ordered to leave the premises as well.

Kang Chan wasn't sure if the hotel didn't just have that many customers or if the DGSE had simply already taken action, but they rarely saw any regular customers.

The expressions, eyes, and aura of those who had gathered in the restaurant made it seem as if the operation had already started.

“There's something I need to tell you before I brief you all,” Kang Chan opened. He then told them that Uzman had visited the hotel and revealed what they had talked about.

“As a result of our collective efforts, we have finally become a country that cannot be messed with. Using this operation, we will ensure that no one can revolt against that result.”

Afterward, Kang Chan glanced at Gérard. Gérard then unrolled a large map over two tables.

“This is a map of Cuba,” Kang Chan said, then gestured at Gérard to unfold the next map. “And this is Playa Santa Lucia, which is where we're supposed to meet. It directly connects to the beach, and as you guys can see from the satellite photo, it has a hill at the back.”

Kang Chan looked up from the map to those sitting before him. “I'll explain this in simple terms—Ziegfeld is the so-called Star of David. Gérard has caught that fucking bastard's successor.”

People looked at Gérard, then quickly looked back at Kang Chan.

“That son of a bitch has committed grave crimes. He was behind all the terrorist attacks in South Korea, the assassination of our agents in Libya, and the series of events that happened afterward, including the Quds in Africa and the UIS in Afghanistan—all of that.”

Kang Chan noticed the people's eyes gradually burning up.

“This man has the power to start a world war at any given moment. On paper, he wants to meet me to cooperate with me and acknowledge our next-generation energy facility.” Kang Chul-Gyu smirked, conveying that he didn't believe that reason one bit. “Honestly, the fact that that stupid little asshole even suggested something like that makes me uncomfortable.”

Kang Chan planted his hands on the map and leaned over it, then slowly looked at every man before him. “One more thing. Others will likely try to use this opportunity to kill me and Ziegfeld at the same time. That should tell you about how dangerous this operation will be.”

At that moment, the eyes on him became even more ferocious.

Finally, Kang Chan nodded. “Gérard, Daye, and Choi Jong-II. Your team will be going with me in suits.”

“Yes, sir!”

“Jeungpyeong special forces team. You will be in charge of the perimeter. Kang Chul-Gyu, Nam Il-Gyu, Yang Dong-Sik, and Oh Gwang-Taek, you will be moving separately but will be receiving orders from Cha Dong-Gyun. Any questions?”

Cha Dong-Gyun immediately raised his hand “Will combat engagement be at our discretion?”

“Of course.” Kang Chan nodded. “We’re representing South Korea, its National Intelligence Service, and its special forces. It is only proper I leave that decision to you. If needed, you are free to kill anyone and everyone.”

After a brief pause, he looked straight at Cha Dong-Gyun’s glinting eyes. “I’ll take full responsibility for that.”

Kang Chan’s gaze conveyed his intentions as effectively as words.

Since there weren’t any more questions, Kang Chan issued his final orders.

“We’re going to leave the hotel at 0900 local time tomorrow and fly out at 1000. We’ll arrive in Cuba at 1700 local time, and the operation will start the next day at 1100. Go get some rest until then. Meeting adjourned.”

Afterward, everyone stood up from their seats.

“Assistant Director,” Kang Chul-Gyu softly called as everyone exited the restaurant.

“You guys go ahead. I’ll follow,” Kang Chan told Seok Kang-Ho, then sat at one side of the restaurant with Kang Chul-Gyu.

“I don’t have a good feeling about this,” Kang Chul-Gyu revealed. “I’m sure you’ve felt it as well.”

Kang Chan nodded.

“I thought I should let you know anyway for everyone’s sake,” Kang Chul-Gyu added before finally looking as if he had said everything he had wanted to say. “I’ll head up now.”

With an awkward expression, he stood up. Kang Chan followed. They walked and rode the elevator to their floor.

On the way, Kang Chan felt the need to thank Kang Chul-Gyu for telling Kang Dae-Kyung that he was alive. However, for some reason, attempting to do so made him feel so bad that it rendered him speechless.

Their relationship certainly was quite awkward.

Kang Chul-Gyu stepped out of the elevator and then immediately headed to his room.

Why is he in such a rush?

Shaking his head, Kang Chan returned to his room as well. Seok Kang-Ho and Gérard stood up and greeted him.

“He just told me that he doesn’t have a good feeling about this. You guys just keep resting. I need to call a few people,” Kang Chan said.

Wearing similar expressions, Seok Kang-Ho and Gérard nodded.

Kang Chan took his coffee and cigarette, then went to one side of the living room.

The first person he called was Lanok. He explained what had happened so far, then told him about his plan.

- Vasili and I are investigating all the possible places they can deploy units from, but we haven’t found any evidence of anyone mobilizing troops. We’ll keep monitoring the United States and let you know right away if anything dangerous comes up.

Is something wrong with him?

Lanok, whom nothing could faze, sounded nervous. Not even the Eurasian Rail Conference incident or Suo Ke kidnapping him made him sound this anxious.

“Mr. Ambassador,” Kang Chan softly called.

“We’re going to win.”

Lanok laughed quietly.

- It seems I have forgotten for a moment that we have the God of Blackfield. I’ll be waiting for the day you return.

The call ended on that note.

Kang Chan put a cigarette in his mouth and lit it up.

Chk chk.

Kang Chan blew out cigarette smoke. “Hooo.”

Ziegfeld?

Death’s coming.

Chapter 403: Right Under Our Nose (2)

Kim Hyung-Jung had the cord of their telephone draped over his shoulder and a cell phone on the other ear.

“The entire Foreign Legion is on high alert right now due to an emergency decree. Yes, sir. France’s intelligence bureau and the DGSE have stopped working on foreign affairs. They seem determined to hide their true intentions. I’ll report to you as soon as anything new comes up.”

After finishing the call with Go Gun-Woo, Kim Hyung-Jung turned to his monitors and talked into the phone that was still draped over his shoulder.

“We’ve already been notified of Russia and China issuing an emergency alert. Focus on how the troops in America and the Middle East are acting. Yeah, that’s

right! Make sure the information Russia and China have given us won't be leaked! Keep up the good work!"

Click.

After placing the phone down, Kim Hyung-Jung hurriedly looked at the monitors again to check the intel from the agents stationed abroad.

After Kang Chan had left for Cuba, all of Europe, China, Russia, and even the United States started to take military action—they started to mobilize their special forces and aircraft carriers.

Kim Hyung-Jung never imagined the day would come when France's intelligence bureau and DGSE—both of which never shared information—would secretly hand over intel to South Korea or that Russia and China would give South Korea intel in the form of reports a dozen times a day.

Moreover, the moment Uzman from Saudi Arabia exerted his influence, the atmosphere in Africa and the countries in the Middle East completely and astoundingly changed.

Nobody could have ever imagined the Shiites protecting South Korean informants from the Sunnis and giving South Korea information.

When Kim Hyung-Jung first met Kang Chan hoping to connect South Korea to the Eurasian Rail, he never expected things to become this big.

If it weren't for Kang Chan, the dream of joining the Eurasian Rail project would've gone out the window. Right now, the National Intelligence Service would've simply been busy gauging the moods of the other countries, wondering why they were acting that way.

Kim Hyung-Jung didn't expect this operation in Cuba to be big enough of a deal for the United States, Russia, France, China, the UK, Germany, and almost every other country to mobilize their troops.

Kang Chan, the assistant director of the National Intelligence Service, was at the heart of this operation, and South Korean special forces were protecting him.

Kim Hyung-Jung picked up the cup that had been pushed to the corner of his desk and drank his cold coffee. Since he couldn't fight with the others on the frontlines, he instead strengthened his resolve and did his best at what he could do.

After placing the cup down, Kim Hyung-Jung looked at the monitor again, his eyes burning with his sense of duty.

Brrr.

Following the deep whirring sound of its engine, the aircraft rose to its usual altitude.

Kang Chan sat in the first-class seat that had been prepared for him, which was close to the entrance of the commercial aircraft, and began making calls. Soon, he put his phone down. Lanok, Vasili, and Kim Hyung-Jung had informed him of the situation.

Hearing that the United States had mobilized one of its aircraft carriers perplexed him, but this situation did have Sherman involved, a man who would

resort to such drastic methods as many times as he liked if the benefits outweighed the costs.

Unfortunately, the moment an aircraft carrier was deployed, the possibility of a world war occurring at any moment became real.

Exhaling softly, Kang Chan looked outside the window. His heart started to beat faster the moment he left France, warning him that he was heading into danger.

Kang Chan had expected as much. After all, every time he had lain in bed or tried to relax, he had felt antsy and ill. Moreover, as Gérard and Daye had said, an operation he was a part of would never end without surprises.

He had felt agitated and his heart had pounded countless times in the past. However, it had never been this intense—he felt so disquieted and leery that it felt as if death was approaching them.

He leaned on the table and looked outside the window.

What does Ziegfeld really fucking want? What is he plotting? Would Sherman really let this meeting end peacefully?

Kang Chan had never participated in this kind of operation before, which was a problem in itself.

To be fair, I doubt anyone's experienced something like this before, though. This is the first time the Star of David officially showed itself to the world.

Kang Chan glared at the clouds outside the window as if he were looking at their enemies.

Seok Kang-Ho suddenly appeared, interrupting Kang Chan's thoughts.

“Here. Have some coffee.” Seok Kang-Ho placed a large plastic cup in front of Kang Chan. It was evident that he had poured two packets of coffee into it.

Kang Chan glanced up at Seok Kang-Ho.

“Is your heart pounding again?” Seok Kang-Ho asked. He sat next to Kang Chan, his eyes sharply glinting with ferocity. “Phuhu.”

“Why are you laughing?” Kang Chan asked but broke into laughter as well. He strangely found himself laughing along with the fucker whenever he had heard his signature laugh.

“It just dawned on me that we've accomplished quite a lot of crazy feats,” Seok Kang-Ho explained.

“Motherfucker.”

“Phuhu.”

Kang Chan sipped the hot coffee. Instant coffee and ramyeon really did wonders comforting them at times like this, especially during a flight.

“Let's do our best to live through this,” Seok Kang-Ho commented.

“Hey! If we were going to die, we would've died in Afghanistan or Africa already.”

“That’s true.”

What’s up with this bastard?

Seeing Kang Chan looking at him, Seok Kang-Ho said, “When I heard you died to your wounds just recently, I felt as if I was going to lose my mind. Phew! I’d rather not go through that fucking awful experience again, so we all better survive.”

As they snickered, Kang Chan wondered if their conversation was even funny. On the other hand, though, could he really blame himself for finding Seok Kang-Ho’s expression and delivery funny?

“Get some sleep,” Kang Chan said afterward and gestured at Gérard—who was sleeping—with a glance.

“What about you, Cap?”

“I’m done making calls, so I’ll be getting some sleep too. War’s about to start.”

“Alright.”

Seok Kang-Ho returned to his seat and reclined the chair.

There was no need for words anymore. To handle what Kang Chan’s heart was warning him about, he needed to sleep and eat properly.

They arrived at the Jose Marti Airport at 3 pm in Cuba’s local time.

The aircraft turned on the runway and headed toward the airport’s maintenance department. Right after, soldiers dressed in a way that was reminiscent of the communist party surrounded it. However, instead of being threatening, their presence was reassuring. It was as if Kang Chan and his men were simply being escorted.

The aircraft door opened, and Kang Chan got out first.

Seok Kang-Ho and Gérard exited the aircraft with him, and Cha Dong-Gyun and Kwak Cheol-Ho—who were fully armed and had their faces covered—followed right behind.

As the blazing heat and the intense sunlight rushed toward them, an agent among the Cuban soldiers approached Kang Chan.

“I’m Lua, the agent in charge of the DGSE’s Cuban branch. It’s an honor to meet you. We have already prepared your transfer.”

“Where’s the other aircraft?” Kang Chan asked.

“Over there, sir.”

The DGSE had prepared another commercial plane for them for the two-hour flight to Playa Santa Lucia. However, due to the Playa Santa Lucia Airport’s poor condition, it was smaller than the one they had just exited.

A Cuban soldier with a scruffy mustache kept glancing at Kang Chan and the DGSE agent.

“Cha Dong-Gyun, secure the path to that aircraft and have our men guard the perimeter,” Kang Chan ordered.

“Yes, sir!”

Cha Dong-Gyun immediately issued commands to his men through the radio.

Clunk. Clunk. Clunk.

Three soldiers got off the plane behind Kang Chan. Together with Kwak Cheol-Ho, they surrounded the one that the DGSE had prepared for them.

Kang Chan turned his head to the DGSE agent again. “Move the cargo.”

“Oui.”

After the cargo loader unloaded the cargo, it was moved and loaded into the smaller aircraft.

It might be too heavy for the plane.

Kang Chan watched them anxiously, but neither the DGSE agent nor the person moving the cargo brought up such a problem.

The process took thirty minutes.

“Cha Dong-Gyun,” Kang Chan called, then nodded at the smaller aircraft.

Cha Dong-Gyun once again relayed his orders on the radio. Everyone immediately got off the plane and boarded the smaller one.

“Good work,” Kang Chan told Lua.

“We’ll be on standby.”

Kang Chan nodded, then got on the aircraft with Seok Kang-Ho and Gérard. Once Cha Dong-Gyun had boarded with the soldiers keeping their perimeters safe, the plane drove to the runway.

It was a shitty two-hour flight.

Kang Chan could understand the turbulence due to the winds from the sea. However, when they arrived, they immediately learned that the Playa Santa Lucia Airport’s runway was just about the size of a four-lane road on a vast plain.

Du du du du du du!

The aircraft endured harsh vibrations, wearing out the tires, until it finally managed to stop near the end of the runway. They would likely have to replace the tires before flying off again.

Seok Kang-Ho groaned, then shook his head. He wasn’t the only one suffering from this flight—even Kang Chan had trouble thinking.

That son of a bitch! Why would Sherman want to meet in a place like this?

Kang Chan stopped himself from swearing out loud as he got off the aircraft.

Vroom. Vroom. Vroom.

A truck and an SUV drove toward the plane. The vehicles seemed to have been waiting for them. Soon, a lean, dark-skinned agent with a mustache respectfully walked over to them. He looked Cuban.

“I’m Rico, the agent in charge of helping you here in Playa Santa Lucia.”

The look in Rico’s eyes made him seem as if he was hiding something.

It took them about forty minutes to unload the cargo.

While Cha Dong-Gyun and the soldiers kept watch, Kang Chan slowly looked around the airport. Everywhere he looked, he saw barren lands with only a few assorted trees growing.

If he had been sent here without any explanation, he would’ve had a hard time distinguishing Playa Santa Lucia from Africa, Afghanistan, and Mongolia.

Even now, he wouldn’t have known that they were in Playa Santa Lucia if it wasn’t for the smell that rushed toward him when they lowered the aircraft’s ramp. Most of the time, Africa, Afghanistan, and Mongolia smelled like the ginger they respectively grew. There were also times when they simply had an earthy smell.

Kang Chan softly exhaled. “Phew.”

Cuba—no, Playa Santa Lucia smelled like strong cigarettes that were soaked in seawater.

Kang Chan looked at Kang Chul-Gyu. His heart was now warning him of the impending danger even more strongly than before.

‘The battle’s about to begin.’

Meeting Kang Chan’s gaze, Kang Chul-Gyu briefly nodded. He already looked as if he was on a battlefield.

The soldiers loaded the weapons and got on the truck bed of the truck in groups of five. The others got in the SUV.

They drove down a bumpy road for about twenty minutes before finally reaching a lone two-story cement building that stood out like a sore thumb in the middle of the barren land. It had outdated gray walls, drooping electrical wires that made Kang Chan wonder if people used it to commit suicide or torture others through electricity, and an air conditioner that was halfway outside the window. It also had satellite antennas.

“Feel free to rest here, sir,” Rico said.

After getting out of the car, Kang Chan looked around their surroundings. Meanwhile, the soldiers checked the building and installed weapons on the roof.

A cloud of dust rose whenever the unique wind from the sea swept past them.

The smell of wet cigarettes in the cloud of dust once again reminded Kang Chan that they were here in Playa Santa Lucia, Cuba for war, not sightseeing.

“We’ve secured the building and the roof. I’ll have six soldiers cover the perimeter,” Cha Dong-Gyun said through his mask.

After listening to the report, Kang Chan headed inside.

Honestly, Kang Chan was a little surprised. Although the old home appliances got on his nerves, its interior was decorated like a luxury hotel.

“Daye, assign rooms to everyone,” Kang Chan said.

“Alright.”

Seok Kang-Ho went up the stairs on their right with Choi Jong-Il.

There were a total of eight rooms. Kang Chan, Seok Kang-Ho, and Gérard used the room in the middle of the second floor, and Kang Chul-Gyu, Nam Il-Gyu, and Yang Dong-Sik were assigned to the room next to them. Choi Jong-Il and the Jeungpyeong soldiers were given the rooms across from them.

Can we be shot from outside the building?

Kang Chan looked out the window of a second-floor room and examined the building’s exterior. Just then, Rico entered. He seemed curious about what Kang Chan was doing.

“What would you like to have for dinner?” Rico asked.

For some reason, Rico looked as if he wanted to mooch off what Kang Chan was going to have for dinner.

“Is there anything prepared for us?” Kang Chan asked back.

“We’ll prepare whatever you wish. We can prepare a Cuban meal, spaghetti, pizza, or even an American-style steak.”

“One second.”

Kang Chan went to the door and leaned down toward the first floor. “Daye! What do you want to have for dinner?”

“We have cup ramyeon, instant rice, and kimchi. Let’s have that!” Daye immediately responded from below.

“We’ll have the food that we brought here. What about you?” Kang Chan asked Rico.

“I’d also like to have the same if that’s okay with you.”

Kang Chan had guessed as much. Smirking, he agreed to have Rico join them for dinner.

They made cup ramyeon in a large pot and took out the instant rice. They also prepared kimchi. No one would skip dinner just because the flight was strenuous.

During the meal, Rico vigorously ate three cups of instant ramyeons even though he claimed that it was his first time having them. He also had plenty of their spicy kimchi.

Kang Chan normally didn't have much to say about how a person ate, but Rico just looked too detestable when he did.

After dinner, they turned on the faucet only for it to let out motor sounds, making it seem as if it was pulling up groundwater. Fortunately, the flow of water was strong enough for three soldiers to clean up the rest of their dinner.

Kang Chan stepped away from the table and went out of the building. He wasn't sure if it was because of the humidity or the salt in the air, but the sunset near the sea cast a burgundy veil over them, making the clouds look red.

Thump-thump. Thump-thump.

He didn't tell anyone about it, but Kang Chan only had a light dinner. After all, when they placed a cup of ramen in front of him, his heart started pounding a bit stronger.

He took a look at their surroundings.

Are our enemies aiming at us right now?

Not only were the soldiers on the roof thoroughly examining their vicinity, but they had assigned six soldiers to guard areas where their enemies could shoot them. Most snipers wouldn't be able to get past their defenses.

What on earth is making my heart pound, then?

Kang Chan softly sighed.

Screech.

At the same time, the door opened, and Kang Chul-Gyu came outside. His eyes were glinting, just like Kang Chan's.

Kang Chul-Gyu stood next to Kang Chan.

"It's been a long time since I felt this anxious. I'll examine the area with Il-Gyu and Dong-Sik once it gets dark," Kang Chul-Gyu said. Slowly looking around their surroundings, he softly continued. "I'd also like to request for you to stay armed. Have your radio with you at all times as well."

"Okay."

Considering this crisis could make Kang Chul-Gyu nag at him for this long, Kang Chan thought he should at least be prepared for any circumstances.

The darkness was slowly enveloping the sunset that Playa Santa Lucia likely enjoyed every day.

Thump-thump. Thump-thump.

Kang Chan looked up and around their surroundings with glinting eyes.

What's going on? Are there bastards out there playing a trick on us?

Kang Chan was about to go crazy from frustration and curiosity, but there was no way he could know what was about to happen until it already had.

As he surveyed the area two more times, the darkness cruelly engulfed the remaining light.

“I’m going back inside to get ready,” Kang Chul-Gyu said.

“Be careful. Don’t overdo it.”

Kang Chul-Gyu, who was already turning around, looked back at Kang Chan in hesitation. After a moment, he nodded as if to say that he understood.

Was this really a good idea? Should Kang Chan put this many people in danger just to meet Ziegfeld, an untrustworthy man?

By the time Kang Chan went back inside, Kang Chul-Gyu, Nam Il-Gyu, and Yang Dong-Sik had already finished getting ready.

They had pistols, magazines, and bayonets attached to their waists and ankles. They also had rifles slung across their back. Unique to their team, they also had a bayonet strapped to their left shoulders.

The atmosphere on the first floor was as heavy and fierce as the look in Kang Chul-Gyu’s eyes. Moreover, Kang Chan entered looking on edge, making the situation even more like they were just about to head into battle.

“Cha Dong-Gyun—prepare weapons and a military uniform for me, and raise our security to the maximum. I want Daye, Gérard, Choi Jong-Il, and Woo Hee-Seung armed and ready as well,” Kang Chan said.

Kang Chan’s expression and the look in his eyes made Cha Dong-Gyun and Choi Jong-Il move quickly.

While Kang Chan was changing into his military uniform, Kang Chul-Gyu stood in front of the door with Nam Il-Gyu and Yang Dong-Sik.

Chk.

“This is Command. Kang sunbae will be heading to the perimeter with two other people. Teams on the outskirts, be advised,” Cha Dong-Gyun radioed in.

Chk.

“Team One—copy.”

Chk.

“Team Two—copy.”

Chk.

“Team Three—copy.”

Screech.

Kang Chul-Gyu, Nam Il-Gyu, and Yang Dong-Sik said goodbye with their eyes and then went outside.

Thump-thump. Thump-thump.

The warnings that Kang Chan's instincts were giving him intensified as more time passed. Eventually, it started making him feel as if a sharp knife was being stabbed into his eyes and neck.

Kang Chan armed himself with pistols, bayonets, magazines, rifles, and even his radio. With his nerves on edge, he looked at the soldiers.

Rico looked around, surprised at the sharp atmosphere that started from Kang Chan. Only he didn't know the meaning behind the look in Kang Chan's eyes.

Pew! PEW! Pew!

Familiar gunshots frighteningly penetrated their ears.

"I want more soldiers on the roof! Daye! Gérard!" Kang Chan yelled. He then charged toward the door.

PEW! Pew! Pew! PEW!

Chk.

"It's North Korea's 8th Special Forces Brigade! I repeat. It's North Korea's 8th Special Forces Brigade! The rest of our men should remain at base!" Kang Chul-Gyu softly radioed in. He sounded as if he was gritting his teeth.

Chapter 404: I'll Play Along With You (1)

Everyone heard what Kang Chul-Gyu said over the radio. The moment the transmission ended, Kang Chan drew his pistol and aimed it at Rico, leaving everyone wondering what was happening.

Clink!

"Tie this bastard up," Kang Chan commanded. As ordered, Yoon Sang-Ki and another soldier rushed in and swiftly subdued Rico.

At the same time, Cha Dong-Gyun sent four soldiers to support the rooftop. The other soldiers didn't have to be ordered for them to hang by the windows and watch their surroundings. The South Korean special forces' global standards truly shone in moments of confusion and unexpected situations like this.

"Cha Dong-Gyun, assign men who'll be heading out with us—"

The door opened, interrupting Kang Chan.

Clink! Clink! Clink!

Kang Chan immediately aimed his rifle at those who were rushing in, and the others quickly followed suit. Just as quickly, however, they identified the group as the one they had assigned to the perimeter.

Crash.

Four soldiers dragged in two others whose necks and chests were soaked in blood. They then collapsed together on the floor. As his men immediately tended to the injured, Kang Chan glanced toward the door.

The last person to enter was Nam Il-Gyu. He had a knife in his hand, and his eyes were gleaming.

“Just as Kang sunbae-nim said, we’ve encountered North Korea’s 8th Special Forces Brigade. These bastards had a lot of grudges against us in the DMZ.”

“How many?”

“I can’t say for sure, but roughly around fifty.”

“Cha Dong-Gyun, send ten soldiers—”

“Assistant Director.”

Nam Il-Gyu interrupted Kang Chan’s command.

“Kang sunbae-nim wants you to be in the best condition for tomorrow’s meeting. He also asked us to handle this fight so that our juniors can deal with other enemy traps.”

Despite his urgency to go out and support the remaining two soldiers outside, Nam Il-Gyu conveyed each word carefully and firmly with a look that seemed ready to jump into action at any moment.

“Please, Assistant Director. Those bastards fight like us. They hide in the dirt and jump out, just like during our training in Jeungpyeong. Their combat style will definitely get more of our juniors injured, so please just let me, Kang sunbae, and Dong-Sik handle this.”

Every man would have a terrifyingly intense look in his eyes when putting his life on the line. Nam Il-Gyu was no different. A heavy silence and tension enveloped the first floor.

Do we even have time for this?

Kang Chan glanced toward the door, but Nam Il-Gyu slightly moved to hold his gaze, seemingly locking him in a staring contest.

“If tonight is already like this, there will be another trap tomorrow. The juniors need to be able to protect you then.”

Every second counted in this critical moment when two men were facing over fifty enemies just outside the door. Kang Chan couldn’t leave the three of them alone.

“We don’t need to have the meeting tomorrow,” said Kang Chan.

Despite Kang Chan’s decision, Nam Il-Gyu did not back down.

“Please do what’s best for Korea. We, the DMZ team and Kang sunbae, have given our lives for our country. Dong-Sik has even committed the grave sin of negligence against his daughter So-Mi because of it...”

“We do not have time for this. Don’t you know what our men are capable of? They’re currently the best in the world; they won’t be easily taken down.”

“I do know that, but it’s difficult to fight together in this kind of battle. Even if Kang sunbae and I can’t handle everything, we’ll at least expose them. You can step in then.”

There were only two options for Kang Chan. Either break Nam Il-Gyu's will and lead the soldiers out or accept the determination in his eyes.

The brief moment of contemplation was too precious to waste on lengthy thoughts. For now, he needed to watch the situation before deciding.

Kang Chan made up his mind.

"Fine, but we'll provide cover fire from the rooftop," he said.

"Thank you, Assistant Director!"

Nam Il-Gyu saluted Kang Chan.

Kang Chan quickly saluted in return. How could he ignore such a gesture?

Creak!

Right after, Nam Il-Gyu disappeared outside.

"Cha Dong-Gyun, position two men at each window and send the others to the rooftop. If you spot even one of them, shoot them in the head. Drag that bastard to the rooftop as well!"

After issuing orders, Kang Chan immediately went up to the rooftop. It had been a long time since he'd seen such pitch-black darkness.

The stars and the moon hid behind the clouds, cruelly concealing their light. Dust continued to sweep across the rooftop.

Clink!

Lee Doo-Hee set up a sniper rifle against the rooftop wall beside Kang Chan, whose eyes had become as cold as ice.

"Rico."

The man looked at Kang Chan and his surroundings with an indignant expression.

"Ramen and kimchi are hard for a first-timer to enjoy. It's especially impossible for someone like you. Make a wise choice and answer. How did the 8th Brigade get here?"

"I'm innocent," Rico replied.

This bastard dares mess around with Kang Chul-Gyu, Nam Il-Gyu, and Yang Dong-Sik's lives?!

Kang Chan pulled the trigger.

Bang!

When the muzzle flashed, Rico's left thigh burst open.

"Aaagh!"

"How did the 8th Brigade get here?" Kang Chan repeated.

“Ugh...”

Bang! Thud!

His right leg was shot through next.

“Ugh! Ugh...”

“You’re keeping your mouth shut? Fine.”

“Uugghh!”

Kang Chan took out his phone in front of the man and dialed a number.

- This is Hugo.

“Rico, the local agent in Cuba, has betrayed us.”

Hugo didn’t respond.

“I assume you’re already looking into his identity?”

- Of course.

Kang Chan nodded and glared at Rico. Tears and snot were streaming down Rico’s face, but he still looked indignant. He would naturally feel resentful. After all, he probably didn’t expect the North Korean 8th Special Forces Brigade to be exposed so quickly.

“Hugo, this incident, following the betrayal of the guide in China, is a disgrace to the DGSE.”

- We will take decisive action.

Kang Chan didn’t miss the way Rico’s eyes darted around in an attempt to listen to their conversation.

You idiot!

Whether he wanted to or not, as a local leader of the DGSE, he had to be aware of who Kang Chan was.

Information warfare? He probably got greedy from the money coming out of Ziegfeld and got involved with North Korea.

Fine, I’ll play along and give orders accordingly.

You probably don’t know this, but during my training under Lanok, Vasili taught me exactly how to handle situations like this. I just have to make sure you and your associates can’t even flip a coin anymore, no?

Kang Chan stared directly into Rico’s eyes. In French, he said, “I will ensure the DGSE never faces another situation like this again. Kill everyone who recommended this man, all agents in Cuba associated with him, his family, and everyone in his phone’s contacts within twenty-four hours.”

Only Rico and Gérard could understand what he had said. Kang Chan smirked at Rico, whose face had turned white.

“And seize every single penny from his accounts and assets. If the results are unsatisfactory, I’ll order the execution of all involved staff.”

- Duly noted. We will have it done immediately.

“Assistant Director! That’s...!”

Bastard! You should have listened when I was being reasonable!

“Rico.”

“Yes, Assistant Director, sir. This was something I...”

“If you wanted to hold out, you should have shown some more tenacity.”

“What do you mean...?”

Bang! Thud!

Rico's head snapped back, and blood splattered from his forehead.

“Clean this up!” Kang Chan commanded, then moved beside Lee Doo-Hee.

Although the others could not understand what he had told Hugo earlier, they got the gist of it from the atmosphere.

Clink!

Kang Chan set his rifle on the rooftop’s parapet and glared into the darkness.

A muzzle flashed amid the night, followed right after by a gunshot piercing the silence like a knife. Kang Chul-Gyu glanced at the rooftop with fierce eyes, then turned away.

Firing a gun from the rooftop at a time like this!

There was no better word to describe it than “incredible.” The sound of gunfire offered decisiveness to the enemy and reassurance to the allies. It served as a warning to their opponents that they were being watched and a powerful message to their allies that they had strong comrades supporting them.

Kang Chul-Gyu and Nam Il-Gyu found the enemies while they were patrolling the perimeter. Just as they had identified the two Jeungpyeong soldiers and walked toward them, they noticed that the earth behind the two was being displaced. The two Jeungpyeong soldiers whirled around to fire, but in such a fight, guns would always be slower.

They would have been killed had Kang Chul-Gyu and Nam Il-Gyu not rushed in. After slitting the enemy’s throat, they quickly realized that their opponents were from the 8th Special Forces Brigade. The way they carried their weapons was so unique that it was impossible not to notice unless there was another Asian special forces team in the world mimicking the DMZ team by hanging knives on their left shoulders.

Why and how these guys were here weren't important. All that mattered now was clearing out everyone who had dug into and hidden themselves underground. Moving like a cat, Kang Chul-Gyu gently slipped his left hand into the crumbling soil.

Rustle.

Then, like a snake slithering through the ground, his left hand moved forward.

Did you know that when you cover freshly dug soil, it always leaves a pattern in the direction it was covered? That's why deeply buried bodies resurface with rainwater and why a single footprint can disturb the dust differently in the wind. Especially on a day like today, with the strong sea breeze, it's even easier to spot those trying to hide.

Rustle.

The moment the soil two steps ahead shifted slightly, Kang Chul-Gyu lunged into the darkness.

Whoosh!

Thud!

He plunged his knife deep into the ground.

Crunch! Crack!

As he pulled the knife from the soil, the sound of flesh tearing and bones breaking echoed simultaneously. Like spilled ink, blood soaked the ground, and the metallic smell quickly spread. To disguise themselves this well, they had to have spent at least half a day preparing. In this position, these people would survive even if a machine gun rained down bullets from the rooftop.

Swish!

The sound of Yang Dong-Sik cutting down an enemy came from the right. If there were thick bushes, other ambushes could have been possible, but on this bare ground, hiding in the soil was the best option.

Did these idiots really think they could eliminate Kang Chan with such numbers?

Kang Chul-Gyu moved silently forward again.

They must be panicking. Raising their heads risks being sniped from the rooftop, but hiding means getting killed one by one.

Rustle! Thud!

The soil moved again, and Kang Chul-Gyu moved like a wildcat, plunging his knife into the ground.

Crack!

He heard the sound of muscles and bones breaking against the knife. He was certain that all the hidden enemies around had heard it.

Yang Dong-Sik reached into the soil and found the head of the third enemy he had killed.

Thud! Crunch! Crack! Crunch!

After several stabs, Yang Dong-Sik placed the severed head atop the enemy's buried body. This was what they called "Showing Them Seoul." All the hidden enemies must have heard him as well.

The enemies probably knew now that the King of the DMZ and Nam Il-Gyu, the creator of "Showing Them Seoul," were around. The warning shots from the rooftop ensured they couldn't even raise their heads. Yang Dong-Sik spotted an enemy hidden a few steps ahead and swiftly approached.

Thud! Crunch!

He plunged his knife into the enemy's body and then yanked it out.

Since you're already dead, you might as well take a look at Seoul before you go.

Yang Dong-Sik reached into the soil.

More than ten years have passed. Why haven't these bastards evolved...?

Yang Dong-Sik's hand stopped as he pulled out something curious.

Sssss!

It was a wire.

What's this?

He searched the dead body again.

Did they bring a packed lunch for the Seoul tour?

In Yang Dong-Sik's hand was a palm-sized block of C4.

It's like a string of firecrackers for when Dad comes home!

Realizing why the enemies had surrounded the building and moved in the darkness, Yang Dong-Sik quickly rose to alert Kang Chul-Gyu.

I have to warn him!

Click!

Yang Dong-Sik glanced down in surprise.

Thud!

A sharp steel spike shot out from the soil, piercing his chest.

These bastards!

"Aaagh!"

He gritted his teeth and twisted his upper body.

Click! Thud! Click! Thud!

Two more spikes shot out, skewering Yang Dong-Sik's torso again.

"Dong-Sik!"

It was dark, and more enemies were waiting to ambush them, yet Kang Chul-Gyu noisily approached him. Yang Dong-Sik knew he had to warn Kang Chul-Gyu about the C4 and the spikes, but...

“Kugh.”

... all that came out of his mouth was a bubble of blood.

Thud! Crack! Thud! Crunch! Thud! Crunch!

Every time Kang Chul-Gyu struck with his knife, the sound of enemies being split open echoed.

Isn't he a truly admirable sunbae? I'm not just talking about combat skills, either!

Click! Click!

Twice, spikes shot out aiming at Kang Chul-Gyu. Yang Dong-Sik could barely see the soil flying.

Are these something like spring-loaded spikes like the batons used by the police? At least it'll be useful when you can't move a gun while lying down.

Strangely, the noise stopped. Amid this eerily silent world, his eyes remained fixed on Kang Chul-Gyu. He watched as Kang Chul-Gyu plunged his knife into the ground and dragged it, like watching a muted TV.

Hope sunbae-nim is okay...

‘Dad, does it hurt a lot?’

‘No, I’m okay.’

“Dong-Sik! Hey!”

He could see Kang Chul-Gyu shouting and approaching, but he could only hear So-Mi’s voice.

‘How could you come so soon? You should stay much longer.’

‘Right. I’m rather worried about sunbae-nim.’

“Dong-Sik! No! Don’t lose consciousness! Dong-Sik!”

He could clearly see the words on Kang Chul-Gyu’s lips and felt him lifting his upper body.

‘Do you really like him that much?’

‘Yeah, So-Mi. I like Kang sunbae-nim more than anyone in the world.’

Thud.

Kang Chul-Gyu caught Yang Dong-Sik's head as it fell to the ground.

“Dong-Sik! Hey, come on!”

Along with a spatter of blood, Yang Dong-Sik uttered his last clear words.

Swish! Whizz! Whizz! Swish! Crack! Whoosh!

It looked like a battle between ghosts and spirits. Just beyond the mound that obscured the view of the two-story building, Nam Il-Gyu, surrounded by enemies, could not find the chance to draw his gun. However, he gave the enemies surrounding him no chance to aim theirs either. Seven to ten enemies rose from the ground, encircling Nam Il-Gyu.

Crack! Whizz! Whizz!

These bastards have no idea who they're dealing with—I'm the one who created 'showing them Seoul!'

Feeling a sense of urgency, Nam Il-Gyu parried the incoming knife handles and quickly plunged his knife into an enemy's torso. He now understood why these fuckers were lying quietly in the dirt. Considering the wires connected haphazardly and the C4 strapped to their waists, it seemed they had planned to lure the allies out and eliminate them all here. They never planned on returning alive.

Whizz! Whizz!

In his haste, Nam Il-Gyu got hit in the waist and shoulder.

Swish! Swish! Swish!

He narrowly avoided the incoming knives.

The last knife grazed the bridge of his nose, slicing it horizontally.

These damn greenhorns!

'Damn it!'

Smack!

Nam Il-Gyu grabbed the wrist of the enemy who had just swung at his face like a viper. He then severed their wrist and plunged his knife into their neck.

Swoosh! Thud!

Meanwhile, he was slashed on his back and thigh. It was terrifying; there were too many surrounding him, and they would do anything to take down at least one person. To make matters worse, they would most likely use him as bait to draw out Kang Chan and the special forces team.

Better to die than become bait. Should I shout? At least Kang Chul-Gyu might hear me.

Whizz! Whizz!

Nam Il-Gyu got hit again on his left side and forearm.

What if I pierced that fucker's neck and detonated a grenade?

No matter how many knives flew at him, he could at least manage that.

'Before it's too late!'

Nam Il-Gyu gritted his teeth.

Swish! Thud! Swish! Thud! Swish! Thud! Swish! Thud!

Gunshots rang out, and holes appeared in the enemies' foreheads.

He thought it was Kang Chul-Gyu helping him, but his sunbae's shouts were coming from quite a distance.

“Dong-Sik!”

Swish! Thud! Swish! Thud! Swish! Thud!

Is it a ghost? Is someone helping because our situation looks so pitiful and tragic?

The shooting was frighteningly accurate, giving Nam Il-Gyu enough room to have absurd thoughts. The sound of the shots was different from that of a sniper rifle.

Could it be?

Nam Il-Gyu turned his head.

Click!

With eyes blazing with fury, Kang Chan approached.

Chapter 405: I'll Play Along With You (2)

Huff. Huff.

Fully prepared for combat, Kang Chan sharply scanned his surroundings. He then pulled the trigger, making the muzzle of the MP5S flash. The enemy's forehead burst open right after.

Click! Swish! Thud!

Fucking bastards! I don't mind fighting to the death in the DMZ due to differing ideologies and situations. But to kill fellow Koreans in a foreign land just for some Western money? Stupid fucking assholes!

Swish! Swish! Swish!

Gunshots and flashes could be heard and seen in the distance. Seok Kang-Ho, Gérard, Cha Dong-Gyun, Kwak Cheol-Ho, and Choi Jong-Il were closing in, tightening the encirclement.

“Assistant Director! There are C4s everywhere!” the blood-soaked Nam Il-Gyu urgently shouted. “They've strapped explosives to themselves and plan to detonate it as soon as you and the juniors approach!”

With a nod, Kang Chan signaled Nam Il-Gyu to get behind him. Perhaps it was because of his fierce gaze, but Nam Il-Gyu quickly obeyed.

Huff. Huff. Did these little shits seriously impale Yang Dong-Sik's chest with spikes?

Swish! Swish!

Kang Chan slowly swept the soil with his boot as he moved forward.

Smirk!

I know where you fuckers are! I watched you bitches fight Kang Chul-Gyu, Nam Il-Gyu, and Yang Dong-Sik from the rooftop! C4? Go ahead, detonate it!

Do you think we're stupid enough to stick our heads out and get ourselves killed? Fuck your explosives!

As Nam Il-Gyu searched for enemies from behind, Kang Chan took out two grenades with his left hand and pulled the safety pins with his mouth.

Still don't feel like moving? Then die!

Kang Chan threw the grenades.

In response, Nam Il-Gyu dropped to the ground out of reflex, not fear. There was no reason to let grenades injure him. Unlike him, Kang Chan squatted and took aim.

What the hell is this man doing...?

Boom! Boooooom!

The grenades exploded on loose soil, sending dirt twenty meters into the air and blowing dust over fifty meters up.

Rustle. Rustle.

Swish! Swish! Swish! Swish! Swish! Swish! Swish!

As dirt fell like black rain from the sky, Kang Chan opened fire on the enemies whom the grenades had forced to move.

Swoosh!

In front of the dazed Nam Il-Gyu, Kang Chan lowered his rifle, grabbed the bayonet strapped to his ankle, and charged forward.

Flop!

Though surprised, Nam Il-Gyu was no idiot. He was still the creator of the "Show them Seoul" trend among the DMZ team. He quickly got up, grabbed his knife, and followed Kang Chan.

Thud! Thud! Thud! Slice!

To ensure that the enemy was dead, Kang Chan plunged the knife deep into the soil. Chills ran down Nam Il-Gyu's spine as he bore witness to Kang Chan's precise and brutal knife strikes. Eventually, however, gunfire and grenade explosions from the front of the building broke the silence.

Swish! Swish! Swish! Swish! Swish!

Before Nam Il-Gyu realized it, Kang Chan was already firing away. Meanwhile, Kang Chul-Gyu used Kang Chan's continuous rifle fire as his guide toward them.

The scene made him feel chills for the third time.

How could he use his guns, grenades, and knives like that in such a chaotic moment? Is this all to create an escape path for Kang sunbae?

"Hurry!" urged Kang Chan.

Swish! Swish! Swish! Swish!

Click! Clack!

Swish! Swish! Swish! Swish! Swish! Swish!

Carrying Yang Dong-Sik over his shoulder, Kang Chul-Gyu ran toward them with a fearsome expression. Without looking, Kang Chan reloaded and fired relentlessly around Kang Chul-Gyu.

Swish! Swish! Swish! Swish!

“Faster!”

Even though Kang Chul-Gyu was only ten meters away now, Kang Chan kept firing at the ground and shouting.

Crunch! Crunch!

Kang Chul-Gyu’s footsteps were normally silent, but at that moment, they echoed loudly and clearly.

As they tried to make their escape, a blinding light burst out and swirled with the darkness. Right after, ear-splitting explosions threw Kang Chan, Kang Chul-Gyu, and Nam Il-Gyu into the air.

Boom! Boom! Boom!

Thud! Thud! Thud!

Rustle. Rustle. Rustle.

Damn it! It’s always like this! Those damned bombs always make people stupid. I feel like a ghost has grabbed my ankle and is pulling me underwater. Everything is blurry, and I can’t even hear properly anymore.

Kang Chan shook his head and moved toward Kang Chul-Gyu.

Stomp. Stomp.

Old man! Do you think I’ll just let you die? All you’ve done so far is buy some clothes, eat bulgogi once, and spend an awkward night at a pension house! You can’t die with just those memories! That’s not what you want either, is it?

Honestly, I find this unfair! I didn’t even know you were the King of DMZ or that you carried scars all your life!

Thump!

Kang Chan slipped his hand under the shoulder of the fallen Kang Chul-Gyu, finding his back completely soaked in blood.

“Ugh!”

Moving a body carelessly could push shrapnel deeper. Hence, Kang Chan instead sat down with his legs stretched out in front of him and carefully turned Kang Chul-Gyu on his leg. Kang Chul-Gyu was pale, showing the years etched deeply in his features.

“Stay with me!”

Kang Chan gently shook Kang Chul-Gyu.

“I haven’t even called you ‘Father’ yet! Don’t make me feel guilty and open your eyes!”

Behind him, Nam Il-Gyu was struggling to sit up, and soldiers were running from the building with clanking rifles.

“Wake the fuck up! I won’t forgive you if you go like this!” shouted Kang Chan.

Kang Chul-Gyu looked so pale that the blood from his nose, ears, and eyes stood out even in the darkness.

“Please! Just this once! Listen to me and open your eyes!”

He would have bitten his palm and given him blood just as he had done for Gérard, but he knew it wouldn’t help. On the contrary, it could end up blocking his airway.

As Nam Il-Gyu picked up Yang Dong-Sik, soldiers rushed toward Kang Chan.

"We'll take care of him, sir!"

Kang Chan nodded.

Flop! Flop!

The soldiers began carrying Kang Chul-Gyu and Yang Dong-Sik to the building. Behind them were Seok Kang-Ho, Gérard, Cha Dong-Gyun, Yoon Sang-Ki, Choi Jong-Il, and Lee Doo-Hee, their faces barely visible under layers of dirt.

"The special forces team has five injured. The building’s windows and front door have been completely destroyed as well, sir."

Kang Chan reached out to Seok Kang-Ho. "Help me up!"

As ordered, Seok Kang-Ho grabbed Kang Chan's hand and pulled him up.

Thud! Rustle.

The dust that had settled on Kang Chan fell off.

"Cha Dong-Gyun! The bodies of the people we killed are over there. Gather everything you can find and bring it in front of the building."

"Yes, sir."

Gritting his teeth, Kang Chan took one step after another toward the building. His eyes were so intense that not even Choi Jong-Il dared ask about his condition.

Is this what you wanted? Talking about negotiation while stabbing us in the back? A fight where whoever kills first wins?

Joke’s on you, then. This is our specialty.

Through the completely broken door and window frames, the white light of fluorescent lamps and the red light of incandescent lamps shone out.

"Phone!"

Woo Hee-Seung quickly fetched Kang Chan's phone. The latter then quickly called a number.

Tap, tap, tap, tap.

"Cigarette!"

Seok Kang-Ho pulled out a cigarette, placed it in Kang Chan's mouth, and lit it.

- This is Hugo.

This bastard is also incredibly busy tonight.

"Hugo! I don't know the extent of my authority, but send the Foreign Legion's special forces team and all available troops to Cuba!"

- The special forces team and two Foreign Legion regiments are ready for deployment.

Good enough!

Kang Chan puffed out smoke. "Deploy them right now!"

- Assistant Director.

"What is it?"

- Director Romain's number is in Rico's contacts.

Kang Chan smirked. Whenever things ended chaotically, it certainly always turned out like this.

These bastards always bark, but you learn the hard way that they bite when you expect them to meow.

"I'll handle that myself."

- If Director Romain dies, your authority as acting director will be nullified.

"Hugo."

- Yes, Assistant Director!

Hugo's tone became firmer, perhaps sensing the change in Kang Chan's voice.

This bastard is definitely easier to deal with over the phone.

"I'll handle it myself."

- As you wish, sir.

"One last thing. I want Sherman killed."

Kang Chan heard Hugo gulp.

"Is that an impossible order?" he asked.

- No, sir! We will carry out your command for the glory of France.

I'm actually not doing this for France. This is just who I am.

However, Kang Chan thought there was no need to clarify this. He ended the call, searched for another number, and pressed the call button. With his cigarette burned out, he then threw the butt on the ground and stomped on it.

"Phew!"

Carpet? Hotel-grade interiors? I couldn't care less about any of that. Everyone involved in this mess will lose their heads, just like how Vasili taught us in his special lecture.

The dial tone stopped, and the call connected.

- Kim Hyung-Jung speaking.

"This is Kang Chan. We need support from our Fighter Wing, the 35th Brigade, and the counter-terrorism team. Seek cooperation from China and Russia as well. Please get the President's approval, and if he disagrees, let me know immediately."

A brief but strong silence passed.

- Can you specify the target for the attack?

"Bermuda. A confrontation with the United States is possible."

As if Kim Hyung-Jung had stopped breathing, complete silence fell on the other end of the line once more.

"Manager Kim! North Korea's 8th Special Forces Brigade was waiting to ambush us here. I'll provide exact casualty details as soon as we have them, but we can't just let this matter slide quietly."

Still no response. It seemed Kim Hyung-Jung still couldn't breathe.

"Please give me a decision within thirty minutes. I need to request aerial refueling support from China and Russia," Kang Chan said.

- Ah! Understood! I'll check immediately and call you back!

"Manager Kim!"

- Yes, Assistant Director!

"Declare a military emergency. Two of the Foreign Legion's regiments and their special forces team are already on their way here, and I'll also be requesting a state of emergency from Russia and China. They've just thrown a punch at us, sir. It won't sit right with me if we stay quiet in response."

- I'll report that as well.

Kang Chan ended the call and then looked around.

Clank. Clank. Clank.

Kwak Cheol-Ho walked over to him.

"Yang Dong-Sik sunbae-nim is gone, sir. Kang sunbae-nim is severely wounded, but thanks to Yang Dong-Sik sunbae-nim, he managed to avoid injuries to his head, neck, and heart. We'll have to see how it turns out."

Kang Chan nodded. "Is a blood transfusion possible?"

"Yes, sir."

Kang Chan's mood lightened a bit.

Despite not being given any orders, Cha Dong-Gyun was already positioning soldiers at each window. Moreover, although they had heard Kang Chan's instructions to Kim Hyung-Jung, none of the soldiers were shocked. On the contrary, their eyes gleamed with determination, making Kang Chan chuckle.

With these men, there's nothing we can't do.

Setting up the tables and chairs that had been knocked over, Kang Chan sat down and picked up the phone again. He pressed the call button, and just as the dial tone started, the call connected.

- This is Vasili.

"Vasili, North Korea's 8th Special Forces Brigade was lying in wait for us."

Vasili responded with a low growl.

- Hmm.

"I've ordered the DGSE to assassinate Sherman and send two of the Foreign Legion's regiments and its special forces team to Cuba. I've also requested the help of our Fighter Wing and two other teams from South Korea."

- What do you need me to do?

"The Spetsnaz, support for the Fighter Wing, and aerial refueling."

- One of my problems is getting solved neatly.

Unsure of what he meant, Kang Chan just kept quiet.

- I was considering putting another man in as President, but this situation leaves me no choice but to take the forefront. You're planning to hit Bermuda, aren't you? You do realize that the US will likely stand in your way, don't you?

"If they want a fight, we'll give them one!"

- Hahaha! Hahaha!

Has Vasili ever laughed so heartily before?

- Yes! The main character should have this kind of boldness! Don't forget to calculate rationally, though. The US might be looking to start a world war.

"Got it. Is Yang Bum next to you?" Kang Chan asked.

Yang Bum immediately joined the conversation.

- I'm here, Mr. Kang Chan.

"As you've heard, we request the same level of support from China."

Though Kang Chan was concerned that Yang Bum hadn't regained his authority in China's intelligence bureau, he thought that not speaking up in such times would be even more humiliating for Yang Bum.

- Understood. Let us know the departure time, and we'll take the necessary measures.

The man's response was surprisingly straightforward.

“Thank you. I'll contact you as soon as we've set the time.

Kang Chan hung up and immediately dialed another number. This time, the call just kept ringing.

Is he avoiding the call?

As the sweet smell of instant coffee wafted in from the inside, where Seok Kang-Ho was making some, a polite voice answered the call.

- Monsieur Kang.

"Uzman, this is Kang Chan. I have a request."

- I can't imagine what you need, 'Upwind.' What is it?

"I'm thinking of invading Israel."

Like Kim Hyung-Jung, Uzman abruptly stopped breathing. A moment of silence followed.

- As one ages, they tend to begin calculating the repercussions of their actions. Hence, I must ask, have you foreseen the consequences of this proposal?

“Uzman.”

- I'd like to hear your opinion, Monsieur Kang.

Uzman sounded so calm that it almost seemed as if he were soothing Kang Chan.

“No sane person desires war, but when one threatens another, they have to be met with retaliation. Only then will they stop committing such acts in the future.”

- Have you considered our relationship with Palestine?

“I am well aware of how the Star of David operates.”

- A 'fierce wind' indeed. We have our regulations, Monsieur Kang. Can you give us some time? It won't take long.

“Of course.”

Kang Chan ended the call just as Seok Kang-Ho brought over the instant coffee. Due to the broken windows, dust had landed on the beverage. However, not even that could affect its taste.

After taking the coffee, he headed to the inner room on the first floor. He planned to give a blood transfusion to Kang Chul-Gyu.

Creak.

Seemingly having taken damage, the door screeched as it opened. Kang Chan entered and stopped, taking a deep breath. Kang Chul-Gyu was looking at him with a pale face.

Kang Chan walked slowly and sat down by the bed, unable to think of what to say. Had Kang Chul-Gyu heard what Kang Chan had shouted while he had been unconscious?

As they both smiled awkwardly, Seok Kang-Ho walked in briskly.

"Phone call."

Buzz. Buzz. Buzz.

Damn it!

Kang Chan answered the call.

- Mr. Kang.

"Speak."

- Mr. Kang! I think there's been a misunderstanding. You don't have to mobilize the Foreign Legion.

Crazy bastard!

Kang Chan chuckled.

"Sherman! I'm really disappointed."

- What do you mean...?

"If you really don't know what's happening here right now, then you've just disappointed me even more."

Perhaps because he was shocked or speechless, Sherman didn't respond.

"Let's see who dies first, Sherman. That's something I really enjoy!"

Kang Chan laughed, then dropped the call.

Chapter 406: Why Did You Mess with Him? (1)

Moon Jae-Hyun looked as though he had ordered sweet and sour pork, stir-fried seafood, black bean noodles, and spicy seafood noodle soup, only to be told by the cashier that his card had been declined.

"Are you sure it's North Korea's 8th Special Forces Brigade?"

"Considering Kang Chul-Gyu, the DMZ team, and Jeungpyeong special forces team are all on-site, I see no reason to doubt the Assistant Director's judgment," Go Gun-Woo replied.

Moon Jae-Hyun turned his gaze to the garden. Now, Go Gun-Woo exuded the aura, expression, and authority of a National Intelligence Service director.

How reassuring.

At times like this, Moon Jae-Hyun would always remember Hwang Ki-Hyun and Song Chang-Wook, whom he had met through Hwang Ki-Hyun.

'If only we were stronger...'

If Korea had been stronger, they could have protected Hwang Ki-Hyun, who had devoted himself to their country. Moreover, Song Chang-Wook would still be holding the old Korean flag that his grandfather had sacrificed everything for during the fight for independence.

Moon Jae-Hyun took a deep breath, trying to shake off his rising emotions. As the president, he had to prioritize the safety of the citizens and the development of South Korea in every decision.

Noticing that his mouth was dry, he drank some water from the bottle on the table before looking back up at the sky. He had never believed in a god, and he wasn't about to suddenly seek help from one now. Instead, he strove to make decisions that would honor the sacrifices of those who had bled for South Korea and ensure the well-being of the nation and its people.

How could he think about fighting the United States? The idea was so absurd that it made him laugh humorlessly. South Korea had indeed produced an extraordinary individual—someone capable of mobilizing the forces of Russia, China, and France with a single phone call.

Moon Jae-Hyun nodded in acknowledgment.

I should accept the reality. Powerful countries like Russia, China, and France wouldn't deploy their troops based on a single phone call from Kang Chan unless there was a good reason.

The time has come to shed the habit of living under the pressure of powerful nations.

“What's Russia and China's response?” Go Gun-Woo asked.

Kim Hyung-Jung met Go Gun-Woo's gaze. “They've conveyed their intent to follow the Assistant Director's orders. France has already deployed the Foreign Legion.”

“I've heard this risks a confrontation with the United States. If so, then the US is probably already aware of this situation as well. Deploying our military and declaring a state of emergency will likely face strong opposition from the ROK-US Combined Forces Command.”

“The National Intelligence Service will handle the deployment,” Kim Hyung-Jung answered.

“How do you plan to send out the Fighter Wing?” Moon Jae-Hyun asked. “I heard the last incident put two of their majors in a difficult position,”

“We can either make an official announcement or insist it's a joint exercise with Russia and China. If a conflict arises, then there's no avoiding...” Kim Hyung-Jung trailed off. His troubled expression made it clear that he was refraining from suggesting that the president should take direct responsibility.

An unfavorable outcome would undoubtedly lead to serious conflicts with the US. To make things worse, all the blame would fall on Moon Jae-Hyun.

Already aware of that, Moon Jae-Hyun instead asked, “How should we announce the state of emergency?”

“We can claim that we've detected suspicious movements from North Korea or make a public statement. The latter would make the US reaction unpredictable,” Kim Hyung-Jung said.

Moon Jae-Hyun let out a low groan. “The US has to be aware of the Assistant Director's situation, right?”

“Yes, sir.”

Moon Jae-Hyun turned away from the garden.

Somewhere in the sky, Hwang Ki-Hyun, Song Chang-Wook, and the other patriots who had dedicated everything to South Korea were watching.

‘I hope I made the right decision—one that South Korea and our people can be proud of for years to come. Please guide us to the right path.’

With a heartfelt prayer, Moon Jae-Hyun lowered his gaze.

“Director.”

“Yes, Mr. President,” Go Gun-Woo answered. He then shared a meaningful look with Kim Hyung-Jung.

A brief silence ensued.

“I have always wanted South Korea to become a powerful nation. Unlike the Assistant Director, despite knowing that nothing comes without sacrifice and pain, I still often find myself afraid of the responsibilities we must bear,” Moon Jae-Hyun began, his demeanor and tone befitting a president.

“I will take full responsibility for this decision. I may go down our history as a criminal, but I refuse to waste the opportunity we have been given.”

With a tense expression, Go Gun-Woo focused intently on his every word.

“As the President of South Korea, I regard North Korea's attack on our citizens in Cuba as a serious act of aggression targeting our territory and sovereignty.”

Kim Hyung-Jung swallowed hard.

“I hereby declare Watchcon 1 and Defcon 2 for the entire South Korean military.”

Go Gun-Woo gulped as well.

“Dispatch the Fighter Wing, the NIS counter-terrorism team, and the 35th Brigade as per the Assistant Director's request. Deliver my orders to the military and the ROK-US Combined Forces Command, and handle the follow-up procedures.”

This was far more than just declaring a state of emergency. After all, Moon Jae-Hyun's orders involved live ammunition issuance and unit reinforcement.

With their determination evident in their faces, Go Gun-Woo and Kim Hyung-Jung stood up and headed out.

“Haa.”

Left alone, Moon Jae-Hyun also stood up and looked to the sky.

Now more than ever, I should put my trust in him and his judgment. South Korea has to unite firmly around its talent. We should never ruin him with our own hands.

Having steeled his resolve, Moon Jae-Hyun headed to his office.

Lanok had just finished a call with Uzman when his phone rang again. Checking the number, a corner of his lips curved upward. However, as if wearing a mask, all emotions left his expression just as quickly.

"Hello?"

- Lanok! Are you trying to start a war?

It's rare for Sherman to sound this agitated.

- Although I expect that young man to make such a decision, shouldn't you, Vasili, Yang Fan, and Ludwig refrain from joining this madness?

Despite Sherman's unusually strong tone, Lanok's expression did not change.

- Lanok!

"I'm listening."

- What do you plan to do?

"Lower your voice."

- That's not important right now—!

"You better start showing his name some respect, too."

Sherman laughed in disbelief.

"You put the DGSE's credibility on the line to summon Monsieur Kang, Sherman, yet we still trusted your word and the CIA's credibility enough to let you organize this meeting. Unfortunately, you repaid that good faith by trying to eliminate him. Taking all that into consideration, isn't it only right for you to bear the consequences?"

- I've already told you that I didn't know exactly what was happening!

"If you couldn't handle the responsibility, you shouldn't have called us to Cuba in the first place."

Seemingly at a loss for words, all Lanok could hear now was Sherman's heavy breathing.

"Sherman, may I offer you some advice?"

- Please.

"Remember what happened to Brandon after terribly undermining US interests? The DIA has its eye on you too. Correct me if I'm wrong, but didn't you personally order his elimination?"

- Are you threatening me by relying on a mere Korean upstart?

"You dismiss my warning before the call even ends. Are you really naive enough to believe that the CIA is that powerful?"

- That's... not what I meant. I apologize for my rudeness.

A heavy sigh followed Sherman's apology.

- Lanok, I need your help.

He now sounded almost as if he had lowered his tail.

- That young man—no, Monsieur Kang respects your advice, doesn't he? If he doesn't want a world war, he should settle this matter now.

"Settle? Now? You attacked him, Sherman. There were casualties. Do you expect me to advise Monsieur Kang to just let that slide quietly?"

- Tell me what you want, and I'll compensate as best as I can.

"Sherman."

Sherman waited quietly.

"Two Foreign Legion regiments, a Foreign Legion special forces team, a Russian Kuznetsov-class carrier, the Spetsnaz, a Chinese carrier, and the White Wolves are on the move. That massive force is bringing eighty fighter jets with them, and we still have the South Korean forces to take into the calculation."

Sherman groaned, seemingly in pain.

"I just had a call with Uzman. Would you believe it if I said the Shiites and Sunnites have joined forces?"

- That can't be...

"So take a realistic view and come up with conditions that can appease Monsieur Kang before the DGSE, the Russian KGB, and the Mossad put a bullet in your head. Oh! And don't forget the DIA."

Lanok pressed the end call button and placed the phone on the empty spot on the bed. He then turned to Raphael, who was standing nearby with his usual calm expression.

"That old raccoon keeps making me imitate Vasili's bad behavior. Can you prepare some tea?" Lanok requested.

"Yes, sir. I'll have a pot prepared," Raphael responded, his expression brimming with pride.

"Thank you for taking the time despite your busy schedule," Uzman said in his characteristic soft voice.

The building he was in had Arabesque windows, a red, ornate carpet, and golden pillars lined up against its walls. Though usually accompanied by three attendants, Uzman had dismissed them all to focus quietly on the call.

While listening attentively to the phone, Uzman nodded as if the person on the other end was right in front of him.

"We appreciate the respect that you and the United States have shown our culture, Mr. President,"

Throughout the conversation, his voice remained incredibly gentle.

“However, this decision is beyond my control. Above all, this has created an opportunity for the Shiites and Sunnites to unite, which, as I’m sure you understand, the entire Arab world welcomes.”

- Uzman! If you invade Israel, we won’t just stand by.

“Then it seems conflict is inevitable,”

Uzman's response didn't match his gentle tone.

- He has clashed with the Arab world many times. You are among the wisest people I know, so I find it hard to understand why you would support such an outrageous decision.

Uzman nodded before addressing the American President by his title once more.

“Mr. President, consider how the Star of David has exploited the Arab world. Even if Monsieur Kang has had several conflicts with us, we understand him.”

Uzman took a deep breath.

“On the other hand, I find it difficult to understand why the head of such a trusted nation's intelligence bureau would act this way. However, it is possible that he did all this without informing you beforehand, Mr. President.”

With the US President failing to respond immediately, Uzman added, “We have always agreed to center the world order around the United States. That was why we remained silent despite the conflicts between America and our world. However, things are different this time. If America defends the Star of David even though it has revealed its true nature, we will have no other choice but to proceed as planned.”

The experienced ones always sounded intimidating. They had an undeniable firmness within their softness.

- I hope for amicable relations with the Arab world, Uzman. Could you delay this decision by just a few days?

“Please seek Monsieur Kang’s forgiveness first.”

- I don't understand why he has the final say in this matter.

The US President genuinely sounded confused.

Well, I do get why he finds this hard to grasp.

Uzman nodded for the third time.

“At the very least, he has never harmed others for personal gain. Moreover, he has trustworthy eyes.”

- Uzman, the world doesn't place importance on such things. Why risk national danger due to sentimental reasons?

Although the man on the call made his displeasure clear, Uzman merely smiled faintly.

“I didn’t realize that uniting the Arab world posed a threat to our nation.”

- That’s not what I meant.

“I believe you, Mr. President. However, I advise you to increase the channels through which you receive information. Due to Sherman's recent actions, France, Russia, China, Germany, and the entire Arab world have begun to move according to Monsieur Kang's instructions.”

For the first time since the call began, Uzman sounded firm.

“At times like this, it's better to look in the mirror than blame someone else. I expect wise judgment from you, Mr. President. Thank you for your time.”

After a deep sigh, the US President thanked Uzman. The call ended shortly after.

Their conversation made Uzman uncomfortable, yet he still smiled while staring out the window, seemingly amused.

“How can one go against the will of God?”

He looked over the information on the table.

“A new order....”

Uzman put down the materials he was looking through and slowly turned the golden globe.

“Korea? God has chosen a truly distant place.”

Uzman nodded habitually.

“A chance for the Arab world to unite! Inshallah[1].”

With the blood transfusion done, Kang Chan continued his calls in the room on the second floor. The phone seemed to ring again every time he hung up. Unfortunately, he couldn't afford to ignore it. After a call with Vasili, he glared at the phone and put it on the table.

Who knew a phone that doesn't ring could look so beautiful?

As if to taunt him, the phone rang again.

Buzz. Buzz. Buzz.

Who could it be?

Kang Chan picked up the phone and answered the call.

“Hello?”

- This is Grafelt, Monsieur Kang.

Who the fuck...? Ah! The Israeli guy I trained with in France!

Kang Chan chuckled as he picked up a cigarette from the table.

“It's been a while.”

- Indeed.

Click.

Perhaps because he had heard the lighter, Grafelt remained silent.

“Get to the point,” Kang Chan said.

- Monsieur Kang, I'll be brief. Please retract the proposal you made to Uzman.

“What if I refuse?”

- Then the Mossad and the Sayeret Matkal will target you.

“Does that include you?”

- Yes.

His honest answer made Kang Chan feel rather somewhat appreciative. However, honesty and compliance were two different things.

“I'll be waiting,” Kang Chan replied clearly and firmly. “Doesn't matter if it's the Mossad or the Sayeret Matkal or whether you're part of it or not.”

Understanding the French, Gérard looked at him with wide eyes.

Kang Chan added, “Let's see if I can kill Sherman and Ziegfeld and crush Israel first before you can kill me. I can't help but be curious about how this will all turn out!”

- Monsieur Kang, isn't that unfair to us?

Kang Chan chuckled at Grafelt's sudden change in tone.

- The entire Arab world is suddenly targeting Israel. If this is all because of something you said, then Israel is just getting caught in the crossfire.

“Grafelt.”

- Yes, Monsieur Kang.

“Only two things can change my mind: Sherman and Ziegfeld's heads.”

Although Grafelt had been quick to reply, he didn't respond this time.

“Did you find your situation unfair when you were still hiding behind Ziegfeld and profiting through him?” Kang Chan stubbed his cigarette into the ashtray. “Cut the bullshit and decide. Bring me their heads or face me in war.”

Kang Chan ended the call and chuckled.

Are Grafelt and Ziegfeld related somehow?

Something was busily moving behind the scenes. It was as if Kang Chan was standing in the center of a spinning carousel in the neighborhood playground, watching the rapidly turning surroundings.

Fucking bastards!

These assholes had profited from local wars while hiding behind Ziegfeld and committing massacres in Palestine, yet as soon as their threats stopped working, they started whining about fairness. Kang Chan knew their true colors, though. If they could, they would have tried to kill him before making any of those calls.

Chapter 407: Why Did You Mess with Him? (2)

Under Cha Dong-Gyun's orders, sentries were posted around the building's perimeter. The soldiers on the rooftop wore night vision to monitor their surroundings better.

Ever since they discovered North Korea's 8th Special Forces Brigade, the situation had been rapidly unfolding. Moreover, most of the calls were done in French. In such an environment, it was crucial for the team to be fully aware of the situation.

Kang Chan sat on the second floor of the dimly lit building. He then pressed a button on his radio.

Chk.

"I will now explain the current situation. Our country's Fighter Wing, the NIS counter-terrorism team, and the 35th Brigade have all been dispatched," Kang Chan explained.

Seok Kang-Ho, who had overheard the call with Kim Hyung-Jung, grinned at Kang Chan.

Kang Chan continued, "Additionally, a carrier loaded with fighter jets and Spetsnaz has departed from Russia, and another carrier with fighter jets and the White Wolves has departed from China."

Upon hearing Russia, Spetsnaz, China, and White Wolves, Gérard smiled, stretching the scar on his cheek. Since the call earlier was in French, he already had a rough idea of what was going on.

"The entire Arab world is preparing to attack Israel, which is protecting Ziegfeld, and our country has declared Watchcon 1 and Defcon 2," Kang Chan said.

With a proud look, Cha Dong-Gyun glanced at Kwak Cheol-Ho and then looked back at Kang Chan.

"I received a call threatening me that the Mossad and the Sayeret Matkal are targeting me. We don't know how the US will react to all this."

The wind from the sea continuously breezed into the dimly lit building on the second floor, seemingly wanting to listen to Kang Chan speak on the radio.

"But I couldn't care less what Israel and the US would do. I will capture Ziegfeld here. One more thing."

What now?

Seok Kang-Ho, Choi Jong-Il, and Cha Dong-Gyun silently waited for Kang Chan to continue.

"I will make sure they pay a clear and definite price for Yang Dong-Sik sunbae's sacrifice."

Yes! That's it! This is the leader we know!

The emotions reflected in the eyes of those watching conveyed this sentiment.

“It’s going to be a tough night. We don’t know what provocations they’ll throw at us before our reinforcements arrive. Still, until they get here, I expect everyone to do their best to hold this building. That’s all!”

As soon as the radio transmission ended, Seok Kang-Ho let out his characteristic laugh and walked over to Kang Chan’s table.

“At times like this, shouldn’t we have at least a cup of instant coffee? The men on duty right now need to be rotated out, too,” he said.

“Order them as you see fit,” Kang Chan replied.

“Copy.”

While Seok Kang-Ho was instructing Cha Dong-Gyun and Choi Jong-Il, Kang Chan explained the radio message to Gérard in French.

“This reminds me of the time in Congo,” Gérard said.

“What does?” Kang Chan inquired.

“Remember when our squad stayed behind to hold our position?”

Kang Chan nodded and smiled bitterly. “Did we?”

During the operation to rescue the Foreign Legion’s 13th regiment, which had been surrounded by Congolese rebels, Kang Chan and his men had to buy time for the soldiers to escape. However, they ended up getting trapped in a two-story building at a night market that sold AK rifles and rhinoceros horns.

“Here you go.” Seok Kang-Ho placed cups of instant coffee in front of Kang Chan and Gérard and then sat down at the table. “What’s so funny?”

“I was just recalling how this situation is similar to when we were trapped in the Congo night market,” Gérard answered.

Seok Kang-Ho smirked and nodded.

“What’s your gut feeling?” he asked.

“Still not good. I feel like there’s more to come,” Kang Chan answered.

“Got it.”

Seok Kang-Ho, who understood Kang Chan’s gaze and tone better than anyone, sharply glanced at the dark window.

Meanwhile, Kang Chan turned his attention to Cha Dong-Gyun.

“With the situation as it is, tomorrow’s meeting is off the table. The hours before dawn will be the most dangerous, so make sure everyone rotates for meals and even just a bit of rest.”

“Yes, sir,” Cha Dong-Gyun replied as firmly and heavily as the darkness around them.

- Sherman! Is it true that you used North Korea’s 8th Special Forces Brigade?

While holding the phone in his private plane, Sherman looked out the window with a troubled expression.

- I sent an ambassador, but the President of South Korea remains unmoved. Moreover, they claim that you, the Director of CIA, used North Korean forces to attack their personnel, resulting in casualties. There's no way to excuse this.

The man sounded strained with suppressed anger.

- I heard the South Korean team on site has secured the bodies of the North Korean soldiers. Answer me, Sherman! Are you the one who proposed the meeting with the South Koreans in Cuba?!

“Yes, Mr. President,” Sherman replied lowly.

- Haaa! Sherman!

the President’s voice and sigh conveyed his regret.

- South Korea is an absolute and symbolic ally to us. Among all the Asian countries, we have the friendliest and most critical relationship with them. Do you have any idea what you’ve done?

“There are many aspects of this situation that have also taken me by surprise.”

A heavy silence followed.

- Sherman, through a spokesperson, I will support South Korea’s actions, and the ROK-US Combined Forces Command will follow the orders of the South Korean President to declare Watchcon and Defcon.

“Mr. President! That’s a very dangerous and extreme decision.”

- Sherman.

The low call sounded ominous. Hence, Sherman quickly lowered his tone.

“Yes, Mr. President.”

- I agree that the interests of the United States must come first, and I am grateful for the CIA’s dedication to this.

Sherman replied, “Thank you, Mr. President.”

- Nevertheless, this series of events is difficult to accept. South Korea holds a position far beyond that of a simple ally for us. It is our only foothold in containing North Korea, China, and Russia, and it has been our long-standing blood ally. If we betray its trust, who will believe in our promises anymore?

Unable to respond, Sherman placed his thick glasses on the table and rubbed his eyes.

- They have the bodies of North Korean soldiers as evidence, and France, Russia, China, and Germany are willing to testify that you called South Korea's soldiers to Cuba.

What is he trying to say?

Sherman swallowed hard and focused even more intently on the phone call.

- I want this matter resolved by 11 AM as promised in Cuba, Sherman. This is the utmost consideration I can offer you for your dedication to the United States.

Fortunately, the President still seemed to be suppressing his wrath.

- Do you understand?

“Of course, Mr. President.”

- Good. I'll be waiting for the results.

Finally, the call ended.

“Haaa.”

Sherman placed the phone on the table and sank deeply into the seat of the airplane.

The door to Uzman's reception room opened heavily. A white-haired man in a suit entered, and his attendants and security followed right behind.

“Thank you for making time for me.”

“What could be more important than meeting the Deputy Prime Minister of Israel?” Uzman replied. He then shook hands with the man and gestured to the sofa. “Please, make yourself comfortable.”

Israeli Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Chapi Presley bowed his head in gratitude and sat beside Uzman. Immediately, a tray of tea, dates, and an ashtray was prepared on the table.

This meeting was an impromptu visit, not a pre-arranged one. Although Uzman could have easily refused, he allocated time for it, and the meeting was hurriedly set up.

Had the meeting been announced to the public, it would have attracted half the world's journalists due to its significance. However, the Mossad had arranged it in secret.

“Time is of the essence.”

“I also don't have much time to spare,” Uzman responded.

“Our government finds your plan unacceptable and urges a wise judgment, Your Highness.”

Chapi spoke without hesitation, as if he had come prepared.

“We will also formally protest to the South Korean government and the head of their National Intelligence Service, who first brought up this issue—”

“Deputy Prime Minister,” Uzman interrupted, “there seems to be a misunderstanding.”

Despite Chapi's sharp gaze, Uzman showed no sign of concern.

“We are not acting on South Korea's orders. To be clear, Saudi Arabia proposed this initiative, and the Arab world agreed.”

“I heard you told the President of the United States that postponing the schedule requires Kang Chan’s consent, though.”

“That is different from taking orders.”

“Why did you tell the President of the United States that and decide to invade Israel, then?”

Uzman fiercely gazed at Chapi, which was a far cry from his usual demeanor.

“Deputy Prime Minister, if you visited me out of nowhere just to ask rude questions, then this meeting ends here,” said Uzman.

He then turned his head toward his attendant. If he were to order him to issue the guest out, this meeting would end.

“If I came across as rude, Your Highness, I apologize,” Chapi quickly replied, trying to hold Uzman's gaze.

Glaring back at Chapi, Uzman slowly but quietly sighed. Behind his kindness clearly hid overwhelmingly intimidating wisdom.

“Deputy Prime Minister, our oil-producing nations will no longer suffer from Ziegfeld's machinations. Will we not tolerate the massive profits he uses to fund the massacres in Gaza either,” Uzman declared with a firm expression.

“Monsieur Kang and I have reached a conclusion that respects the Arab world. The Arab world is merely following the new world order he proposed.”

Chapi sipped his tea, trying to hide his urgency, but he couldn’t escape Uzman’s experienced gaze.

“He plans to eliminate Ziegfeld, who is hiding in Bermuda, using the forces of France, Russia, China, and South Korea. Deputy Prime Minister, we Arabs always keep our vows to God.”

Without breaking eye contact, Uzman extended his index and middle fingers forward to show his resolve.

“I swore to God that I will follow Monsieur Kang, who respects us, and I accepted the attack on Israel as God’s will to eliminate Ziegfeld.”

At that moment, Chapi realized that Uzman, the old fox, had thoroughly outmaneuvered him. It didn't matter how Chapi twisted or turned the situation. Uzman had already decided to follow Kang Chan.

"If we could reach an agreement with Mr. Kang—"

"Please, call him Monsieur Kang."

Interrupted once more, Chapi's cheek twitched. "If we reach an agreement with Monsieur Kang, will you reconsider your decision?"

"I swear to God that I will respect Monsieur Kang's decision."

"Hmm."

Chapi's groan made it clear that he was in a difficult position, having to bow to Kang Chan.

Beep, beep, beep.

Vasili looked at the ringing phone. He then mockingly smiled at Yang Fan.

"The old raccoon seems to find the fire on his tail quite hot."

Beep, beep, beep.

"Aren't you going to answer it?"

"Let him sweat a bit."

Yang Fan laughed as if to say he couldn't handle it anymore. Finally, Vasili reached out to the phone.

"Vasili speaking."

- Vasili, what do you want?

Surprisingly, Sherman sounded calm.

Vasili glanced at Yang Fan as if to say, "Can you believe this?"

- You don't want a world war, do you?

"Sherman."

- Name your terms.

The quick response sounded filled with anticipation.

"Let's not ignore the obvious solution."

- Hmm!

"Go to Monsieur Kang and resolve this with him. He makes all the decisions now."

- I don't understand why heavyweights like you and Lanok are following that Korean upstart like obedient kindergarteners! Listen, Vasili! It's Korea! Korea! Russia, China, and our alliance can sway that country anytime! He's just a rookie on that tiny piece of land!

Sherman's anger seemed to have burst out.

- Just one Spetsnaz strike from the carrier could bring him down in five minutes. Why are you so obedient to him? Even now—!

“Sherman,” Vasili called, interrupting Sherman's rant. “Why are you so adamant about clinging to Ziegfeld, whom even the US President is ready to abandon?”

Vasili's eyes remained as cold as ever.

“If it's because the next-generation energy facility is being built in Iran, then know that if you don't leave Ziegfeld now, you'll never get another chance. I do understand that embracing the Star of David and controlling Iran's next-generation energy facility would make you a national hero. I can see why you find it so hard to let go.”

- What's wrong with having the world order divided between the US and Russia, Vasili? If we just eliminate that Korean upstart, everything will go back to normal! China will follow your lead anytime, won't it?

Vasili let out a clear mocking laugh and glanced to the side.

“Ah, I almost forgot to tell you. Yang Fan of China's intelligence bureau is with me. He harbors plenty of grievances against the world order being split between the US and Russia. Why don't you say hello?”

“It's been a while, Sherman.”

- Please don't misunderstand, Yang Fan.

Yang Fan remained silent, creating an awkward pause.

“Oh dear! It seems our little Chinese fellow is in a bit of a bad mood. It's best we end this call here.”

With that, Vasili abruptly pressed the end call button. Seeing Yang Fan light a cigarette, Vasili ordered the man standing by to bring some tea.

“It seems Sherman is planning to take military action.”

“He probably already has.”

Yang Fan glanced to the side, noting the resolute look in Vasili's eyes.

“He'll want to resolve this before the Foreign Legion or our carriers arrive. The US military will be held back by their president, Ziegfeld has no official military, and the Arabs are siding with Monsieur Kang. Who's left?”

Click.

As Vasili finished speaking, a man with a rifle slung over his shoulder approached him and poured him a cup of tea.

“It won’t be North Korea. We’ve already put enough pressure on their government to keep them from making any moves,” Yang Fan replied.

Vasili nodded in agreement. “Sherman must have something up his sleeve. Otherwise, that old raccoon would have already run to Monsieur Kang to negotiate terms.”

“Hooo.”

Yang Fan exhaled a cloud of smoke and stubbed out his cigarette in the ashtray.

“What if I ordered our carriers to attack Monsieur Kang and bring back his corpse? Do you think our protagonist would really end up dead before me?” Vasili asked Yang Fan with a serious expression.

“Well, I somehow feel like we’d witness another miracle of him coming back to life.”

Vasili turned his gaze to the horizon.

“Poor old raccoon. Why did you have to provoke him?” he muttered to himself.

Whoosh!

In the deep, dark night, the wind blowing in from the sea tirelessly swept up the dust.

Clank. Clank.

With a rifle slung over his shoulder, Kang Chan climbed to the rooftop. The two-story building stood alone on a wide plain, making it an ideal target for a missile strike.

Something else is coming.

With his instincts constantly warning him of danger, Kang Chan sharply surveyed his surroundings. Cha Dong-Gyun had positioned the soldiers over a wide area, keeping them reasonably safe from a missile attack, but a nagging unease still gnawed at Kang Chan. He felt no different from when they were trapped in the Congo market, which Gérard had mentioned earlier.

Kang Chan couldn't shake the feeling that the two-story building standing in the darkness was a metaphor for South Korea's current situation. It struggling to achieve its goals due to the pressures from the US, Russia, China, and France.

Before him was nothing but darkness and a somber sea breeze. However, behind him stood reliable comrades: Seok Kang-Ho, who was sharply scanning the surroundings; Gérard, whose eyes were as ruthless as the scar on his cheek; and the Jeungpyeong special forces team, arguably the best infantry unit in the world.

Kang Chan recalled what Moon Jae-Hyun had said about South Korea's future lying in its talented people, making him chuckle softly.

Clank. Clank.

Hearing rifles clanking, he turned around to two figures climbing onto the rooftop. Kang Chul-Gyu and Nam Il-Gyu soon came into view and approached him.

'What's going on?'

Kang Chul-Gyu seemed to have read the question in Kang Chan's eyes.

With his pale face and gleaming eyes, Kang Chul-Gyu conveyed his intention to Kang Chan.

"Assistant Director, I can't stand with you in the frontlines in this condition, but I'm confident in my aim. I'll provide sniper support from here."

Kang Chan locked eyes with him, seemingly having a brief exchange with just their gazes.

'The enemy is approaching.'

'I know, but staying here in your condition won't help.'

'I'll do my part. Let me do this.'

Whoosh!

The wind blew, making the small, blood-stained Taegeukgi on Kang Chul-Gyu's left shoulder flutter. The flag used to be attached to Yang Dong-Sik's sleeve. He had been so proud of it.

Damn it! How could I stop this?

"Haaaa."

Kang Chan exhaled softly.

Chapter 408: Greeting the Morning Together (1)

With or without stars, the night would pass as it had always done. What kind of morning and what events would unfold after that, though, no one could tell.

Amid the damp, humid evening in Cuba, Kang Chan looked around to check on his men. Everyone had a limit to how long they could stay extremely tense. That was why the best time for an ambush was just before dawn.

Will we get through this safely? We'll always be in the most danger when we start to think we've survived.

He would still relax sooner or later despite knowing that, though. Fortunately, his soldiers, who were wearing night vision goggles to better watch over their assigned areas, served as his greatest source of strength. After all, they had traveled and fought many horrific battles together.

What are our enemies planning?

Although he didn't know what their opponents were about to do, he was certain that the outcome of this battle would be determined before their reinforcements arrived.

Would they yield or try to annihilate us?

If forced to choose, Kang Chan would most likely bet on the latter.

The uneasy feeling and the fact the pale-faced Kang Chul-Gyu had climbed up to the rooftop weighed down the most on his chest.

‘Who should I send?’

Kang Chan looked into the darkness with piqued curiosity. After a while, his radio crackled, and reports started coming in.

Chk.

“This is Sector 1. We have spotted heavily armed troops with skull face paint. There’s a lot of them.”

Chk.

“Sector 2. Same skull face paint. We estimate over a hundred.”

Chk.

“Sector 3. Spotted a large unit in black camouflage. ”

Chk.

“Sector 4. Black camo, large numbers.”

Impressive bastards.

With glinting eyes, Kang Chan pressed a button on his radio before he could even finish his thought.

Chk.

“All teams, retreat,” he ordered.

His men only responded with radio crackles.

Chk. Chk. Chk. Chk.

I only know of one group that wears skull face paint so attention-grabbing that they stand out even at night.

There was no need to think further.

“Snipers! It’s flat ground! Keep an eye out for rocket launchers!”

“Yes, sir!” Lee Doo-Hee and the snipers responded firmly. They then gazed into their night scopes.

Clack! Clack! Clack! Clack!

All the soldiers on the rooftop checked their magazines and pulled back the bolts.

Kang Chan pointed to the left of the rooftop entrance. “Gérard! We’re up against the Peruvians! I need you on Sector 2 first!”

“Daye! Cover Sector 4 until they get closer!”

“Copy!” answered Seok Kang-Ho. He then ran to the right, his equipment clanking.

“Yoon Sang-Ki! Man the machine gun!”

“Yes, sir!”

Kang Chan pressed the Push-to-Talk button again. The darkness and the wind were still the only ones rushing in.

Chk.

“We’re not new to this business. At this point, those bastards are just another group of guests.”

Clank. Clank.

The soldiers who had been on guard duty were quickly running back to the building.

“Today, it’s a special forces team from Peru. The skull pattern painted on their faces is a distinctive feature that means they intend to annihilate us. ”

Clank! Clank! Clank! Clank!

The last of the men in the open rushed inside.

“Advancing with ballistic shields at their vanguard and then rushing in is their most common tactic. Once we’ve used up our grenades and machine gun ammo, it’ll come down to hand-to-hand combat.”

The soldiers on the rooftop and those who had just climbed up focused on Kang Chan’s words.

Chk.

“It does not matter, though. I refuse to let this building be our grave.”

No matter where Kang Chan looked, he found men whose eyes conveyed steeled resolve.

“Eliminate those who stand between us and the morning sun. Remember, if we fail to see the break of dawn, the world will look down on South Korea forever. That’s simply not part of our business plan!”

Although looking tense, Seok Kang-Ho still smirked at Kang Chan.

“Be ruthless! Decisive! Send our guests to Death’s embrace like we always do!”

Afterward, Kang Chan took out his phone and dialed a number.

- Hello?

“Manager Kim, we have over four hundred tangos swarming our location. We might not be able to contact you for a while.”

- What? What on earth...?

“I’ll call you tomorrow morning.”

Kang Chan turned off his phone. He then slung his rifle over his shoulder.

Click!

Brace yourselves. No matter what hell unfolds, we will greet the morning.

Whoooooosh! Whooosh!

The wind rushing in from the darkness now carried the strong scent of death.

“Ziegfeld! Recall the troops!”

- It’s already too late, Sherman.”

Contrary to Sherman’s frantic tone, Ziegfeld was composed.

- We sent five hundred men. Not even thirty of their best can defeat that many. We will get good results.

“You do know what he accomplished in Africa, don’t you?”

- Russia, France, the UK, and the US were with him back then. Right now, the South Korean special forces team is alone, and they’re against Peru’s special forces. His death will bring everything back to its rightful place.

Sherman, who was in a private jet, wearily looked out the window. Since the US President wanted all this resolved an hour before noon, having Kang Chan dead was also the most definitive solution he could think of at the moment.

- I’ve made some arrangements to ensure that the response from the mainland will change. Once it does, even the President of the United States will tacitly support you.

Ziegfeld sounded as relaxed as finalizing a deal.

- We paid Peru’s special forces fifty million dollars to make this happen. That should be enough to handle thirty ants, don’t you think?

“If they somehow fail...”

- Japan paid them, not me. They have close ties with Peru. I also know of a place that neither you nor the CIA know about. If they fail, you’re free to assume a new identity and live a completely different life there, during which you can tighten the noose on those who disregarded you. Imagine getting to enjoy the pleasure that the Star of David basks in every single day.

“Hmph.”

- Read a magazine or something while you wait on the plane. Once we’ve confirmed his death, you’ll have to clean up the aftermath.

Sherman exhaled deeply once again. Since the die had already been cast, he had no choice but to prioritize checking the number.

- You’ll receive a flood of calls pleading to spare that rookie for a while. Best not to answer them.

Ziegfeld’s tone made it seem as though he was issuing a command. However, though Sherman’s lips twitched, he did not say anything further.

The President of the United States sat in front of the cabinet members overseeing Asian security, the Department of Defense, and the Department of Homeland Security. He then pressed a button on his desk, which played a connection tone.

Beep. Beep. Beep. Click.

- Good evening, Mr, President.

The simultaneous interpreter's voice overlapped with Moon Jae-Hyun's.

“It's nice to see you again, Mr. President. Before we begin, I would like to express my condolences regarding the recent Cuba incident.”

Moon Jae-Hyun didn't reply as he was supposed to. The moment the President of the United States looked at the cabinet members sitting in front of him as if to ask what was happening, Moon Jae-hyun's clearly delayed response came through.

- Thank you for the statement of support through your spokesperson and the acceptance of Defcon measures by the ROK-US Combined Forces Command. However, our personnel in Cuba have come under attack again.

The US President frowned, and his cabinet members looked just as surprised. The CIA, which handled the US' external intelligence, hadn't reported anything about this.

- We have not identified the enemy yet, but we do know that over four hundred armed soldiers are attacking our personnel in your backyard.

“Mr. President,” the US President called, clearly startled. “Allow us a moment to verify this.”

The US President quickly gestured to the Department of Defense official. He then added, “Afterward, we will dispatch our best team. The United States and I hope that this incident does not harm our relationship with South Korea.”

- I, too, hope that the blood alliance between Korea and the United States remains strong. However, I believe that to achieve this, we have to build trust through actions, not just sweet words.

The US President looked as though his pride had been wounded.

- Thank you for your time. I look forward to the United States' show of sincerity.

The call ended.

“Sherman, that old bastard!”

The President of the United States abruptly stood up and glared at the cabinet members.

“I want that intel verified and the troops ready for deployment now! Contact Sherman! Tell him to come here immediately!”

The cabinet members hurried out of the Oval Office. Suppressing his burst of anger for a moment, the US President pressed the intercom button on his desk.

Click.

- Mr. President.

“Where’s Sherman?”

- He’s not answering his phone.

After letting out a groan-like sigh, the President ordered, “Summon the Deputy Director of the CIA, the Director of NCIS, the Director of DIA, and the Vice President!”

- Yes, sir.

“You’re done, Sherman!” he growled, his venom-filled voice enveloping the office.

The rooftop of the two-story building was approximately six meters above the ground. From this height, one could clearly see the eyes of the people directly below during the day or if there were lights.

Whoooooosh!

A little past 2 am, the wind started to blow stronger. About seventy meters away, the enemies stopped advancing and began surrounding the building instead. They seemed to number around five hundred, and about two hundred had white skull patterns painted on their faces, making them visible even at night. Upon seeing them, Kang Chan pressed the Push-to-Talk button.

Chk.

“We were right. It’s the Peruvian special forces team. That’s the skull symbol of the Inca warriors. It serves as a warning that they intend to engage in hand-to-hand combat.”

Seok Kang-Ho and Gérard gritted their teeth, already imagining how horrific and strenuous the upcoming hand-to-hand combat would be.

“Heh, bastards! Let’s send them back to hell!” Seok Kang-Ho shouted, then laughed. He had a cruel glint in his eyes.

At times like these, such brutish remarks oddly provided strength.

Soon, the enemies’ warcry pierced through the darkness.

“Hooah! Hooah! Hooah!”

Their shields then hit the ground, the explosive noise echoing across the land.

Boom! Boom! Boom!

The soldiers quickly looked at Kang Chan. At this distance, they could already start taking down enemies. After all, the bastards had white face paint, and even without night vision goggles, they wouldn’t have trouble hitting targets seventy meters away.

Nevertheless, Kang Chan held his fire and simply glared at them. It was strange, considering he had the best aim of them all.

“Hooah! Hooah!”

Boom! Boom!

The shortened shouts sounded even more intense now.

Chk.

“Get ready! They’re coming!” Kang Chan ordered.

Clack! Clack! Clack!

The soldiers shouldered their rifles and placed their fingers on the triggers.

“Hooah!”

Boom!

Stomp! Stomp! Stomp! Stomp!

Right after one last shout and thud, they heard boots begin stomping on the ground. The Jeungpyeong special forces team had experienced brutal battles in Afghanistan and savage combat in Africa. However, this was their first time facing enemies approaching this noisily.

The South Korean soldiers exchanged glances. This was how units unaccustomed to these foes fell. Flustered, they would hastily open fire, hit nothing but ballistic shields, and then get killed in hand-to-hand combat.

Stomp! Stomp! Stomp! Stomp!

Finally, the enemies advanced toward the two-story building that was standing alone in the darkness. With all the lights turned off, the establishment felt even more eerie.

Stomp! Stomp! Stomp! Stomp!

“Hooah!”

Stomp! Stomp! Stomp! Stomp!

The darkness flowed over the shoulders of the enemies, making it look like a thick wall was approaching the building.

Stomp! Stomp! Stomp! Stomp!

When the enemies advanced about ten meters, Kang Chan pressed the Push-to-Talk button again.

Chk.

“Machine guns! Hold your fire until the enemy is within twenty meters.”

Stomp! Stomp! Stomp! Stomp!

“The enemies have ballistic shields. Look for openings, and shoot only when you’re confident you can take your target out. If we have to resort to hand-to-hand combat, Gérard, Yoon Sang-Ki, and I will be Team One. Daye, Nam Il-Gyu Sunbae, and Cha Dong-Gyun. You three will be Team Two,” Kang Chan ordered.

“Hooah!”

Stomp! Stomp! Stomp! Stomp!

The enemies had cut the distance down to fifty meters.

Chk.

“The two teams on the rooftop will cover the hand-to-hand combat teams. Save your bullets for that moment, but keep in mind that if we wait too long, the enemies will overwhelm us with numbers.”

Stomp! Stomp! Stomp! Stomp!

“We will start firing after chanting our motto. Remember, there are about five hundred of them, and we are only thirty strong. No matter how much we conserve our ammo, we will definitely run out of bullets before morning. However, that does not give you the right to fall! You all better live to see the sunrise!”

The soldiers looked at Kang Chan with eyes full of understanding.

This is the kind of person leading us, a commander who knows even the fighting style of the Peruvian special forces we’ve never faced before, a commander preparing to defeat 500 enemies with just over 30 men and greet the morning.

Chk.

“I trust you all. Cha Dong-Gyun, give it your all.”

“Hooah!”

Stomp! Stomp! Stomp! Stomp!

“We will!”

Right after the enemy’s shouts, Cha Dong-Gyun’s shout, filled with determination, rang out toward the enemies.

Stomp! Stomp! Stomp! Stomp!

“Survive this night!”

Stomp! Stomp! Stomp! Stomp!

Forty meters left. Kang Chan and his men could now see the faces of the enemies with white face paint.

“And greet the morning together!”

Stomp! Stomp! Stomp! Stomp!

The enemies moved in pairs—one held a shield in front, while another aimed a rifle from behind.

“Our motto!”

Cha Dong-Gyun’s words, sounding like metal tearing, echoed.

“If I can!”

The thunderous shout from their comrades completely drowned out the enemy’s march.

“Protect my country with my blood!”

Clack! Clack! Clack!

Shouting with all his might, Lee Doo-Hee looked through the night scope. The others also aimed at the enemies’ heads.

“I am!”

Clack!

Kang Chan aimed at an approaching enemy’s forehead and placed his finger on the trigger.

“Happy!”

Bang!

As their motto pierced the darkness toward the enemy, Kang Chan’s muzzle flashed. Right after, an Inca warrior’s forehead exploded.

Bang! Thud! Bang! Thud!

Following his lead, the soldiers on the rooftop, the second floor, and the windows of the first floor began opening fire as well.

Tat-tat-tat! Thud! Tat-tat-tat! Thud!

Naturally, the enemies began retaliating.

Tat-tat-tat! Thud! Tat-tat-tat! Thud! Tat-tat! Ping!

With each enemy gunshot, part of the walls of the rooftop and windows exploded.

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

Although Kang Chan, Kang Chul-Gyu, and the snipers could successfully hit their targets in the forehead, the others’ bullets merely ricocheted off the enemy shields and disappeared.

Ratatatat! Ting! Bang! Ting!

“Hooah!”

Bang! Thud!

“Raaaaaaagh!!!”

Bang! Thud!

“Hooah!”

The enemies steadily advanced, leaving behind those who were hit in the shins and stepping over those who had been shot in the head.