

Super Genius DNA #Chapter 41: A Player of Life (3) - Read Super Genius DNA Chapter 41: A Player of Life (3)

Chapter 41: A Player of Life (3)

The place that Young-Joon's parents were living in was an old house that was in a remote area in Doma-dong, Daejeon. To get to the house, he had to go through a narrow, maze-like alley. Taxi drivers didn't really like these kinds of roads.

"You can drop me off here."

Young-Joon got off the taxi at the entrance to the alley.

Looking at the old, gray stone walls... old memories of the place surfaced in Young-Joon's mind.

'I played a lot with Park Joo-Hyuk near here.'

Young-Joon went down the alley. And when he arrived in front of a rice shop that was no longer open...

Vrooom!

A truck suddenly came out from the left.

Crash!

Young-Joon could not understand what just happened. He felt a strong impact on his left shoulder and arm, then his whole body flew into the air. His body flew dozens of meters and tumbled on the ground.

Three men got out of the truck and confirmed the situation.

"Is it done?" The man with a mustache and wearing a leather jacket asked while lighting a cigarette.

"Check," the man who was seemingly the leader ordered.

One of the gangsters approached Young-Joon with a wrench in his hand and flipped him over. Blood ran down Young-Joon's head.

“I think it’s done, sir,” the gangster said.

“Huh! Hey! Behind you!” Spitting out his cigarette, Mustache yelled in surprise.

“Behind?”

The gangster turned his head and fell to his knees in shock. Young-Joon’s upper body was smoothly getting up from the ground. It looked as if someone was pulling on his collar to get him up. His cut on the back of his head was healed.

He stared at the gangsters with cold eyes void of emotions.

* * *

The order, which had passed through a few people, was to eliminate Young-Joon. They had prepared a lot for this. They did multiple simulations in this exact spot with the truck owned by the identity they stole. People didn’t really come by here, and there was nothing but stray cats and dog poop in this alley. There were no surveillance cameras either. Along with his subordinates, he planned a lot of potential scenarios. And when the time came, they attacked him just like they planned without hesitation, like a machine.

But they failed.

When the leader woke up, he found himself in the truck and tied to the driver's seat with green tape. His subordinates were seated behind, tied up and unconscious, and Young-Joon was seated in the passenger’s seat.

Tap! Tap tap tap!

Young-Joon tapped Lee Kwang-Soo’s phone.

“Uh.... Euh...” Lee Kwang-Soo moaned in fear.

This guy wasn't human. They had never seen a monster like him before. How did that kind of strength come out from a scrawny little nerd like him? Everyone fell to the ground in just a few minutes, and then Lee Kwang-Soo went unconscious after getting his joints twisted and hit on the back of his head.

“Who ordered you?” Young-Joon asked in a cold voice.

“... I-I don't know.”

“There is a phone call and text from a man named Kim Il-Soo on your phone.”

Lee Kwang-Soo looked bewildered.

‘How did he open my phone? There's a passcode on it?’

Young-Joon stared at Lee Kwang-Soo, then said, “Human fingers leave behind residue like fingerprints, bacteria, and dead skin on places they touch. Places you touch more often have more of those residues left than other places. Zero, one, three, four—these four numbers were exactly like that. And there aren't many combinations you can make with four numbers.”

“ ... ”

“The passcode was zero-four-one-three. And looking at your messenger, that was your wife's birthday. You take care of your family even when you do things like this?”

“ ... ”

“Kim Il-Soo isn't in my memory. I assume that you got the order from higher up. Tell me who it was. Then I will let you live.”

“I-I don't know. I only work with Il-Soo-hyungnim...”[1]Lee Kwang-Soo answered in a terrified voice.

“It's Ji Kwang-Man, isn't it?”

“N-No, it's not!”

Lee Kwang-Soo desperately tried to hide it, but it didn't mean anything to Rosaline. She already detected the change in blood flow in Lee Kwang-Soo's brain. She could get the answer by looking at the limbic system that was activated when he heard Ji Kwang-Man's name. But she needed to hear it from Lee Kwang-Soo himself since knowing and proving were two different things.

Rosaline got close to Lee Kwang-Soo. She smiled. To him, the smile was as chilling as a devil's.

* * *

When Young-Joon regained consciousness, he was in his room at his parent's house. He was hurt and throbbing everywhere.

"Ugh."

He massaged his throbbing body and glanced at the clock. It was six o'clock. There was blood on his shirt.

—Do not move too much; you are still recovering.

The message Rosaline sent him popped up.

He had lost consciousness from the moment he was hit by the car, but he could faintly remember the things he saw through Rosaline's eyes.

"What happened? It wasn't an alley cars usually go through."

—It was a deliberate accident. Aimed at you.

"No way. What if..."

—It's true. They were people who Ji Kwang-Man sent. With a little bit of torture and threatening, they said it with their own lips.

"*Sigh*

."

Young-Joon covered his face with his hands. He did think that they were going to do something as their management rights were being threatened. He predicted a few different reactions, but he didn't expect them to be this violent.

'Are they crazy?'

"I think it was three people. What happened to them?"

—They are alive, so don't worry. I subdued them and tied them up in the car.

"..."

—After that, I came to this house to disinfect the injury, and I controlled your consciousness while recovering you. So that control of this body could return to you.

“I need to go see it for myself.”

Young-Joon put on a new shirt and went outside. In the old car, three people were tied up with green tape. To be honest, Rosaline didn't really have to tie them up as they had broken bones everywhere and could not move because their joints popped out of place. Two of them were unconscious, and Mustache, the only person who woke up, wiggled as he saw Young-Joon.

“Hup!”

Young-Joon ripped off the green tape from his lips. In fear, the man lowered his head and bowed.

“I'm sorry. Please let me live. I'm sorry. I'm sorry...”

“Why did you do it?” Young-Joon asked.

“We said no as well. At first, we told them that we couldn't do it this time. It's true. We kept saying no because it was too pressuring since the subject was a famous person. I'm telling you. But he kept on convincing us...”

“Ji Kwang-Man did?”

“... That is... I did say that it was ordered by the Division Director, but I am not completely sure. The order has gone through a few people...”

“You're saying that someone else gave the order, right? How did they convince you?”

“They said that it was fine until now since Doctor Ryu was famous, but not powerful...” Mustache said as he glanced at Young-Joon.

“They said that Doctor Ryu has no ties to politicians because he is picky. And isn't this a world where no one gets caught after a celebrity who was forced to engage in sexual entertainment writes a list of people and commits suicide? A famous person and a powerful person are different. The world does not care when an ordinary person dies, but when a famous person dies, the whole world pays attention, but it was a battle of power to find the culprit.”

“So they convinced you that even if you kill me, they could cover it up if they put their minds to it? Because I'm only famous and they are powerful?”

“Yes... They said they could bury it since there are no politicians linked to you and watching your back.”

“ ... ”

“A-And they said they were going to give us a lot of money. We can't keep living like this either. Since this was going to be our last time, we were going to get lots of money and move to a different country. They said they were going to get boat tickets for us too...”

“And you trusted that?”

“He is not a liar. He has worked with us for ten years, and we're basically brothers...”

“You are really stupid. If you kill me, you don't have a way to get out of this country. They are going to use you and cut ties.”

“But... We have worked with Il-Soo-hyunnim for over ten years...”

“Call Ji Kwang-Man right now.”

“We have never been connected with Division Director Ji Kwang-Man. We just assumed. We only talk to Il-Soo-hyunnim, so...”

“Is the middle-man's name Il-Soo?”

“Kim Il-Soo...”

“Then call him. Put it on speakerphone. I'll record it.”

* * *

“Aren't you crossing the line?” Gil Il-Soo asked in a hostess bar located in Bangbaedong.

He was a middle-man broker who took requests from customers like Ji Kwang-Man and moved illegal organizations accordingly.

“I did overdo it a little. But we were running out of time. I couldn't help it,” Ji Kwang-Man replied.

“Right now, he has no power. All he has is a huge amount of fame. I think this is the maginot line. If we give him more time from here, he becomes untouchable as politicians get involved. But right now, I can cut ties and get rid of him, although it will get noisy.”

“Won’t they be suspicious of us?”

“Who? Us?”

Ji Kwang-Man sighed.

“They won’t find out,” Ji Kwang-Man said. He added, “The public does not know that we are not on good terms with Young-Joon.”

Publicly, A-Gen was a company that fully supported Young-Joon to the extent that they gave him full shares of induced pluripotent stem cells. They mobilized high-level personnel in the company and helped with optic nerve differentiation and clinical research by giving him all the retinal degenerative mice from the Experiment Animal Resource Center. They also hired him as a director even though he was just a Scientist. A-Gen had given him a huge share of four percent when he was a complete stranger. In addition, A-Gen should actively support Young-Joon as they were about to gain huge profits from the launching of his affiliate company. How could anyone suspect that they were behind Young-Joon’s murder?

No one would be able to suspect Young-Joon other than himself, but he was dead and gone. The dead did not speak. Then, the public’s anger would not be aimed at A-Gen or management since there was no way a company would cut open a goose that laid golden eggs. There would be anger toward the government, asking why they did not protect a gifted person like him. Public opinion will roar and demand a thorough investigation to catch the criminals.

“At that point, we can catch the worthless people who did it and throw them right in front of the public. Get them to pour out all their anger and hang him or pull his limbs apart,” Ji Kwang-Man said.

He added, “They rip them apart in excitement. The public is the great unwashed; they can only think so hard. Once you rise to my level, you can run simulations of them and predict what will happen next.

A cold sneer appeared on Ji Kwang-Man's face. “What’s next? After that, a conspiracy theory about the people behind it will come up. There are two

suspects: America or SG Pharmaceuticals. I one hundred percent guarantee you these two will come up.”

The scenario was that Americans assassinated him to protect their lead in international science as the person who was going to transform medicine from now on was Korean. There was a similar conspiracy theory when Doctor Lee Hwi-So passed away as well, although it wasn't confirmed whether it was true or not.

The other alternative scenario was that SG Pharmaceuticals assassinated him because they could not stand to see A-Gen's growth.

“There will be no room for A-Gen to be raised as a possible suspect as they fight. In the meantime, A-Gen will gather all their employees, hold a memorial service, and it will all end beautifully with the CEO shedding a tear. Rather, the mom-and-pop investors might be moved by that and stock prices might increase.”

Kim Il-Soo felt chills on his shoulders.

“It's okay to throw them under the bus, right?”

“Of course. They will keep their mouths shut if you give them enough money.”

“Of course. I will fill their pockets.”

Ji Kwang-Man finished his drink cheerfully.

He was thinking of reporting a celebrity sex scandal after the three garbage lives took all the public's anger and disappeared. He would wait for the news to die down, then normalize A-Gen's management that was disturbed by Young-Joon. The situation may have unfolded differently if Young-Joon had a politician like Shim Sung-Yeol watching his back, but there was no one. Nicholas? He was just fond of the man as a scientist; he wasn't going to fight his own company for someone who was dead now.

‘Ryu Young-Joon. Your integrity was your poison. A clean fish can't live in a big, dirty river, right?’

“This one was a big case, and I'm only asking because I'm nervous, but you're only throwing my people under the bus, right? Not me?” Kim Il-Soo asked.

“Of course, how could you be included, Mr. Kim. Why are you so anxious?”

“Haha, never mind. I was just worried about taking out such a famous person like that.”

“Don’t get scared. We can do it. And this is the only way we can protect our company’s management rights.”

“Yes, of course. It will go well.”

Buzz!

Kim Il-Soo’s phone buzzed.

“I guess the job is done.”

Kim Il-Soo picked up the phone.

—H-Hyung-nim?

“Yeah. Is it done?”

—That is... Um... Ryu Young-Joon...

“Why? You didn’t take care of him?”

—Are you Kim Il-Soo?

It was Young-Joon’s voice. Kim Il-Soo froze. Ji Kwang-Man also heard it because the phone volume was quite loud.

“Uh... Yes, who is this?”

—This is Ryu Young-Joon.

Kim Il-Soo gulped. Ji Kwang-Man was glaring at him. magic

“I-I don’t think we know each other. What is this about?” Kim Il-Soo replied with a trembling voice.

—I already recorded you asking whether I was taken care of, so let’s talk freely.

“ ... ”

—The people you sent failed. I called the police, so they will be arrested soon. I'm sure you will get arrested, too. I heard that you've been working with these people for ten years. They don't know much about Ji Kwang-Man, but they sure do know quite a lot about you.

“Ha... Haha. Sir, I don't know what you are talking about.”

—The reason I called you is because I wanted to ask you something.

“... Ask me something?”

—How much are you going to tell when you get investigated?

Kim Il-Soo took a deep breath. He put force into his tone of voice.

“I don't know what you are talking about. I will hang up if you're going to keep talking nonsense.”

—Tell them about everyone. If it includes Ji Kwang-Man, tell them about him too. This isn't something you can handle by yourself anyway.

“Excuse me. Wait...”

—Just don't talk and listen if you're going to pretend like you didn't do it.

Young-Joon went on.

—To be honest, I learned something from this. I also understand what kind of logic and plan was behind you doing something like this. And you people probably know a lot of powerful people who could make this go away, whether you bribed them or you know their weak spot.

“ ... ”

—But it doesn't matter how sturdy the ties you are holding onto are. I have the ability to take that from you. Only I can give them what they want the most, what they want more than money or prestige: a healthy life.

Whee!

They could hear the sirens of police cars and ambulances from Young-Joon's side.

—I will make sure that not only the public's anger is focused on you, but also the resentment of the majority of the political community as well. It's going to be hard to take that all on your own. Tell them about everyone who was behind this.

"H-Hey, wait."

—To be honest, I was recently thinking about how I was ripping apart Ji Kwang-Man and management too much. As a person, I felt guilty for destroying management with traps, bluffing, and blackmail.

Young-Joon said.

—But it doesn't matter now. I feel like I can go as far as needed without anything holding me back now that I know that you people are garbage. From now on, your life will be a living hell worse than you could ever imagine. If you don't want to be fucked by yourself, give me all the people you are hiding.

Beep.

Young-Joon hung up the phone. Kim Il-Soo stared at Ji Kwang-Man, frozen.

Ji Kwang-Man pulled out his electronic cigarette and put it in his mouth. His fingers trembled. He took a deep breath with his eyes closed.

Thud!

He slammed the table with the cigarette in his hand.

"This is how you get the job done?"

"That is..."

"You figure it out on your own."

"... Y-You said that you're not going to throw me under the bus."

"Get lost. I don't know anything about this from now on. Let's keep this encounter a secret, too."

Ji Kwang-Man took his coat and left.

* * *

Attempted murder of star scientist Ryu Young-Joon, a national hero. The nation was turned upside down. News articles poured out nonstop since the first breaking news in the media, and A-Gen's stock prices plummeted sharply. Public opinion was raging in criticism against the government and gangsters.

Young-Joon was watching the news on the television inside the VIP hospital room at a university hospital. The anchor was reporting Young-Joon's accident once again.

—Around 4 PM today in a remote neighborhood in Doma-dong, Daejeon, Doctor Ryu Young-Joon of A-Gen was attacked and transported to a nearby university hospital with major injuries. Thankfully, he suffered no severe injuries. The criminals were three gangsters...

Beep!

Young-Joon turned off the TV. He closed his eyes and thought long and hard. He could quickly recover from his injuries if he used Rosaline, but he didn't use her on purpose. The reason why he was staying at the hospital was to take this situation to the extreme.

Young-Joon thought about Shim Sung-Yeol, who went to visit Son Soo-Young, the successful patient of the clinical trial, a while ago. There was no place better for them to create a positive impression than a hospital room.

'They should be getting here anytime soon.'

"Mr. Ryu Young-Joon, you have a visitor," The nurse said as she approached him.

"Who is it?"

"He says that he is Congressman Kim Joo-Chul..."

"Please allow all the visitors to come in," Young-Joon replied.

1. Hyung-nim is a masculine word that males use to refer to older males. It means older brother, and it is commonly used amongst gangsters when referring to their superiors or bosses. ?

Chapter 42: A Player of Life (4)

Kim Joo-Chul was a young politician who was successfully re-elected. He was building up his support and getting better at what he was doing. He was thirsty for prestige, so he did whatever he could if it meant that he could make his name. And since he happened to be in Daejeon, he was able to come see Young-Joon first. It would be quite helpful for him to make a name for himself if he could put his face on a provocative incident like a superstar being attacked. That was the only reason Kim Joo-Chul visited Young-Joon's hospital room. As it was late in the evening, he was thinking of getting a picture with the new rising scientist and advertising it on social media rather than bringing in a reporter and making a fuss.

"Hello."

With a bright smile, Kim Joo-Chul walked into Young-Joon's room.

"Hello," Young-Joon replied dryly.

He was talking to Rosaline in his head. He consumed one fitness point as it was not an everyday conversation.

'What do you think?'

—He has stomach cancer. Stage one.

'If they resect it?'

—It would have to be a total gastrectomy.

Young-Joon thought that someone his age would have some sort of minor illness, but it was a big one right off the bat. Did Kim Joo-Chul know that he had stomach cancer?

"Doctor Ryu, how are you feeling?" Kim Joo-Chul asked.

"I am good."

“How could an accident like this happen to someone who works day and night for the advancement of science in our country? It really breaks my heart.”

With a look of pity, Kim Joo-Chul came over and sat beside Young-Joon.

“I am alright. I had a thorough examination, and it wasn’t that serious. I am doing an endoscopy tomorrow,” Young-Joon replied. He was throwing bait at Kim Joo-Chul as politicians used anything in order to form a bond.

“Oh, is that so? I also got an endoscopy recently,” Kim Joo-Chul said.

“What kind of endoscopy?”

“An upper endoscopy.”

‘Bingo.’

If he did an endoscopy, they would have found a severe stomach ulcer.

“Were there any problems?” Young-Joon asked.

“Haha, they told me to get it checked out, so I did, and I was diagnosed with stage one stomach cancer. But you can treat it with an endoscopy since it’s only stage one, right?” Kim Joo-Chul said, chuckling.

“I can’t get surgery right away since I was re-elected and it’s a busy time for me, but I am going to go in soon and get it treated.”

“With an endoscopy?” Young-Joon asked.

“Yes.”

“Did your doctor say that?”

“No, but it’s stage one, right?”

“So did you not ask how much of your stomach needs to be resected?”

“Yes...”

Kim Joo-Chul looked a little nervous as Young-Joon kept asking.

“I think it would be best if you asked him. Not all stage one stomach cancers can be treated with an endoscopy.”

“Is that so?”

“Sometimes, you may have to do a total gastrectomy. Normally, people think that you have to resect more of the stomach as the stages progress, but the amount that needs to be resected is actually dependent on where the cancer is located.”

Kim Joo-Chul went a little stiff.

“Congressman, where did they say the cancer was?”

“T-The upper side...”

“I cannot be certain as I did not see your chart, but they usually do a gastrectomy if the tumor is located in the first third of the stomach. It is a surgery where the entire stomach is taken out and the esophagus is connected to the small intestine.”

Kim Joo-Chul froze right away. This was devastating news.

Kim Joo-Chul thought, *‘I have to take out my entire stomach?’*

“What... It’s only stage one, but I have to take out my entire stomach? It’s only stage one? Why?”

“If only the upper part of the stomach that has cancer cells is removed, side effects such as severe reflux esophagitis would occur. Then, you would not be able to eat anything. That’s why the entire stomach is taken out.”

“B-But the doctor did not say anything like that.”

“I do not know about the doctor’s situation. They might be thinking about it because it is in a tricky location. It may have not been communicated well since the doctor and you both have very busy jobs. Anyway, I’m just saying that it is generally like that.”

“ ... ”

When Kim Joo-Chul was getting his examination, he was already late to the re-elected congressmen meeting. He left the office after hearing that stage

one stomach cancer had a recovery rate of almost one hundred percent. He said that it was because he was busy and that he would hear the rest by phone afterward.

It wasn't that he didn't care about it at all, but he had just put off calling the doctor for a few days. But after hearing it now, he thought it could be much more serious than he thought.

"You should call your doctor and ask how much of your stomach needs to be resected."

"Please give me a moment."

Kim Joo-Chul, who had turned completely pale, quickly pulled out his phone and called the doctor's phone. The doctors probably weren't working anymore as the time was late, but he couldn't think about that right now as he was too in shock.

"Hello? Doctor? Yes, I am Congressman Kim Joo-Chul. I went to see you before... Yes, that's right. Yes. I just wanted to ask if I would have to resect my entire stomach?" Kim Joo-Chul asked.

And a little while later, his hand fell helplessly along with his phone. His breathing was a little rough out of shock.

Watching him, Young-Joon cautiously interrupted.

"Did he say that you will have to do a total gastrectomy?"

"Yes... He said... that will be best..."

"Well, what can you do? Don't worry too much about it. However, your quality of life will decrease." Young-Joon said,.

"After you resect your entire stomach, you will have to chew your food at least thirty times and eat slowly for at least twenty minutes. You have to chew your food more since your stomach can't digest it. And since you will lack the ability to store food, you will have to eat five or six times a day in relatively small amounts."

" ... "

“And if you don’t be careful, you might start dumping, which is when high concentrations of undigested food pour into your intestines and cause abdominal distension, stomach cramps, vomiting, or diarrhea. And if you’re unlucky, you could get dizzy or fall into a coma. So you must follow your diet carefully.”

“ ... ”

“And you must lay down slightly after thirty minutes of eating since you have to slow the passage of food. You can’t get up right away and move. There are a few kinds of food you have to restrict, such as dairy, but the hospital will tell you that. You have to take care of yourself.”

Kim Joo-Chul urgently turned his face toward Young-Joon.

“S-Sir, is there any way?”

“Any way?”

“You cured glaucoma too, right? You said you are going to cure Alzheimer’s as well...”

Young-Joon stroked his chin as if he was contemplating for a bit. Kim Joo-Chul gulped in nervousness.

“Sir...?”

“There is a biomaterial called CD44 on the surface of cancer cells. It’s on normal cells as well, but there is specifically more on cancer cells. If there’s about one on normal cells, there’s about one hundred on the surface of cancer cells. So, a lot of scientists tried to target that and create an anticancer drug since it would only kill cancer cells with one hundred times more efficiency.”

Young-Joon went on.

“But the scientists discovered while developing it that a small subset of stem cells in the body had as many CD44 as cancer cells. Maybe not one hundred of them, but about eighty. So, all those cells died when the anticancer drug was used, and that was quite fatal. That’s why the pharmaceutical industry hasn’t been able to create an anticancer drug that targets CD44 even though it is one of the most efficient targets.”

“ ... ”

“But strangely, stomach cancer cells have a variant of CD44 on the surface.”

“A variant?”

“It is a material called CD44v8. There are a lot of them since it is derived from CD44, but it doesn't exist on other cells because it is a variant.”

“Then...”

Kim Joo-Chul could barely follow Young-Joon's explanation.

“Then can you make a drug with that?”

“That's right. Then, stage one stomach cancers will not need any resection at all. It will be cured by just putting the medicine on the tumor since it is highly toxic to cancer cells,” Young-Joon replied.

He added, “But it is very tricky to develop. It's difficult to make a unique antibody just for CD44v8, and that's why the scientific community has not been able to develop it into a pharmaceutical yet. I had a few ideas, which I think would have a pretty high success rate. But I haven't been able to even start developing it. As you can see.”

Young-Joon lifted his arm that had an intravenous line in it.

“Because I'm in this situation.”

Suddenly, sparks flew from Kim Joo-Chul's eyes. Young-Joon smiled bitterly.

“I should have been born earlier... I'm sorry,” Young-Joon said in a half-joking voice.

“No...”

“But I also have stem cell technology, Congressman. It's okay even if you resect your entire stomach. If you hold out a little bit, I can make you a new stomach.”

Young-Joon added, “If I am still alive by then. Since someone seems to be after my life.”

“ ... ”

Kim Joo-Chul grit his teeth.

“Doctor Ryu, did you do anything to make someone resent you?”

“I made some enemies while trying to live the right way.”

“If you have anyone you suspect, please tell me.”

“I do, but it is only a suspicion. I want to take care of this based on evidence and the law. I’m worried that they will suffer more damage than their share if I thoughtlessly tell you their name.”

“They are going to be people with power if they messed with someone like you, Doctor Ryu. They are going to try to cover it up if you let them be, no?” Kim Joo-Chul said. “I will do it according to the law as you wish. I will investigate it thoroughly and find them.”

* * *

About ten people had come to see Young-Joon in the span of about ten days. There was a pretty scary energy going around the political community. The public’s request to thoroughly investigate was nothing but a cliché stimulus for the old snakes who had seeped in politics for a long time, but what Young-Joon gave them was a much stronger motivation. Everyone who had met him once were all caught up in a roaring anger.

In the meantime, Young-Joon met some more close people he missed.

As soon as Ryu Ji-Won heard the news, she skipped all her afternoon classes and got on a train right away. She was usually playful and fun, but it seemed like something like attempted murder was too much of a shock. She began crying by his bedside with her face buried in his bed.

“I knew things were going too well for you!”

Wiping the tears off her face, she sobbed and said, “Hey, just don’t do research anymore. That’s why this happened, right? Some strange people are after you because you’re famous?”

“It’s not because I’m famous, but I do have more enemies now...”

“More enemies? You?”

“Yeah.”

“... Yeah, you have a pretty bad temper. You should bring a bodyguard with you when you go places now. I heard that Einstein also had a bodyguard with him.”

“Well, he, a German Jew, criticized the Nazi in Europe when Hitler was ruling. He really lived like there was no tomorrow.”

“You’re not that different, either!”

“And Einstein didn’t have a bodyguard after he sought asylum in America.”

“Anyway.”

“Whatever. Einstein was racist, and he had a pretty bad personal life as well. Don’t compare me to him.”

“Where’s Mom and Dad?” magic

“They came here the day I came to the hospital, and they’re here almost every day. They went out to eat right now, but you should take them for some coffee later.”

“Young-Joon!”

The door swung open and Park Joo-Hyuk entered. Patent Attorney Lee Hae-Won followed him in.

“You lunatic. What are you doing here? What happened?”

As Park Joo-Hyuk was making a fuss and walking toward Young-Joon, he saw Ryu Ji-Won sitting beside him.

“Long time no see, Ji-Won. How is school?”

“It’s fine. Hehe.”

“It’s nice that you’re here, even though you’re probably really busy with school. Coming all the way here because of your stupid brother. *Sigh*,” Park Joo-Hyuk said.

“Are you Kim Jong-Nam or something? You can’t control yourself now that you’re famous, huh? Are you some chaebol who is secretly fighting for power or something? This is going overboard, man.”[1]

“I didn’t know they would act like this, too. That’s why I was hit. Why did you bring Attorney Lee?”

“You’re her best customer and her income. What is she going to live off of if you’re gone?”

Lee Hae-Won chuckled like she was embarrassed by what Park Joo-Hyuk was saying.

“But I am glad you’re okay.”

“You should rest a lot now since I’ll be giving you more work once I get discharged.”

“Ugh...”

Lee Hae-Won looked sad.

That was when Park Joo-Hyuk interrupted.

“Hey, Young-Joon. I looked into some private security firms. About a hundred of them show up when you search it up on Naver, but half of them are ghost companies, and the other half are worthless. A lot of them just use part-time workers instead of actually trained guards. I made a list for you just in case you spend money on bad ones like an idiot and get stabbed in an alley or something.”

“So which did you choose?”

“K-Cops.”

“... The Robot Police?”[2]

“Ji-Won doesn’t understand that joke. Be careful; it makes you look old.”

Ryu Ji-Won actually looked like she didn’t know what they were talking about.

‘Holy...’

“Anyway, ask them for security since K-Cops are trustworthy. Or ask for protection from the government.”

“Okay. Thanks.”

“Take care of yourself. *Sigh*, you always worry me, little bro,” Park Joo-Hyuk said, clicking his tongue.

1. Kim Jong-Nam was the firstborn son of Kim Jong-Il of North Korea who was assassinated by a nerve poison in 2017. ?

2. Robot Police K-Cops, or Brave Police J-Decker, was an animation that aired in Korea in 1994. ?

Chapter 43: A Player of Life (5)

A few hours after Ryu Ji-Won, Park Joo-Hyuk, and Lee Hae-Won left, the members of the Life Creation Department showed up. Young-Joon did hear that they were all coming to see him, but he wondered if it was okay for all of them to come to Daejeon together.

“Isn’t it work hours right now? It’s a weekday today.”

“We all took the evening off. We arranged all the work in the morning, so don’t worry.”

Jung Hae-Rim approached Young-Joon with a worried face.

“Seriously, what happened?”

“I think Ji Kwang-Man did this,” Young-Joon replied.

They all froze.

“What does... But is there a reason for him to do something this bad?” Park Dong-Hyun asked like this was unbelievable.

“Are you sure it’s Ji Kwang-Man?” Cheon Ji-Myung asked Young-Joon.

“I think so.”

“Do you have proof?” Jung Hae-Rim asked.

“There will be some soon.”

“Will be some?”

“Well, I reached out to some politicians, the prosecution, and places like that?”

“You?”

Cheon Ji-Myung tilted his head in confusion. It was like seeing a cow eat beef.

“It’s true. I just thought that it might not proceed according to the law if I let it be, so I just gave it a little nudge so that it would. Ji Kwang-Man will be caught in the investigation soon enough.”

“Oh my...”

“But isn’t it better for you to question him if you have suspicions?” Bae Sun-Mi asked.

“Then, it could look like I had a veiled fight for power with Ji Kwang-Man. I am going to keep my stance as the victim,” Young-Joon replied.

Since he had a lot of people who would play for him, there was no need for him to hold a knife and put blood on his bands.

“Other than that, how did the Alzheimer’s mice experiment go? Did we get the data?” Young-Joon asked Bae Sun-Mi.

“I win! Give it to me!”

Suddenly, Jung Hae-Rim exclaimed and put out her hand towards Park Dong-Hyun and Koh Soon-Yeol.

“Hmph. I’ll transfer you the money.”

“I’ll give it to you in cash.”

Koh Soon-Yeol pulled out a few ten thousand won bills and gave it to Jung Hae-Rim.

“What kind of bet did you have?” Young-Joon asked in bewilderment.

“I predicted that you were going to definitely ask about research progress and I bet my money on that,” Jung Hae-Rim remarked with a proud smirk.

“I didn’t think someone who was just hit by a car and lying in the hospital would ask about work,” Park Dong-Hyun said in a depressed voice.

“So, did we get the data?” Young-Joon asked Bae Sun-Mi again.

“I also bet that you would ask, so I brought my laptop. I’ll show you the data.”

Bae Sun-Mi pulled out her laptop and put it on the side table beside the bed. The first slide that showed up when she opened the PowerPoint file was the brain dissection of an APP model mouse. An APP mouse referred to a Beta-Amyloid Precursor Protein (APP) model mouse. This mouse had a V717F variant in the APP gene, so the beta-amyloid protein kept accumulating outside the brain cells. As human Alzheimer’s was also caused by beta-amyloid proteins accumulating in the brain, APP model mice were basically a recreation of human Alzheimer’s in mice.

“If you see here, you can see the formation of the amyloid plaque, and you can see the locations where synapses were lost,” Bae Sun-Mi said as she pointed to the checkmarks on the picture.

“As time passed, the brain was continuously destroyed to turn into this kind of shape.”

She turned to the next slide. The picture now showed a brain that had a much more contracted shape than before.

“And the result of the stem cell therapy Doctor Ryu created...”

She turned to the next slide. Ninety percent of the destroyed brain tissue had been recovered. Now, there was no noticeable difference compared to a healthy mouse’s brain.

“They also showed significant improvements in cognitive ability and memory tests. I think that one hundred percent of their brain will be recovered if we give them more time.”

“We succeeded.”

Young-Joon grinned.

“Yes.”

Bae Sun-Mi looked exhilarated.

“Doctor Ryu, rest well and take your time. I’ll be preparing for clinical trials.”

* * *

Young-Joon was getting ready to be discharged. He changed into his jeans and shirt, and organized his stuff that he had set up in his room.

As he was packing up his stuff, the news came on the television.

—Today, the prosecution indicted Ji Kwang-Man, a registered director of A-Gen, who was immediately arrested on charges of soliciting the murder of Doctor Ryu Young-Joon.

On the screen, Young-Joon saw Ji Kwang-Man being bombarded with camera flashes from the reporters.

—The prosecution suspects that Ji had planned a hit on Doctor Ryu Young-Joon after identifying him as a threat to management. They think that Ji saw him as a direct enemy as Doctor Ryu Young-Joon became famous after obtaining a large stake in the company and becoming a director. He is denying all charges.

Ji Kwang-Man’s short interview came out next.

—I did not commission anything like that. I heard that my name was mentioned by the broker, but I have never seen him before, and...

—On the other hand, the Korean Organization for Rare Diseases and A-Gen shareholders organized a rally condemning Ji today as well.

The rally came on the screen. A woman in her forties was shouting into the mic.

—My daughter is dying every day because she cannot get a bone marrow transplant. People here who have incurable diseases and their families are all living in hell and on limited time. In the *Science* interview, Doctor Ryu Young-Joon said that he can cure all of that, and he has shown the possibility of that. Trying to kill Doctor Ryu Young-Joon in this situation is no different than trying to kill all of us!

—On the other hand, Doctor Ryu Young-Joon seemed very surprised that Ji was pointed out as the person behind this incident.

The screen switched to Young-Joon's interview. In the VIP hospital room, he spoke to the reporters with a bitter face.

—All I have done was study hard for the growth of the company and the treatment of patients with incurable diseases. I cannot understand why he did that to me. It is shocking, and I feel very betrayed and sad.

Bleep!

Young-Joon turned off the TV. He went to the administration department to make the payment for his hospital bills, then went outside. He saw Park Joo-Hyuk standing there with security agents from K-Cops. There were three men and one woman, and they looked terrifying.

“My name is Kim Chul-Kwon, and I am the head of security.”

A man who looked like a statue from Easter Island reached out to him.”

“My name is Ryu Young-Joon.”

After they shook hands, he got on the van they had prepared.

On the way, Park Joo-Hyuk said, “About the thing you asked me about. There's an empty experiment building fifteen minutes from A-Gen's Lab One. Apparently, Lab One bought it with the purpose of increasing the number of research wards, but put it out on the market again.”

“We can buy that. How much is it?”

“Fourteen billion won.”

“They'll give me a discount since I'm using it for A-Bio?”

“Looking at the general atmosphere in society right now, they might just give it to you for free if you just ask.”

“It's better to take the proper route and just buy it. It's not like I don't have the money.”

“That's true.”

Young-Joon looked at Rosaline's status window.

[Rosaline Lv. 8]

—Metastatic Status: Heart (9%), Liver (47%), Brain (8%), Kidney (15%), Spinal Cord (8%)

—Synchronization: 16%

—Cell Fitness: 5.0

All the values increased significantly after this accident. He couldn't help it since they were urgent injuries. Rosaline's metastatic status increased as she treated the cut on the back of his head and fractures, and the synchronization value increased along with it.

Also, Rosaline's level jumped from 4 to 8 as well. From games to English, leveling up was normally a good thing, but it was a little different for Rosaline.

'Can I keep using her?'

Lost in thoughts, Young-Joon turned his head toward the window.

"But what is so loud outside?"

"It's the rally condemning Ji Kwang-Man," Park Joo-Hyuk replied.

"Where are we passing right now?"

"We will soon be at Gwanghwamun Square," One of the K-Cops agents told him.

As the car reached the front of Gwanghwamun Square, Young-Joon saw a shocking view from his window.

"What is this?"

A surprising amount of people had filled up the plaza. Their shouting continuously pierced through the car window and could be heard from the inside as well. Young-Joon knew that they were talking about the rally on the news, but he didn't think it was this big.

"The police predict 1.3 million people here today," Park Joo-Hyuk said.

“ ... ”

“To be honest, people are right to be angry. I would have also gone to that today if I wasn't on security today. My grandma also passed away after suffering from Alzheimer's,” Security Head Kim Chul-Kwon said.

“And they are even more angry because the person who commissioned the hit was an A-Gen director. A pharmaceutical company that should be developing drugs to cure patients basically tried to kill them all, so...”

Park Joo-Hyuk nodded.

“No matter what kind of network Ji Kwang-Man has, his punishment won't be light if the situation gets this bad. His crime is terrible, and public opinion about him is bad as well. His life is basically over.”

Young-Joon still looked like he couldn't believe it. He thought that something like this would happen if he strictly maintained his stance as a victim and exposed Ji Kwang-Man's self-destructive foul play via the prosecution. He thought patients with incurable diseases would open a rally condemning A-Gen, making it difficult for Ji Kwang-Man to escape, but he didn't expect it to be this huge. It was more shocking than delightful or touching.

“There are seven hundred thousand patients with rare, incurable diseases in the country. And a million cancer patients,” Kim Chul-Kwon said.

“ ... ”

“Please fix all of them, Doctor Ryu.”

Kim Chul-Kwon chuckled.

“From what I can see, this country is sick. People are sick physically, but also mentally. Do you think someone in their right mind would try to kill you?”

* * *

Young-Joon moved into a luxury apartment for himself near Jungyoon University. He only packed the things he needed from his basement house and put them here. He bought most of the furniture as well.

Ryu Ji-Won, who heard the news on the day Young-Joon moved in, moved out of her dorm right away.

“Oppa, I’m here!”[1]

She put her bags on the floor as soon as she came in and took a deep breath.

“These are so heavy I almost died.”

“Should I have come and helped you?”

Young-Joon handed her a water bottle.

“No, it’s okay. I brought a worker.”

“A worker?”

“Hello.”

When Young-Joon turned at the sound of a man’s voice, he saw a boy standing at the door. He was a big guy who was holding Ryu Ji-Won’s stuff.

“My name is Yang Dong-Wook, Ji-Won’s friend.”

“Hello. Thanks for helping out. Come in.”

“What happened to Ji-Won?”

She was sitting on the floor up until a few seconds ago, but she was gone now that Young-Joon saw. Then, they heard a scream from the small room.

“Ack! My room is amazing! It’s exhilarating!”

Ryu Ji-Won was jumping up and down in excitement.

“You like it that much?”

Young-Joon chuckled as he watched her from her room entrance.

“You haven’t lived in our dorm, right? It’s not a home. It’s basically like a human farm.”

“Farm...”

“Ask Dong-Wook. He lives in the dorm as well.”

Yang Dong-Wook nodded and added, “The upper floors hardly get any hot water.” magic

“Instead of getting water, they have cockroaches every now and then. The rooms are tiny, and they are not even sound-proof,” Ryu Ji-Won said with a feigned shiver as she thought about the disgusting circumstances.

“And I have a girl who’s a year older than me as one of my roommates, but man, I couldn’t live with her because she had no common courtesy. She kept putting on music and clacking her keyboard when I was sleeping.”

“Should I donate to Jungyoon University when I get rich so they can build some dorms? It is my university,” Young-Joon said.

“Then your name is going to be on the donor's plaque in the main hall. That’s cool.”

“I hate things like that.”

“Wouldn’t he get a memorial hall dedicated to him if he donated enough money to build a dorm?” Yang Dong-Wook said.

“You’re right. The Ryu Young-Joon Hall. There’s some empty land beside the engineering building, where they took down the Future Hall. I think they’re building a new building there, so they can name it the Ryu Young-Joon Hall.”

Ryu Ji-Won smirked.

“The Ryu Young-Joon Hall. That's hilarious. My oppa *really* is a great person.”

“Don’t mock me.”

“What? I’m serious. You saved me from a chicken pit.”

Ryu Ji-Won jumped into bed and laid down. She hugged her blankets and stretched.

“I was suffering from assignments and my job, but I can relax now...”

A silly expression crept onto Ryu Ji-Won’s face. Yang Dong-Wook saw her response and turned away with a faint red hue on his cheeks.

Young-Joon walked out of Ryu Ji-Won's room, he asked, "Dong-Wook, can I ask a personal question?"

"Of course!"

"Are you dating Ji-Won?"

"What? No!"

"I won't say anything even if you are. I'm just curious. It's normal for her to have a boyfriend since she's all grown up now."

"It's nothing like that."

"So you're just here to help her as a friend?"

"Um... Actually..."

Yang Dong-Wook hesitated.

"I actually came here to see you, hyung..."[2]

"Mhm... Huh?"

'What kind of twist is this?'

Yang Dong-Wook added, "I'm a big fan of you, and I'm in biological engineering. After you succeeded, a lot of students wanted to go to graduate school and work in Professor Ban Du-II's lab, the one where you got your doctorate from. And I'm one of them. Although, I still have a long ways to go until I go."

"Professor Ban Du-II."

It was a nice name to hear.

'I wonder if he's doing well. I should go visit him.'

"Hyung, my dream is to get my doctorate at his lab and then go into A-Bio," Yang Dong-Wook said. "It will be a really big company by then, right? Since it's like ten years later."

"... Yeah, sure. Probably?"

“You are the future of Korea’s science. Can I get your autograph after we organize everything?”

“But are you really releasing an Alzheimer’s cure?” Yang Dong-Wook asked him another question.

“Information about the research stages is confidential until we hand out press releases.”

“I had five million won that I saved from working, and I put all of it into A-Gen since they’re low right now because of Ji Kwang-Man. It’s going to be fine, right?”

“Five million?”

“Yes.”

“Then you should come to the special shareholders’ meeting and get some A-Bio shares. It won’t be a lot at the beginning, but you’ll be able to escape that chicken pit or human farm and move to your own place soon.”

1. Oppa is an informal way for younger females to refer to older males. It is used between friends, but also family. ?

2. Hyung is an informal way for a younger male to refer to an older male. ?

Chapter 44: A Player of Life (6)

Scientist Shin Young-Yeon of the Stem Cells Department partied away her Friday night at a club. She felt like all the stress she got from preparing for the clinical trials was going away. But her stamina ran out quickly.

‘I was totally fine even when I stayed up the whole night in my twenties.’

At one o’clock in the morning, she barely left the club and got a nearby taxi.

“Hello!”

She spoke in a tipsy voice, and her tongue was twisted. Climbing into the backseat and holding onto her bag, she said, “Can you go to Kunyoung Apartment in front of Sindorim stati... Huh?”

She noticed someone was in the passenger’s seat.

“I’m sorry. I thought it was empty. I must have been mistaken.”

As Shin Young-Yeon was getting out of the car, the taxi driver said, “Ma’am, this is an empty car. The person sitting in the front seat is my wife.”

The driver was an old man who looked like he was in his seventies. The wrinkles on his face weren’t just a product of time, but hardship.

“My wife has Alzheimer’s, and I’m taking her around with me because there is no one to take care of her at home. You can get off if you’re uncomfortable, but I will drive you home if it’s alright.”

“Oh... It’s fine.”

“Alright. Then should I head to Kunyoung Apartment in Sindorim?”

“Yes, please.” magic

As Shin Young-Yeon sat diagonally from the passenger’s seat, she could see the old woman sitting there. She had age spots over her face, and she was a little chubby. She was wrapped up in a thick coat her husband had put on her.

On the way home, the taxi driver continuously spoke to his wife and completely dismissed Shin Young-Yeon’s presence.

“Honey, look outside the window. This is the Han River. Can you recognize it? We came here with our little Dong-Il and played,” the driver said as they passed Yanghwa Bridge.

The grandma did not respond.

“It’s pretty, right?”

“ ... ”

“But I should have hung up the laundry before I came out. It should be done now.”

“ ... ”

“Can you do it for me when we get home? I’ll do the dishes.”

“No,” The grandma replied in a sassy voice.

“No? Hahaha. Then do you want to do the dishes?”

“ ... ”

“Are you hot right now? You’re sweating.”

The driver wiped the grandma’s cheek with his right arm.

“I’ll unwrap your clothes a little later after we drop off our customer. Just wait a little bit.”

“ ... ”

The car stopped at a red light. In the meantime, the taxi driver played the National Singing Contest from YouTube on his phone.

“Do you want to watch this?” He handed her his phone.

“No.” The grandma turned away cheekily.

“Haha.” The driver laughed like he was a little embarrassed.

“It’s just like when we started dating. She was so picky when we first met. I went through a lot to make her happy,” the taxi driver said as he glanced at Shin Young-Yeon through the rearview mirror.

“Still, those were good times...”

The light turned green, and he stepped on the accelerator.

A little while later, the taxi arrived in front of Kunyoung Apartment.

“You can let me off here.”

As Shin Young-Yeon paid with her card, she pulled out a business card from her bag.

“Um...”

She handed them the business card.

“I’m a scientist working in the Stem Cells Department at A-Gen, and we’re preparing a clinical trial for Alzheimer’s treatment.”

“Clinical trials?”

“Yes. Please give me a call if you are interested. Although, the patient has to do the clinical trial suitability test, so not everyone can do it even if they volunteer, but...”

“If it’s A-Gen, is it being done by Doctor Ryu?”

“Yes,” Shin Young-Yeon replied. To be honest, she had never met a huge star like Young-Joon because she was the lowest rung on the ladder, but he was still the manager of this project.

“Actually, I was also thinking of participating in A-Gen’s clinical trials as well. And Doctor Ryu Young-Joon is famous as well.”

The taxi driver smiled, but for some reason, it felt like he was squeezing it out with all his strength.

“Thank you for the business card. We’ll call you next time.”

* * *

On Monday morning, Young-Joon was having a one-on-one meeting with Yoon Dae-Sung, the CEO, in his office.

“We succeeded in developing an Alzheimer’s cure. We confirmed results in mice experiments with confidence, and I sent a manuscript to the *Science* editor,” Young-Joon said.

“That’s nice,” Yoon Dae-Sung responded dryly. He was not in the least bit happy as he knew what Young-Joon would request now.

Young-Joon said, “The Stem Cells Department and the Clinical Trial Management Center from headquarters are gathering participants right now.”

“Do you think it will succeed in trials?” Yoon Dae-Sung asked.

“In my personal opinion, yes. One hundred percent.”

Yoon Dae-Sung wiped his face with his hand multiple times as if this was causing him a headache.

“Director Ryu, you are going to create an affiliate company with your Alzheimer’s treatment and become independent, right?” Yoon Dae-Sung asked.

“Yes. Also, I am going to transfer the shares A-Gen and the Life Creation Department has of the iPSCs to A-Bio. Of course, with the glaucoma treatment as well.”

“ ... ”

“And I need your support, sir. There’s a research ward that Lab One listed for sale, and I am considering buying it and setting up A-Bio there. It’s fourteen billion won, but could you lower the price?”

“By how much?”

“I heard that Lab One bought it for nine billion won. I will buy it for ten billion.”

“I will deliver the message to Lab Director Kim Hyun-Taek.

“Thank you. And I would like to take a few more things from A-Gen.”

“What is it?”

“First of all, please give us access to all of A-Gen’s facilities.”

Yoon Dae-Sung closed his eyes. It was time.

Young-Joon added, “A-Bio will not only use stem cell therapy for nerve differentiation but for growing artificial organs as well. In this process, I will need the Experiment Animal Resource Center and access to the Clinical Trial Management Center that I was using at A-Gen before. I will also need the help of the three-dimensional incubator and technicians.”

“ ... ”

“The research that A-Bio will conduct in the future will absolutely require A-Gen’s infrastructure. As such, I would like the same access rights as the other labs. Please allow me to pay a usage fee and use the entire main system.”

This system was like the core of A-Gen’s research and development. One of the biggest reasons that other pharmaceutical companies in the country could not match up to A-Gen was because they failed at setting up this system. It

took an astronomical amount of money and a huge amount of time. It was the research support main system that had been built for sixty years, all the way from Yoon Dae-Sung's father's generation.

But Yoon Dae-Sung had no way to deny Young-Joon's requests anymore.

"... Alright," he replied.

"Thank you."

"What is your next request?"

"There is a new probiotics product being developed in the Health Food Department at Lab Six. I am overseeing the development. It's a big project that we are collaborating with a venture company called Celligener, but I think there will be confusion in delivering the instructions for the company if I move to A-Bio."

Young-Joon added, "So, I was thinking of moving it all to A-Bio. We don't have to move the entire probiotics team, but just that one new product. Even if we do, we'll still study it at A-Gen like before since all the equipment is here."

"..."

Yoon Dae-Sung thought for a moment. He couldn't understand why Young-Joon wanted it when it was nothing but probiotics. Of course, the healthcare industry was an important field and probiotics was an emerging item. But all he was taking was not the entire field, but just the pipeline of one new product. Then, it was true that there was less of an impact compared to stem cells. He was suspicious that Young-Joon was hiding something huge in that new probiotic drug.

Yoon Dae-Sung would have screamed in shock if he knew that it was a treatment for type 2 diabetes.

But Young-Joon did not tell anyone about that. Even Choi Myung-Joon and Song Ji-Hyun from Celligener who were both working on probiotics did not know.

"I will deliver the message to transfer the pipeline," Yoon Dae-Sung said.

“Thank you. And furthermore, we will have to use A-Gen’s GMP (Good Manufacturing Practices) later. Please include A-Gen’s manufacturing part along with the infrastructure and research development.”

GMP was a set of rules created by the American FDA, and it was a guideline on how to produce drugs and medicine. If A-Gen was a sock company, the GMP would determine the quality of nylon, or how to care for polyester and things like that. A sock company would not be monitored that strictly, but for new drugs that would be given to the human body, evaluation was mandatory; they had to be manufactured in a facility that passed GMP’s due diligence.

Normally, manufacturing facilities of new biodrugs went through the process of producing and purifying biomaterials in hundreds of liters of liquid culture media. In A-Gen’s case, they had the biggest system in the world. It was unbelievable, but the GMP here had liquid culture media in tanks.

Employees walked through hundreds of incubators and tanks after changing into uniforms and sterilization. The biggest culture media tank was so big that it had a boat. People usually took a sterile wherry and crossed to the other side. It was unbelievable, but that was what they were doing because it was hard to go around since it was such a big tank.

Since it was so big and the capital they managed was astronomically high, A-Gen’s GMP factory had as much independence as its own company.

And it was the facility that Young-Joon wanted the most from A-Gen.

“Alright. Is there anything more?”

“There was an early liver cancer treatment called Cellicure that Celligener sold to A-Gen about six months ago. I would like the rights of that drug to be transferred to me. I am thinking of developing it with Celligener at A-Bio.”

“...Alright.”

Actually, the Cellicure case wasn’t even reported to Yoon Dae-Sung as it was taken care of by Ji Kwang-Man and Kim Hyun-Taek. But after Young-Joon’s fame skyrocketed, he had also heard about what had happened.

“That is all. I was thinking that I would have to convince you, but you granted all my requests. Thank you.”

“That way, you will consider my situation when I exchange shares with you, Doctor Ryu.”

“Haha, alright. I will try my best.”

“So, what do you have in mind for the ratio?”

“Let’s exchange ten percent of shares in the company’s name. The ratio will be one-to-one. A-Gen will take ten percent of A-Bio, and A-Bio will take ten percent of A-Gen.”

“ ... ”

Yoon Dae-Sung froze.

“Doctor Ryu.”

“Yes.”

“You invested twenty billion won into A-Bio, yes?”

“Yes.”

“The market capitalization of A-Gen is over two hundred trillion won.”

“I am aware of that.”

“But one-to-one? Do you think that will be possible?”

“The government said they would invest in me. They are going to give me three hundred billion won with no strings attached in the name of a small and medium-sized business support policy.”

“But do you think that is comparable to the stock of a company worth two hundred trillion won?”

“We can talk about the shares later. Let’s just write a contract for transfer rights for ten percent and work out the details later. You can terminate the contract if you think the prices don’t match.”

“What is the time limit?”

“I just need one year. A-Bio will grow massively in that time. None of the shareholders will be able to criticize you for a one-to-one exchange.”

Yoon Dae-Sung took a sip of his tea.

Young-Joon already had four percent. If A-Bio took ten percent of A-Gen's shares, it was the same thing as him having fourteen percent since he would own ninety percent of A-Bio.

On the other hand, it was difficult for Yoon Dae-Sung to do what he wanted with the ten percent of A-Bio that A-Gen would have as although he was the CEO, he and his family only held fourteen percent of A-Gen. As a result, the amount that Young-Joon would have in A-Gen was the same amount that the Yoon family held. Yoon Dae-Sung had a lot of friendly shares, but would that be maintained even after A-Bio grows?

‘The management rights are shaking.’

Ji Kwang-Man moved hastily, but he was probably worried about this situation. He would have thought they would have no choice after the creation of A-Bio.

‘Ji Kwang-Man... Why didn't you do a better job?’

After the Ji Kwang-Man incident, all eyes were now on A-Gen. And they were putting the blame of Ji Kwang-man's crimes on the Yoon family as well since they were part of the same management.

If Yoon Dae-Sung rejected Young-Joon's one-to-one request? How would the public's anger and the condemnation of the shareholders on A-Gen change?

The stocks of A-Gen that plummeted after Ji Kwang-Man's incident could be restored after the launch of A-Bio. Most of the small shareholders, SG Group, Berkshire, and others didn't really have an interest in Yoon Dae-Sung's management rights; it didn't matter to them whether the CEO changed. They could actually like it more if Young-Joon took the job.

The moment Yoon Dae-Sung denied Young-Joon's request to exchange shares, his management rights would disappear.

‘I was mistaken.’

The management rights were already partly out of reach now. He would just get one year of probation if he agreed to the exchange.

Chapter 45: A Player of Life (7)

“Director Ryu, do you have interest in running A-Gen yourself?” Yoon Dae-Sung asked a bold question.

“I have never run a company, nor have I learned to. To be honest, I am not confident that I can run a company this big,” Young-Joon replied.

“But I will do it anytime if the situation comes to it.”

“And what kind of situation is that?”

“You have probably heard, but I fought with Lab Director Kim Hyun-Taek about the case where Division Manager Ji Kwang-Man and him bought an early-stage liver cancer drug and destroyed it. That’s when I knew that our company wasn’t as healthy as I thought it was.”

“ ... ”

“Sir, A-Gen is where the world’s best intellectuals are gathered. I have gotten scholarships, and I did my doctorate at Jungyoon University, the best university in the country, but I’m just normal here. When I line up at the cafeteria at lunch, every tenth person I see is from an Ivy League school. When I was at the Anticancer Drug Research Department, half the people in the department were people who had published a paper in *Nature* or *Science*. That’s the kind of intellectuals who are here.”

“... That’s right.”

“I think intellectuals have a social responsibility. I’m not talking about the social responsibility of a company, I’m talking about the responsibility of an intellectual. They have the responsibility to guide the present time of humanity and explore the future. I think that they should research and study with the determination that one more person could live tomorrow if they developed a new drug today.”

“ ... ”

“But destroying a better drug? For the profit of the company? That isn’t just abandoning responsibility to me, but it is like being a vulgar traitor in academia.”

“I understand what you are saying.”

“If management leads this company in that way and if it corrupts so much that no one raises any problems with that, I will gladly threaten management to change that culture. I’m sure you know why I chose an Alzheimer’s cure as my next target for stem cells and why I chose to develop that first.”

Yoon Dae-Sung nodded.

Yoon Chul-Joong, Yoon Dae-Sung’s father and the founder of A-Gen, suffered from Alzheimer’s before he died. From then on, he had fought for an Alzheimer’s cure for a long time. That was when his heart burned more with a scientist’s passion for research than being a businessman.

The fact that Young-Joon picked neurons and Alzheimer’s rather than other choices such as recovery of spinal nerves felt like a metaphor to Yoon Dae-Sung; it was a humble warning and a desperate prayer Young-Joon was sending him. During the last shareholders’ meeting, he had felt something deep in his heart when Young-Joon mentioned his book and Alzheimer’s.

“I am a little ashamed to look at you as a scientist and not as a businessman, Director Ryu. I guess I am much more corrupt than you thought, Director Ryu,” Yoon Dae-Sung said.

“Did you do things worse than erasing Cellicure?”

“ ... ”

Yoon Dae-Sung took a few more sips of his tea. He gathered his thoughts for a moment, then changed the subject without answering.

“It is unreasonable for you to ask for a one-to-one exchange right now, Director Ryu, but you might convince me in a year. A-Bio will grow at a tremendous speed if you succeed at curing Alzheimer’s and supply that technology internationally.”

“Yes, it will.”

“And since you have already shown us things, the shareholders will also bet on the fact that your Alzheimer’s cure will succeed. Since places like the SG Group or Berkshire don’t feel pressured by my management rights being split, they will want A-Bio to be launched as we sign the contract for the stock exchange. And if we can terminate that contract after a year, they won’t lose anything either. They will be hostile to me if I reject it.”

Yoon Dae-Sung smiled bitterly.

“You probably came to me after thinking of all that.”

“To be honest... Yes.”

“In a year, you will have the same amount of influence as me if we do this exchange. You also know that, right?”

“Yes.”

“I will bet on your conscience as a scientist, Director Ryu. Even if my management rights transfer to you in a year, I will not regret it. I will support you.”

“...”

“I am old, and I did think that managing this company was getting harder. If you can maintain that attitude you have right now, I don’t think it would be a bad thing to leave A-Gen in the hands of a capable youngster like you.”

“... Thank you.”

“Then, you may go now, sir.”

As Young-Joon left the CEO’s office, his thoughts were a little complicated. Yoon Dae-Sung said that he was ashamed as a scientist and not as a businessman, and he said that he would support Young-Joon. To be honest, it was a little unexpected. It was just a few days ago that Ji Kwang-Man, someone who was like family to Yoon Dae-Sung, tried everything to get rid of him, including extreme measures that led to his demise.

But all of a sudden, Yoon Dae-Sung was saying that he would grant all his requests, help him launch A-Bio, and support him? And even give him the management rights of A-Gen?

'Liar.'

All he did was gloss over the situation with some nice words. All he did was soften the hostile mood as Young-Joon was gaining a lot of ground. Yoon Dae-Sung was going to try to defend his management rights by increasing his shares however he can and getting more friendly shares. He might be thinking of a way to get rid of Young-Joon, but he had to keep in mind that he could be stabbed in the back at any time.

But this was good. It would be best if Yoon Dae-Sung sincerely supported Young-Joon, but even if Yoon Dae-Sung didn't, all he had to do was be careful.

But there was one thing that Young-Joon found confusing.

'Was I always this skeptical?'

As he climbed up the ladder, he felt like he was changing. He felt that when he was destroying Ji Kwang-Man. He manipulated politicians who came to see him as he slowly got treated at the hospital for injuries he could recover quickly by using Rosaline. It was actually a power fight for management rights, but he drove Ji Kwang-Man to the ground by keeping his innocent scientist image and stance as the victim. Doing something this calculated and political was strange for him.

But how was the world reacting? A crowd of one hundred thirty thousand people held a rally for him, and a twenty-year-old young man he had never seen before was hoping they would work together in the future. People liked the current Young-Joon better and not the innocent and righteous scientist he was when he took on Kim Hyun-Taek as a Scientist who had nothing. The bigger he became, the more burdening his changing environment became.

'Can I really keep going like this?'

Perhaps something had been wrong for a long time.

* * *

Young-Joon, who returned to Lab Six with a bunch of concerns, went into the Life Creation Department office.

"I'm back from headquarters."

Young-Joon greeted Park Dong-Hyun, who was walking around the office entrance with a cup of coffee.

“Did it go well?” Park Dong-Hyun asked.

“Yes. I’m going to launch A-Bio. He also granted all my requests.”

“Damn! You’re the best, Doctor Ryu. You’re going to take me there, right?”

“Of course. If someone was as talented as you, I would scout them for my company, Dong-Hyun sunbae.”

“Is my salary increasing too?”

“I’ll have to think about that.”

“I see that business is business.”

“But I’ll give you a stock option. I am thinking of giving all the scientists a little bit, although it will be way below the decimal mark.”

“I think I’ll be able to buy a house with that share if I work with you, Doctor Ryu.”

“I hope you can.”

“Oh right, you have a visitor.”

“A visitor? Who?”

“I’m not gonna tell you~”

Young-Joon tilted his head in confusion as Park Dong-Hyun said in a playful attitude. He smiled and said, “They’re in the snack room. Go inside. You’ll be happy to see them.”

Even if they were someone he would be happy to see, people Young-Joon knew personally could not come into the company since it was difficult for outside personnel to enter the lab due to security.

So what this meant was that they were probably someone from the company, which made him wonder who it could be.

Young-Joon opened the door with a confused look, then froze when he saw who was waiting for him in the room.

“Doctor Ryu...”

Participants in clinical trials could visit the company for a report and a consultation on the progress of the trial. They could enter the lab by getting a temporary pass at the entrance in order to meet Young-Joon. They couldn't come inside the lab due to security reasons, but they could meet the supervisor in the snack or conference room.

Son Soo-Young and her husband were standing there, and they were holding a small baby wearing white pajamas in their arms.

“I heard that you recommended Veratex. I heard that you convinced the doctor and asked for it to be given to Blue...” magic

A tear suddenly ran down her face. She couldn't think about the many things she thought about to express her gratitude while waiting for him. Son Soo-Young dropped her head; all she could say was thank you.

“... Thank you so much,” she said. Her voice was trembling.

“Doctor Ryu. Thank... Thank you so much. Really... Our baby... is healthy now.”

“... Is her pulmonary blood pressure stable now?”

“Yes...” Son Soo-Young smiled while wiping her eyes.

“I can see well now, too. It's the same as before I got sick. Blue was discharged yesterday as well. Yesterday, our entire family slept together in the same room for the first time.”

“...”

“I had my daughter in my arms as she slept, and I stared at her for a long time. I was so tired, but I didn't want to take my eyes off her... so I kept myself from sleeping and watched her. She... She was so pretty...”

Son Soo-Young felt something deep in her chest.

“You are our family's savior, Doctor Ryu,” Son Soo-Young's husband said.

“How could we repay this debt? We should have come to see you sooner, but... I didn’t have time since I was taking care of my wife and baby. I’m sorry. I couldn’t even come see you after you got in an accident. And I didn’t have a good way of contacting you either...”

“No, it’s alright.”

Young-Joon bit his lip. He felt like he was going to cry if he let go a little.

“I’m really relieved that you both recovered.”

Creak...

As the door opened, Hong Ju-Hee, Blue’s doctor, entered the room. She visited Lab Six as part of Son Soo-Young’s group, and she had just come back from the washroom.

“Doctor Ryu.”

There were a lot of emotions on Hong Ju-Hee’s face that could not be described with words. She hesitated for a long time, then said, “Thank you, Doctor Ryu, for giving me courage... Thank you so much for convincing me to use Veratex.”

“... No. The baby got healthier because you did a good job, Doctor Hong. What did I do?”

“I’m ashamed to say this as a doctor, but to be honest, I had given up. And I would have lived in guilt for the rest of my life if I let Blue go like that. It’s all thanks to you.”

Young-Joon laughed awkwardly and changed the subject.

“But did you not give Blue a name? I thought that Blue was just a baby nickname.”

“We had a name, but we changed it,” Son Soo-Young’s husband replied.

“To what?”

“Lim Si-Ah. Si for seeing, and Ah for righteous. We gave her that name so that she could grow as brave and good like you, and only see righteous and beautiful things like her mother.”[1]

“... I see.”

“Doctor Ryu,” Hong Ju-Hee said. “I saw the news that someone tried to kill you. I couldn’t believe it, but I guess there are people who are jealous of you and hate you.”

“... ”

“If it’s too hard and scary, no one is going to blame you even if you stop. We will be on your side in any situation. Just remember that you rescued a family from despair. You also prevented me from doing something that I would have regretted for the rest of my life.”

As Hong Ju-Hee said that, Son Soo-Young hugged her baby.

“Thank you, Doctor Ryu. We will raise Si-Ah to be someone who helps other people like you. Thank you so much.”

* * *

Young-Joon returned to the lab. On the white lab table, there was a huge centrifuge, a clean bench, an incubator, a live cell imager, an ICSI, a set of pipettes, and a box of tips. Everything he needed was here.

He felt like he had returned after a long journey. There was a lot of confusion, but now the situation was stable. After he made A-Bio, no one would be able to stand in the path of medicine that he was going to pave. It didn't matter what Yoon Dae-Sung’s real intentions were.

‘Nothing is wrong with me.’

He was no longer wavering anymore; he felt that after meeting Son Soo-Young’s family. That was the kind of thing Young-Joon had dreamed of.

His personality changing to a calculated and clever one? Rosaline taking over his brain? What did that matter?

Young-Joon thought about Ryu Sae-Yi, his youngest sibling who died of liver cancer seven years ago. Everything he was experiencing right now was just power and measures to achieve the things he had dreamt of since then.

No matter how strong and big Rosaline became, Young-Joon was not going to lose his mind to her. His confidence was solid now.

[Rosaline Lv. 8]

Young-Joon opened the status window. He was thinking of starting another research as the clinical trial for the Alzheimer's cure was happening. He did not want to waste any more time or fitness.

“Turn on Synchronization Mode.”

—Yes. What disease would you like to analyze?

Rosaline asked.

1. Si is hanja for “to see”, and Ah and hanja for “righteous”. ?

Chapter 46: A-Bio (1)

“Pancreatic cancer,” Young-Joon said. “Analyze pancreatic cancer. You can do it now, right?”

Rosaline's level was higher now and she had more fitness; she had grown enough for her to be able to show cancer as an option.

There were two reasons why Young-Joon chose pancreatic cancer as his target. First of all, it was difficult to start the follow-up research for stem cells right now as all the stem cells experts in the company had to focus on the clinical trial for the Alzheimer's cure. Second, A-Bio would already be created by the time this project was on track, which meant that this was the first research he would do as the CEO of A-Bio and not an A-Gen scientist. Put differently, it meant that A-Bio was entering the anticancer drug market.

It was true that the public still focused on stem cells when thinking of A-Bio. Everyone thought that it was a regenerative medicine company. But A-Bio couldn't just be that; this company had to be the frontier that dominated all areas of the pharmaceutical industry. That was why they had probiotics, a healthcare product. Of course, cancer, the largest disease that threatened humanity, could not be an exception. This research was going to be one that showed what A-Bio was.

Then, why did Young-Joon choose pancreatic cancer as his target when pancreatic cancer only accounted for two percent of all cancer patients? It was because it was the hardest cancer to deal with. There were countless advances in almost every type of cancer, but pancreatic cancer was still

undefeatable. The average survival rate of cancer patients after five years of discovering it was around seventy percent, but pancreatic cancer had an average of around ten percent. Even Steve Jobs, the CEO of Apple and the most famous businessman, died of pancreatic cancer. The world's greatest doctors would have done everything they could to save someone like him, but he still died. It meant that it was still too difficult for humanity.

Why was it so difficult? First of all, most cases were already severe once they felt pain and got checked up at the hospital because there weren't really any symptoms. And it was almost impossible to introduce treatment drugs to the pancreas.

Anticancer drugs could kill normal cells as they were usually toxic. So the key was to only deliver it to cancer cells. This was called local delivery, but local delivery of treatment to the pancreas was so difficult that it always caused despair to numerous scientists.

This was why it would cause a huge impact in the anticancer drug field—because it was such a difficult disease.

—Let's eliminate pancreatic cancer with a coated Birnavirus.

Rosaline said.

“Birnavirus?”

The strategy to use a virus as a transportation method to introduce drugs wasn't a very new idea, but viruses like AAV were used.

Even Young-Joon, a biologist, wasn't familiar with the birnavirus.

“What's the birnavirus?”

—It's a virus that causes infectious pancreatic necrosis in fish in the salmon family. It destroys the pancreas and causes them to die.

“A virus that infects salmon also works on humans?”

—It does not work on mammals.

'Makes sense why I'm so unfamiliar with it.'

It was not infectious to humans, so the pharmaceutical industry wouldn't have paid much attention to it.

"Then how do we use it?"

—We can make it selectively infect cancer cells in the pancreas if we manipulate a few of the receptors on the surface of the virus.

Whoosh!

The images Rosaline analyzed popped up into his head. There were four types of receptors protruding from the surface of the birnavirus. Originally, they were meant to pierce the surface of fish cells, but their mechanism changed as their structure changed. These biomaterials recognized transferrin receptors on the surface of pancreatic cancer cells and the structure of a polymer called ERBB2; they were both target cells that were only expressed in high quantities in pancreatic cancer cells.

The birnavirus would rip through the pancreatic cancer cell membrane and infiltrate it. A little while later, the cells infected by the birnavirus would activate the necrosis mechanism. Then, the cancer cells would die one by one.

—It is a virus that originally destroys the pancreas. It can also destroy the tumor on the pancreas. It will be able to treat pancreatic cancer effectively.

" ... "

As Young-Joon calmed his breathing after seeing the hallucinations, he asked, "I have so many questions to ask. First of all, how would the virus be introduced? Through the veins?"

—It would be better to go with an ingested drug since the pancreas is part of the digestive system. That would be more convenient for patients as well.

"Alright. But that virus is dangerous. I don't think it should be left in the pancreas."

—They will not be able to proliferate in the pancreas if we eliminate the BVP3 gene. The viruses we put inside the body will be eliminated by the macrophages after they've destroyed the cancer cells. It will be safe if we administer the right amount of birnavirus to eliminate pancreatic cancer.

“Hm.”

—But there is a problem. The birnavirus is completely destroyed in the stomach.

The acidic digestive fluid in the stomach destroyed the structure of the virus. The pancreas was connected to the duodenum, just after the pylorus of the stomach. It meant that if the birnavirus was swallowed, it had to pass the stomach to have a chance to approach the pancreas.

“Then we have to make it so that it can withstand stomach acid.”

—We can change the structure so that it can tolerate stomach acid. But there is another problem. Due to the stomach’s nature of being a digestive organ, it will stay for a long period of time. The birnavirus will also infect stomach cells after that amount of time.

Everything about biology had exceptions. Even drugs that had strictly controlled functions had side effects; eventually, they would influence normal cells little by little. Of course, the more normal cells were exposed to the drug, the higher the chances were of it influencing them.

“You’re saying that it can’t go to the pancreas if it loses its function due to stomach acid, and it will infect the stomach if it withstands the acid, right?”

—Yes. So, I recommend that you coat the outside of the virus with a capsule rather than altering the virus itself to withstand stomach acid. This coat will tolerate stomach acid but will be eliminated by fluids secreted by the pancreas.

“... Okay, let’s go over this again. So, after we capsule coat it to stop both the virus being destroyed and it infecting the stomach, the birnavirus that flows out after the capsule is destroyed by pancreatic fluids will move to the pancreas to infect only the cancer cells and eliminate them by activating necrosis, which viruses naturally induce? And we’ll get rid of side effects by putting in just enough of the virus to destroy the cancer cells without the ability to self-reproduce?”

—Yes.

‘Holy, the difficulty of this is unreal.’

It was a solution that lived up to its reputation of bringing countless scientists and doctors to their knees. There was a reason why the medical community hadn't succeeded in treating it. Young-Joon couldn't believe that it had to be treated in such a creative way.

First of all, most scientists who studied cancer most likely did not know that something like the birnavirus existed. It was probably studied by scientists in veterinary medicine and fishery.

The idea to manipulate a pathogen that infected fish and infect humans with it was a crazy idea as well. It was an extremely erratic, dangerous, and bewildering thought, was it not? But to destroy pancreatic cancer by eliminating its ability to self-reproduce and making it so that they only act on cancer cells? On top of that, it would be orally delivered, and it would only be introduced to the pancreas after it passed through the stomach with a capsule that only reacted to pancreatic juice?

It was basically a sci-fi at this point.

“There was a reason why you whined about not having enough fitness to analyze cancer... I didn't know it would be this complicated.”

—Don't worry. I can do most things now. magic

With Rosaline's reply, a couple options came up.

[How to modify birnavirus genes. (Fitness consumption: 1.0)]

[How to coat birnavirus with a capsule. (Fitness consumption: 1.5)]

After opening and reading each of the options, Young-Joon picked up the company phone. Following the ARS's instructions, he chose the option to buy experiment materials, then to buy experiment animals or genes, then to buy viruses.

—Hello, this is Kim Young-Hee from the Research Support Center.

“Hello. This is Ryu Young-Joon from the Life Creation Department.”

—Hup.

Kim Young-Hee was a bit surprised.

“Hello?”

—Oh, yes, sorry. How may I help you?

She asked.

“I am trying to purchase the birnavirus.

—The birnavirus...?

Kim Young-Hee obtained her doctorate in virology and was responsible for viruses at the Research Support Center. Nevertheless, she was unfamiliar with the birnavirus.

—... I’m sorry, but what kind of virus is that?

Kim Young-Hee asked hesitantly.

It was natural for her to not know. How could she know about something like that? It wasn’t like A-Gen farmed salmon or something.

‘I didn’t mean to make her embarrassed.’

Feeling a little sorry, Young-Joon made it more clear.

“It is a virus that causes infectious pancreatic necrosis in salmon.”

She was even more confused.

—Salmon? Like the fish?

Kim Young-Hee asked in a confused voice.

“Yes. It’s a virus that infects salmon. Would we have a sample of it at the lab?”

—No... I know all the viruses we have in the lab, but we don’t have anything like that.

Kim Young-Hee replied.

“How long would it take if we purchased it from somewhere else?”

—Please give me one second.

After searching the database, Kim Young-Hee replied.

—It will take about a month.

“Alright. Please proceed with the purchase. It would be great if it is in the form of a DNA vector.”

* * *

About seven minutes away from Lab One by foot, there was a seven-floor building that was about two hundred-pyung.[1]

Originally, Lab One intended to make this building into a separate research ward and move the Anticancer Drug Research Department here. It was registered as a lab and was equipped with waste liquid treatment facilities, but Lab One could not use it due to the situation.

As such, it was put on the market, and now, it was the company building for A-Bio.

“It’s smaller than I thought. I thought you would get like a two thousand-pyung building with your name value,” Park Joo-Hyuk, who came with Young-Joon to see the building, said.

“I’m going to move to a larger building once the company and the number of people grows,” Young-Joon replied.

“But we don’t have to waste money already. This is enough for now since we’re going to use the facilities at A-Gen for manufacturing or research, and we’ll only be conducting the main research here.”

“How many people do you have?”

“Right now, seven.”

“... Does one person get one floor?”

“You think that makes sense? Oh, wait. It’s eight people including me.”

Everyone from the Life Creation Department had transferred over, and so did Choi Myung-Joon and Seo Yoon-Ju after Young-Joon was given the probiotic project. Choi Myung-Joon had passionately convinced Seo Yoon-Ju, who was

hesitant on leaving a big company like A-Gen for A-Bio, saying that Director Ryu was the real jackpot.

“Do you want to work as an in-house lawyer?” Young-Joon asked.

“At A-Bio?”

“Yeah. I’m going to make a legal team when the company gets bigger. I want you to be in charge of it.”

Park Joo-Hyuk crossed his arms and thought about it.

“Alright. I don’t want to live off the money I get from being appointed.”

“Okay, so nine people. Let’s bring in Attorney Lee Hae-Won and make it ten people.”

“That’s a good idea, but why don’t you just post a job opening? You’re not going to run a company with just ten people, right?”

“I already did.”

“Saramin?”[2]

“There, too...”

Young-Joon turned on his phone. There were about forty application emails in his inbox, and all of them were foreigners.

Park Joo-Hyuk was shocked when he saw Young-Joon’s phone screen.

“Where did you post the job opening to get someone named Abdul Azeez as one of the applicants? Do people from the Middle East use Saramin nowadays, too?”

“I posted a job opening in Science Career Jobs.”

“Holy...”

“Wait. There’s a Carpentier in the applicants. Is this actually Carpentier?”

Young-Joon’s hands trembled.

“Who is Carpentier?”

“Be quiet for a little bit because I’m kinda going crazy right now.”

Young-Joon opened the email. He thought it might just be someone with the same name, but it was actually them. They wrote about their research on transplanting lipid stem cells to reconstruct skin tissue in the first paragraph; it was really the Carpentier that Young-Joon knew.

“I know that our company definitely has potential, but is he for real? What is he thinking... He’s throwing away his tenure and coming to Korea?”

“Who is this person?” Park Joo-Hyuk pestered Young-Joon for a response like he was frustrated.

“He’s a professor at Caltech. And he’s a recipient of the Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine.”

“ ... ”

Park Joo-Hyuk’s jaw dropped to the floor. After being speechless for a while, he asked, “Someone like that is coming to your company?”

“I can’t believe it either, but I got an application email from him.”

“... Am I going to join the company at the same time as a Nobel Prize recipient?”

“If he comes after sorting things out with Caltech, you’ll be his senior in terms of when you joined the company. Maybe not in terms of rank, though”

“When that person comes to Korea, reporters are going to ask him if he knows Ryu Young-Joon.”

“Ack!”

Young-Joon screamed at that thought, which was horrifying, but fostered national prestige.

1. Pyung is a common measurement used to measure how big a house or building is in Korea. One pyung is equal to about 35.6 square feet. ?

2. Saramin is an employment website for job openings in Korea. ?

Chapter 47: A-Bio (2)

On Friday morning, Carpentier, a professor at Caltech, was reading the *Science* journal.

“Ryu Young-Joon...”

It was the young man who had left a strong impression of himself on the scientific community with his shocking interview after being on the cover page of *Science*. It hadn't been long since that happened, but he swept the journal again.

This time, it was a paper about his success in glaucoma clinical trials, but even that huge incident was on the second page. Shockingly, this young, genius scientist published two papers at once in a journal like *Science*.

‘He put induced pluripotent stem cells and cell differentiation in one publication as well...’

Aside from the fact that his research speed was unreal, his results were just shocking.

The paper that was on the front page was an Alzheimer's cure. It was filled with the data they obtained from animal experiments, and he had written about how clinical trials were beginning in the discussion.

Carpentier remembered what Young-Joon said during his CNN interview: he had said that he was going to soon erase neurological disorders from the history of humanity. When he first heard it, he dismissed it as just gossip and laughed it off with other professors during the luncheon meeting, saying that there was a new oddball genius in the community.

But now, Carpentier understood that Young-Joon's statement was not just out of youthful passion and confidence; he actually showed the potential to accomplish something that great. With his skills and research speed, he might just be able to do it, perhaps even more.

The *Science* journal provided job opportunities in the Careers section. In the headline job section, there was a listing for a company named A-Bio. Carpentier pressed it because the person in charge was Young-Joon, and he saw that it was actually his company. It was a start-up company that had launched as one of A-Gen's affiliates.

[At A-Bio, we are looking for the greatest scientists.]

After reading the job listing, Carpentier thought for a while as he stroked his beard. He had lived his entire life as a single man. People said he was homosexual or asexual and all kinds of other things, but there was a different answer.

When he was in graduate school, there was a woman he was going to marry. She was an international student named Lila. She liked swimming and jogging, chugged her beer, and liked to go on drives while blasting the music. She was outgoing and fun, and she was the complete opposite of Carpentier, who was timid.

That was why his sadness was worse when she got in a car accident and got locked-in syndrome. It was more of a curse than a disorder. If there was such a thing as punishment in hell, this would have been it.

Lila had a conscience, and she could move her right eye; that was it. Locked-in syndrome was a disorder that locked up someone in their own body for life due to all their nerves dying.

The words she made out by blinking yes or no when Carpentier pointed at letters of the alphabet was “Kill me”. Perhaps, Lila was someone they had to let go of, but no one had the courage to, and there were a lot of people who wanted to hold onto her as she was a lovely person who always spread her optimistic energy to everyone around her.

From then on, Carpentier swore to dedicate the rest of his life on stem cells and regenerative medicine.

“ ... ”

After entering his sixties, more oftenly, he began to think about meeting Lila after he died. He still couldn't face her. He received a Nobel Prize, but it wasn't enough.

‘But this man... If it's Ryu Young-Joon...’

Click.

Carpentier clicked the button to apply right below the listing.

* * *

“I’m here.”

Jacob landed in Incheon after a ten-hour flight. Then, he traveled another hour and a half to get to the A-Bio lab.

“Phew.”

On the way to the waiting room, Jacob was full of confidence. Jacob, who had just turned thirty, was confident that he was in the top 0.1 percent of his age group in the entire human population in terms of his academic career. He had gotten a scholarship with overwhelmingly high grades at Caltech majoring in biological engineering, where the smartest people in the world were gathered, and even graduated early. After that, he published a paper that was cited over three hundred times while working on his doctorate in a Nobel Prize recipient’s lab. Some universities sent him offers for post-doctoral research, guaranteeing him a professor position.

Jacob, who had a guaranteed future, had come all the way to South Korea, and he was entering a small start-up company, an affiliate of A-Gen. Adults who didn’t know any better stopped him, asking him what he was doing, but Jacob was confident in his decision.

A-Bio was a company that could change the trend of the pharmaceutical industry. It wasn’t dirty like existing pharmaceutical companies since it was new, and it could dominate the sector of the market existing companies didn’t have as A-Bio was based on stem cell technology and regenerative medicine.

It would be nice to be a professor at Harvard, but Jacob wanted to participate as a start-up member of an important company like this and create products that would directly help humanity.

‘I’ll only be able to make choices like this when I’m young. How am I going to think about getting a job at a venture company in Asia that’s ten hours away by plane after I become a professor?’

Jacob was very satisfied in his ambitious decision.

Creak.

He opened the door.

The first person that caught his eye was Carpentier, who was drinking a coffee from Ediya Coffee.[1] Jacob could see some familiar faces. His chest, which was puffed up in pride, had deflated in a second.

'What is this?'

He felt like was at a conference. He could recognize a few famous people in the academic society.

"Professor Carpentier...?" Jacob approached him and said. He felt like he was dreaming.

'I take back what I said about not being able to make a bold decision like this after becoming a professor.'

"You came to apply as well?" Carpentier asked with a chuckle.

"... Why would you...? You have tenure as well..."

Tenure was a system that guaranteed the professor a job at that institution for life. That aside, he was a Nobel Prize winner; he would have a rich and prestigious life just by giving lectures, so why?

"There is a wish I want to achieve before I die. It might be possible at this company."

Carpentier smiled with excitement.

"Carpentier!"

Suddenly, someone shouted from behind like they were happy to see him. When Jacob turned around, he could see Feng Zheng, a professor of life sciences who worked in a lab in MIT's medical department. After writing the paper that was on the cover of *Nature* at thirty-five, he had published twenty papers in *Nature* and their sister journals until now. He was a Nobel Prize candidate and one of the stars of academic society.

Jacob was shocked.

'Even he applied? Wait a minute. He's in cancer research, isn't he?'

It was puzzling why he even applied to a regenerative medicine company, but it didn't matter if one was someone like Feng Zheng. He was someone who

could create a new anticancer pipeline that didn't previously exist at this company and secure a position. CEOs who said that they didn't do anticancer drugs would begin to do it if Feng Zheng said he was coming.

'Wait.'

Feng Zheng, Carpentier, and all those other people.

'... Shit. What if I don't get in?'

A completely unexpected feeling of anxiety was in Jacob's heart.

"You want to apply to this company too, Professor Zheng?" Carpentier asked Feng Zheng.

"Originally, I came here because I was curious about what kind of person Doctor Ryu was. But I heard something shocking during my interview, and now I want to work here."

"Something shocking?"

"It seems that Doctor Ryu is thinking of developing a cure for pancreatic cancer."

"What?!" Jacob screamed.

All the scientists around them turned around to face Feng Zheng.

"Well, I don't know the details either," Feng Zheng said. "He said that he hasn't done any experiments yet as he is still just sketching out the idea. He didn't reveal the details, though. But he said that he was going to erase pancreatic cancer from human history soon."

"Pancreatic cancer?"

The crowd of scientists began murmuring quickly.

"Normally, I would think it's nonsense without any data, but honestly, I'm looking forward to it seeing that it was Doctor Ryu who said it," Carpentier said.

"Wait. Professor Zheng, are you saying that A-Bio is going to do anticancer drugs as well?" Jacob interferred and asked.

“That’s right.”

“What is...”

“Since Doctor Ryu had originally studied cancer, he probably had an interest in anticancer as well. And that’s the reason why I came all the way here.”

Click.

A Hispanic woman in her mid-thirties came out from the interview room. Her name was Felicida, and she was a pretty famous scientist. She worked in Carpentier’s lab, and she was very interested in regenerative medicine and health care.

“Doctor Ryu said that he’s going to do health care,” Felicida said to Carpentier. He nodded.

“If he does stem cells, he could probably connect it to health care. Something like skin improvement with skin regeneration...” Carpentier said.

“No, not anything like that. Actual health care. He said that he’s going to do probiotics. It seems like he already has a lot of progress.”

“Do what?” Jacob asked in disbelief.

Hadn’t he already made something huge, like an Alzheimer’s cure, based on stem cell technology? But he was doing probiotics and anticancer, which were completely different things, rather than working on a stem cell pipeline?

‘What kind of company is this?’

“An Alzheimer’s and glaucoma cure for the stem cell pipeline, a pancreatic cancer cure for the anticancer pipeline. Considering this, the probiotic is probably something else, too. Did you hear anything?” Carpentier asked.

Felicida shrugged and shook her head. “But he said that there would be some excellent effects on a major disease. He said that was why he brought it from A-Gen. It’s probably something important.”

“ ... ”

If he said it was a major illness, it would probably be on the same level as pancreatic cancer and Alzheimer's. What kind of probiotics was it that it was as effective as a cure?

Then, someone came out from the interview room and called on Jacob, who was spacing out.

"Jacob, come on in."

Extremely nervous, Jacob went into the interview room. There was a pale, neat-looking, tired man sitting inside. It was Doctor Young-Joon. To Jacob, it seemed like Asians never got old; he even looked younger than Jacob.

Beside Young-Joon, a few other scientists were reading Jacob's resume.

"Hello, Jacob. I read your paper. The one in *Nature*," Young-Joon said.

Jacob gulped. He was even more nervous than when he was defending his thesis.

"I'm very glad that a talented scientist like you applied to our company. Normally, we would have to hear about your research through a seminar, but we are going to substitute it with your paper and the report on your CV."

"Yes..."

"Jacob, why do you want to join A-Bio? I assume you have a special determination to join a start-up company in a country so far away."

Jacob gulped.

"I wanted to go into a pharmaceutical company and develop a drug myself. Not basic research that universities do. But I didn't want to go to a large, transnational pharmaceutical company because most of them are all corrupt," Jacob said.

"Then, I heard that you started this company and I applied. It would grow fast since it has a strong base technology, and I thought that it wouldn't be dirty because it's new. I also heard that A-Gen, your mother company, kept their research ethics and was fair to you."

The last part was a little different, but Jacob's answer satisfied Young-Joon. He nodded.

“What kind of research do you want to do here?”

“Honestly, I thought that I would be able to contribute a lot in differentiating stem cells to nerves since I studied cell signaling mechanisms.”

Then, without confidence, Jacob added, “To be honest, I was pretty recognized for my talent. So, I thought that if I came here, I would become good partners with you and grow this company into a bigger one.”

“But you don’t think so now?”

“I think the company will grow well, but I am not sure if there will be room for me to contribute. Professor Carpentier and Professor Zheng are out there, too...”

Young-Joon chuckled.

“They are outstanding people, but you shouldn’t be intimidated by authority or fame.” Young-Joon added, “The research we are doing is cutting-edge. We are exploring outside known human knowledge, where no one has the answer to.”

“ ... ”

“I think that the creativity of young scientists could shine brighter than the experience of Nobel Prize winners. Have confidence.”

* * *

The news of A-Bio’s launching swept the nation.

[Carpentier, Nobel Prize recipient, joins A-Bio.]

[Professor Feng Zheng of MIT joins A-Bio.]

[What is A-Bio, a biology and pharmaceutical company?]

Nicholas read the news articles that were flowing in with interest. The reactions that were coming up on Twitter were interesting as well.

—I heard that Avengers are getting released. Is it this?

—What if Carpentier has to work late at night like the Hell Korea is and goes home crying?

—God-Young-Joon is not someone who would do that.

—It seems like his entire schedule is a block looking at the time it took him to develop the glaucoma cure.

—I'm sorry, but I want him to develop a cure even if he goes through hell. My mom has Alzheimer's and our entire family is suffering.

—He said the Alzheimer's cure is going into clinical trials. Wait for it.

—But does Carpentier have anything to do even if he comes? I heard that Doctor Ryu planned all the experiments for iPSCs, Alzheimer's, or glaucoma. magic

—They'll probably divide their research project and give it to people. If it was Alzheimer's after glaucoma, it will be together this time.

—A Korean venture company that orders around a Nobel Prize winner. This is insane!

—I can feel the national pride rising... Get me some more![2]

“Carpentier or Feng Zheng... I'm jealous of them,” Nicholas said quietly as he closed his computer.

To be frank, Nicholas would jump out of his chair and join A-Bio if it wasn't for his title of CTO. He just thought of Young-Joon as a young man with a promising future at the year-end seminar, but it was way past that now.

Nicholas looked over the last Alzheimer's clinical trial report he was given. It was data that they had gathered appropriate trial patients and that they were dedifferentiating stem cells from patient somatic cells.

If he calculated the time right, the Alzheimer's cure that Young-Joon made would be administered to the patient next Monday.

1. Ediya Coffee is a coffeehouse chain based in South Korea. ?

2. This is a meme in Korea for national pride, or gookbbong. The more literal translation is, “I can feel it... Madam, get me some more!” As national pride

makes people feel good, it is compared to alcohol, thus asking the madam, or the server, to get them more. ?

Chapter 48: A-Bio (3)

There was a Starbucks on the first floor of the A-Bio building. Young-Joon ordered an iced americano with the employee benefits card that was given to him yesterday.

“Could you put it in this tumbler, please?” Young-Joon asked as he handed the worker a tumbler.

“You have a tumbler?” Park Joo-Hyuk asked.

“I saw one rolling around in the kitchen cupboard, so I brought it.”

“It says Jungyoon University on it. I guess it’s from school.”

“You’re right. I just saw it.”

Young-Joon checked the writing written on the side of the tumbler.

[JUNGYOON UNIVERSITY]

“I guess I got it sometime during school. I was there for ten years, from undergraduate to my doctorate,” Young-Joon said.

“No, I don’t think so,” Park Joo-Hyuk replied.

“How do you know?”

“Because it says 2019 in small letters below it. It’s way after old people like us graduated. It’s obviously your sister’s. You live together now, right?”

“ ... ”

“I remember Ji-Won bawling and making a huge fuss when you took her four-colored pen to school.”

“Ji-Won was eight.”

“That was when her personality was similar to our cocker spaniel.”

“ ... ”

Young-Joon stared at the tumbler, then said, “This is a secret, right?”

“Wash it thoroughly and put it back. I’m scared of her, too.”

“Yeah.”

Sipping their coffee, they headed to the elevator.

“After I set up the labs here, I’m going to invest in a few small and medium-sized businesses and do collaborative research projects,” Young-Joon said to Park Joo-Hyuk as they walked.

“With where?”

“Celligener, Cell Bio, Reaction Chemistry, and a sunbae I knew in undergrad, Lee Jae-Hong who studied bioinformatics, launched a start-up company. I was considering there as well.”

“What’s bioinformatics?”

“So, it’s like... Huh?”

A lot of people came to this building, and there were a lot of new faces due to the recent interviews, but Young-Joon had never seen this elderly woman before.

“Are you here to see someone?” Young-Joon approached her and asked.

“Uhm... No.”

The elderly woman turned her head and tried to leave.

[Synchronization Mode: Would you like to analyze stage-6 Alzheimer’s dementia? Fitness consumption rate: 0.7/second]

‘... No? What are you talking about?’

Staring at her back as she turned around, Young-Joon was lost in thought for a second. This wasn’t where they were doing the clinical trial. The Clinical Trial Management Center was at A-Gen headquarters, and Sunyoo Hospital was the Clinical Investigation Institution.

'Why is she wandering around A-Bio?'

"Ma'am, do you have someone with you?" Young-Joon asked.

She shook her head.

"Can you tell me your name?"

"..."

Again, there was no response.

'She must have a guardian. Do I have to make an announcement and find them?'

As Young-Joon was contemplating what to do, he saw two people running towards them from the washroom at the end of the hall. It was an elderly man who looked like he had a hard life and a young woman.

"Dear!"

"Grandma... Hup!"

Shin Young-Yeon, a Scientist from A-Gen's Stem Cells Department stopped in her tracks when she saw Young-Joon. She did come all the way here to A-Bio to meet him in the first place, but she was a little nervous now that she was actually facing him.

"H-Hello, sir." Shin Young-Yeon greeted him awkwardly.

"Hello."

"I'm Scientist Shin Young-Yeon from A-Gen's Stem Cells Department," she introduced herself.

"Nice to meet you. I'm Ryu Young-Joon from A-Bio."

After shaking her hand, he glanced at the elderly couple, who seemed to be a patient and her guardian. They seemed to be with her. The reason a Scientist from A-Gen's Stem Cells Department was here probably had something to do with them.

'Are they here because of the clinical trial?'

“Can I ask why you are here?” Young-Joon asked.

“I was wondering if I could ask you for something...”

* * *

Sixty-nine-year-old Park Joo-Nam.

She worked at a barbershop from the age of nineteen. Countless young men from the neighborhood hit on her because of her pretty face, but she had someone else in her heart. It was Kang Hyuk-Soo, a taxi driver.

Back then, taxi drivers had sort of a professional image. Nowadays, twenty-year-old newbies drove safely and conveniently with GPS and the help of automatic gear systems and advanced driver assistance systems, but it was not like that back then. Not only did they have the ability to find the directions to anywhere the customer said like they had a map on the palm of their hand, but they were sometimes required to be conversational in English depending on the situation.

Park Joo-Nam fell in love with Kang Hyuk-Soo at first sight at how he handled a manual transmission skillfully and drove well when she happened to get in his taxi. Kang Hyuk-Soo often came to the barbershop to shave. Thanks to that, she was able to find connections with him easily as she had many opportunities to meet him.

They got close quickly, became a couple, got married and had two kids.

“You look like a bandit when your beard grows because you have a scary face.”

Park Joo-Nam became a stay-at-home wife as she raised the kids, but she put her skills to use and shaved Kang Hyuk-Soo’s face every morning.

“I guess I always have to shave your face if you don’t want customers to run away.”

When Kang Hyuk-Soo sat in his chair after breakfast, her soft, pale fingers would spread white foam all over his lower face. The blade of her razor made crisp sounds as it moved along the texture of his skin.

Kang Hyuk-Soo loved his mornings where he could watch her face as she concentrated. Even if she got wrinkles and time bore itself on her face, her beauty was unchanging.

The two of them grew old together. It was just a normal and ordinary life story. Like other people their age, they went through small and large events in modern history like the military dictatorship, democracy protests, and IMF. They got involved in various incidents and went through trouble, but they endured it well together.

But not Alzheimer's.

At first, it just seemed like Park Joo-Nam's forgetfulness had just gotten worse. They were things like forgetting to turn off the heat after cooking and asking the same questions again. Then, she started getting slow and clumsy in calculating money, confusing the few friends she had, and forgot how many children the young couple in the neighborhood had.

Then one morning, it happened. Kang Hyuk-Soo still clearly remembered the shock he felt that morning.

"Can you shave my face?" Kang Hyuk-Soo asked as he drank a glass of milk for breakfast.

"Shave? ... What was that again?"

With an anxious heart, Kang Hyuk-Soo held her hand and went to the hospital. She was diagnosed with stage-four Alzheimer's. She was prescribed medication like tacrine, an acetylcholinesterase inhibitor, and was treated regularly at the hospital, but her cognitive abilities and memory progressively worsened.

And now, a few years from then, her cognitive function had decreased significantly, and she could not tell what the date was or what season it was. She needed Kang Hyuk-Soo's help to dress for the weather, and it was hard for her to eat, wash her face, and brush her teeth. Sometimes, her conscience would come back, but sometimes, she did not even recognize him. She also began to suffer from urinary incontinence.

Now, Park Joo-Nam spent the entire day in the passenger's seat of Kang Hyuk-Soo's taxi as she required her guardian's help for everyday life.

* * *

“Doctor Ryu.”

Kang Hyuk-Soo suddenly grabbed Young-Joon’s arm.

“Please, Doctor. Help us.”

“Pardon?”

“Please include us in the clinical trial.”

“You have to talk to the primary doctor of the clinical trial at Sunyoo University.”

“We did. And she was supposed to participate,” Shin Young-Yeon answered instead. She sounded a little depressed.

“By supposed to, are you saying that she isn’t anymore?” Park Joo-Hyuk interfered and asked.

“Yes. They suddenly changed their minds.”

“Why?”

“They said it was because she has high blood pressure.”

“Hm...”

For this clinical trial, the method of delivery was intravenously administering stem cells and sending them to the brain through the blood vessels. The AKKT gene in the stem cells used was manipulated to make them sixty percent smaller than regular ones. A cell membrane with a caverlin ligand was used to pass the blood-brain barrier and reach the brain. After, a drug called 3K3A-APC was administered to differentiate the stem cells in the brain to nerves and regenerate the destroyed brain. As such, the heart of this experiment was for the stem cells and drugs to flow through the blood vessels well.

‘Is that why the primary doctor excluded patients with high blood pressure?’

But it didn’t make sense that they excluded someone already chosen just because of something like high blood pressure. It wasn’t something like heart

failure either. Furthermore, they would have chosen her as a participant after confirming that she had high blood pressure during the screening process. Had they made a mistake?

“Was there a restriction for high blood pressure in the participant selection conditions that we proposed?”

“No, just heart failure,” Shin Young-Yeon replied.

“Then it should be fine. If it’s just high blood pressure... How high is it?”

“It’s one hundred fifty over ninety-five.”

“It’s not too serious.”

“I guess they want to conduct it with the healthiest people possible to ensure safety,” Park Joo-Hyuk said.

What he said was also right. The clinical trial for this cure was still in phase one; if this was something like cold medicine, this would be when it was administered to normal, healthy people to prove that it had no side effects. This treatment was directly administered to the patient due to its nature, but it was only to a small number of people, around eight people; they didn’t have to include a patient with high blood pressure.

But what kind of reason would they have to exclude someone they had already chosen?

‘Rosaline, could there be problems during treatment for a patient with this blood pressure?’

—You already know the answer.

‘There aren’t any, right?’

—It does not matter. This treatment will even work on a patient with heart failure. You do not need to care about blood pressure that high.

‘But why did the doctor exclude her?’

As Young-Joon was lost in thought, Kang Hyuk-Soo called him.

“Doctor Ryu, we do not have much time left.”

“Pardon me?”

“The doctor said that she has dysphagia. Apparently, it happens with severe dementia. They said it’s when they have difficulty with swallowing. The doctor said that it gets inhaled into the lungs, causing pneumonia. She won’t be able to spit out phlegm either. The doctor said that she will get stiff, and that she will have to lie down more often because it’s difficult for her to move. They said that I should be careful of bedsores.”

“ ... ”

“When those complications happen, her immunity will decrease and she’ll suffer fall injuries. They told me that’s how people die, not from dementia itself. So, I have to take good care of her. But... Doctor Ryu, I’m seventy-four. To be honest, I’m not sure if I can keep working to feed and take care of her alone. It’s not because I don’t want to, but because my body can’t keep up,” Kang Hyuk-Soo said. “I keep thinking about what would happen to her if I can’t get up the next morning.”

“What are your children doing?” Park Joo-Hyuk asked.

“How could we burden them when they’re busy taking care of their own kids... And our kids are living abroad...”

After some thought, Young-Joon said to Shin Young-Yeon, “Could I talk to you?”

He took her to a corner that no one really came to and asked, “Do you know if all eight spots have been filled?”

“Yes, they have.”

“Do you happen to know who took her place?”

Young-Joon was suspicious of what was happening. He thought that the reason Shin Young-Yeon came to him instead of convincing and comforting Kang Hyuk-Soo was because there was something going on.

“I don’t know their information because we only get the participant identification code... But there is something that our manager heard through someone they know at Sunyoo Hospital. Apparently, they are top VIP,” Shin Young-Yeon said.

“Who is it?”

“Um...”

Shin Young-Yeon pulled Young-Joon to the side and whispered, “It’s Congressman Shim Sung-Yeol’s mother.”

“Shim Sung-Yeol?”

Shim Sung-Yeol’s mother was eighty; she was old. Five years ago, she had gone to a nursing home after getting Alzheimer’s. Shim Sung-Yeol had continued to act like a dutiful son, but to be honest, he was sick of picking up after his old mother. He was tired of going to the nursing home once in a while to show his face, and he thought that the thousands of won going toward her hospital fees were a waste. His eyes were only focused on one thing: the upcoming election. Everything that would add to that was good, and everything that didn’t help was useless.

To someone like him, Young-Joon’s clinical trial for Alzheimer’s was one of the best things that could happen. If it succeeded, he could piggyback off of Young-Joon’s image and be seen in a positive light. Even if it failed, he would gain sympathy votes. Of course, it would be best if Young-Joon succeeded, but wouldn’t he, since he was so outstanding? Even Nobel Prize recipients came to work with him.

—Scientists must be independent from politics.

The face of that young man who declined his request right to his face when he went to visit Son Soo-Young kept popping up in Shim Sung-Yeol’s mind. He was an international scientist star right now.

‘I will do as you say for now,’ Shim Sung-Yeol thought as he pushed the director of Sunyoo Hospital.

‘Next time, I will visit you to thank you as the dutiful son of a clinical trial patient, not as a politician, Doctor Ryu.’

* * *

“Joo-Hyuk!”

Young-Joon, who was talking to Shin Young-Yeon for a bit, returned to them.

“Huh?”

Park Joo-Hyuk looked a little flustered. magic

“What did you guys talk about? Why are you so angry? Man, you look like the time when Ji-Won ate all our Haagen-Dazs ice cream when we were young...”

“We have to go somewhere right now,” Young-Joon said.

“Go where?”

“Sunyoo Hospital.”

Chapter 49: A-Bio (4)

Young-Joon was like a volcano that was about to erupt. Baffled, Park Joo-Hyuk grabbed his wrist.

“Let’s go. I’m so mad that I can’t wait one more second.”

As Young-Joon was about to drag Park Joo-Hyuk out, Kang Hyuk-Soo stepped in front of him. “Doctor Ryu, if you go to Sunyoo Hospital right now, will she get the treatment?”

“I don’t know,” Young-Joon replied firmly. “Only the experimental hospital has the right to select participants. It is not something I can do. I sympathize with your situation, but it doesn’t do anything.”

“Then...”

“I will support the doctor’s judgment that her high blood pressure will be a problem if it is appropriate. You will have to wait for phase two of the clinical trial since the range of participants will expand then. If it’s too difficult for you to take care of her in the meantime, please tell me. I will assist you financially.”

“ ... ”

“But please remember that I do not have the right to interfere with the selection process of clinical trial participants,” Young-Joon said as he glanced at Shin Young-Yeon.

“Let’s go, Joo-Hyuk.”

Leaving the elderly man and Shin Young-Yeon who both looked disappointed, they left the building.

On the way to the hospital in Park Joo-Hyuk's car, Young-Joon, who was sitting in the passenger's seat with his arms crossed, was lost in thought with a serious face.

"Why are you so angry? Who got in the trial instead of that elderly woman?" Park Joo-Hyuk asked.

"Congressman Shim Sung-Yeol took out that woman and put in his mother."

"Hm."

Leaning his head on the window, Park Joo-Hyuk stared at Young-Joon.

"Is that something to be *this* mad about? I think it's the angriest you've been since you started working at A-Gen."

"Of course!"

"Because a politician interfered?"

"No. If that's what I was mad about, I would have made us go to Shim Sung-Yeol's office rather than Sunyoo Hospital."

"Then why are you so mad?"

"The bastards at Sunyoo Hospital messed with my research."

Young-Joon grit his teeth.

"Shim Sung-Yeol could have requested that to the hospital to help his mother because he doesn't know anything about experiments and research. I understand that. It's wrong, but I can at least understand it, right? But the hospital shouldn't have accepted that."

"..."

"A clinical trial isn't treatment. I don't know how high people's expectations of me are and why everyone is dying to be included in my clinical trial, but a clinical trial is not the same thing as treatment in any way."

Young-Joon emphasized what he was saying.

“This is research and an experiment! A-Bio commissioned a clinical experiment to the hospital, and that hospital is an institution that conducts the experiment for A-Bio.”

“Patients are just trying to get into your clinical trials because you’re such a famous star. They trust you that much and are trying to get better...”

“That’s wrong, too! I’m thankful that they have that much faith in me, but in principle, they should not be doing that. It’s not like fame guarantees success. Do they think that I’ll be right this time too because all the experiments I’ve done in the past were right? We can’t do that since this is a clinical study with people’s lives on the line. Research should be done according to data, not the name value of the participant.”

“Okay, man. Why are you getting mad at me?”

“And everything about a clinical trial must be controlled as strictly as possible, starting from the participant selection process! We have to exclude volunteering patients who don’t fit the criteria and conduct it after randomly selecting the participants from the remaining people. That is controlling the variables in a study. It’s the basics!”

“Okay, I get why you are so mad. Can you calm...”

“After excluding patients who do not meet the criteria, the will of the investigator should never be involved in the selection process of the remaining patients. They have to be drawn completely randomly, like rolling a dice. There are places overseas that use a computer to randomly pick. If this principle is broken, it’s data manipulation.”

“Data manipulation?”

Park Joo-Hyuk’s eyes widened at an unexpectedly impactful word.

“Of course! How can the data be reliable when the sample is subjectively selected? If I allow this, the research will become a mess right away. There are so many scammer pharmaceutical companies that choose patients with light symptoms or ones that they think they could treat and advertise their success in clinical trials to sell their drugs! If I pick the participants, how am I any different?”

Thud!

Young-Joon slammed his fist on the window out of frustration.

“But an outside force interferes with my research and puts pressure on participant selection? And the hospital changes patients according to that for reasons that aren’t part of the criteria? It’s an experiment that works with people’s lives; they shouldn’t be conducting it however they want, right? If something happens, I can’t even track down the cause! What were they thinking? These bastards...”

“Woah... Relax, man.”

“It’s not something to relax about! This is something that institutions in developed countries that are really strict about research ethics could kick everyone related to the study kicked out for.”

“... It’s that bad?”

“Of course! It’s data manipulation. It’s a fake paper! And to be honest, I’m suspicious of Shin Young-Yeon-ssi from the Stem Cells Department bringing that elderly woman. It would be nice if she didn’t have any relationship with them, but what if she got something from the elderly man and lobbied the hospital? It’s a clinical trial of a project where I’m the general manager, but the staff under me are lobbying and switching out patients, and politicians are switching patients by putting pressure on them... It’s a fucking mess.”

“...”

“I trusted them because they were a large hospital and experts, and I didn’t think it would be right for me to supervise and tell them what to do when I requested it to the clinical trial investigation institution. I just received reports and waited. I even went to the hospital after the patient was fully cured during the glaucoma trial. But they stab me in the back right from the selection process?”

“I think you should also manage the clinical trial yourself.”

“I was considering opening a hospital when the company gets bigger, but I think I have to hurry. I don’t think I can trust any investigation institution easily.”

“But in my opinion, I don’t think Shim Sung-Yeol acted in worry for her mother or because he wanted her to get better.”

“Then?”

“It’s because he can get close to you if it succeeds. The election is right around the corner,” Park Joo-Hyuk said. “I know that people are confusing your clinical trial and actual treatment, but honestly, not me. I don’t know if it’s because I’ve known you ever since you were a little kid, but I don’t trust you that much, okay?”

“Wait, this is kind of hurtful too.”

“But to put my mother in phase one of a clinical trial Ryu Young-Joon is running? I could never do that. I would just wait until phase two, and it’s not like dementia is an immediately life-threatening disease. Since a politician like Shim Sung-Yeol would have a lot of money, he could just get her a caregiver, and she would last until phase two.”

“Hm...”

“But the reason he went out of his way to make another spot and include himself in phase one? Because he’s in the Ryu Young-Joon fantasy? Nope. In my opinion, his goal in the first place wasn’t his mother’s health, but a connection with you,” Park Joo-Hyuk said.

“The news that it was the first successful treatment in phase one and the news that it works well for many patients in phase two have different impacts. He is just trying to take a picture with you in the huge spotlight when you succeed in treating Alzheimer’s for the first time ever and befriend you.”

“...”

“He’ll give you some gifts as a clinical trial patient’s son, call all the patients together for a meal and gain sympathy by asking you if there were any difficulties in the study, that he was so touched by seeing his mother get better, and that he is indebted to you and wants to support you.”

Park Joo-Hyuk went on.

“After he makes you an ally by cajoling you, actually supporting you, and creating a win-win relationship, he will ask you to support in his election

campaign in turn for a spot in the Ministry of Health and Welfare or the Ministry of Science and Technology. It's a cliché repertoire, isn't it?"

"I don't care if that is true or not. Even if it is true, tell him to keep going with that disgusting scheme and delusion that uses his own mother. I will *never* follow along."

"Why don't you cooperate a little bit? He's a candidate after all. Do you hate politics?"

"It's not that I hate politicians, but I never cooperate with people who don't keep principles. He's already done to me from the things he's shown me before."

"You also put pressure on politicians too, right? When you caught Ji Kwang-Man."

"All I did was ask them to investigate it thoroughly according to the law. It wasn't even a request. A victim who was attacked can't even ask them to thoroughly investigate the people who attacked him? I only asked them to do it according to the law, and I never said Ji Kwang-Man's name. If he was innocent, he wouldn't have been caught. I did put pressure on them, but it was to do everything lawfully. Isn't that different from this?"

"You're right. To be honest, I don't think there's a problem with that either."

"Then why are you picking a fight with me?"

"I just want to tease you when you're mad. You know when you want to mess with kids who are upset? It's similar to that."

"Are you a psychopath?" Young-Joon cringed.

Park Joo-Hyuk saw the side of his face and chuckled.

"It's been a while since you've been this angry. It reminds me of old times... Were you like this when you cursed at the lab director?"

"It was worse. My hands were trembling back then."

"You had a tremor, right?"

"Stop talking nonsense and focus on driving."

* * *

Young-Joon, who pushed the Sunyoo Hospital main doors open, headed straight to the Neuropsychiatry Department. The nurses at the administration counter recognized him.

“Hello.”

A nurse quickly approached him and greeted him.

“I’m here to see Professor Koh In-Guk. He’s the primary doctor, right? Where is he?” Young-Joon asked.

“He should be in the office.”

“When will he be done?”

“He is done soon because of the clinical trial preparations. In about...”

The nurse glanced at the clock.

“Ten minutes?”

“Alright. Please let me know when he comes out.”

Young-Joon went to the waiting room and sat down quietly.

“You looked like you were going to barge in through his office door,” Park Joo-Hyuk said with a smirk.

“I don’t have the right to interfere with the patient’s rights to be treated, so...”

A little while later, Koh In-Guk came out of his office. After the nurse approached him and talked to him for a bit as she gestured to Young-Joon, he came over.

“Hello.” Koh In-Guk smiled and greeted him.

“Hello. Let’s cut straight to the chase since we don’t have much time. Can we go somewhere quieter?” Young-Joon asked.

Koh In-Guk got a little nervous as he saw that Young-Joon’s expression and tone was serious.

“Nurse Kim, do we have any seminar rooms available?”

“Room two-one-one would be empty. The lecture room where the immunity seminar was held.:

“I’m just going to use that for a bit,” Koh In-Guk said. “Let’s go, Doctor Ryu.”

Young-Joon followed Koh In-Guk and Park Joo-Hyuk to the small conference room.

“You came here regarding the clinical study?” Koh In-Guk asked as he sat down in the chair.

“Yes. I heard that the patients were changed.”

Koh In-Guk flinched slightly at Young-Joon’s response. He pretended like he didn’t know anything.

“The patients were switched?”

“You’re the doctor in charge, and you don’t know? That’s a problem as well.”

“... A woman named Shin Mal-Ja came in instead of someone named Park Joo-Nam. That’s what you’re talking about, right?”

“What’s the criteria?”

Koh In-Guk gulped.

“That is... We didn’t think she was fit because she had high blood pressure.”
magic

“Is that all?”

“... Yes.”

“If you look at the pre-clinical data we provided, there is data on obese mice as well. And obese mice have pretty high blood pressure. You know why we tested that, right?”

“ ... ”

“It is because eighty percent of Alzheimer’s patients are obese. And a lot of them have high blood pressure as well.”

“That is... true...”

“We could get a safe starting point if we only included patients with no cardiovascular diseases, but it would only be effective for twenty percent of Alzheimer’s patients. That was why we purposely tested obese mice. We have blood pressure data as well. But why aren’t you using it?”

“ ... ”

“The treatment I developed is to send small stem cells to the brain. The stem cells are less than eight micrometers in diameter. It’s smaller than the diameters of capillaries. And the stem cells, which will be administered through the veins in the arm, will move through the internal carotid artery to reach the brain. Right? The diameter of the cerebral carotid artery is usually measured in millimeters, isn’t it?”

“ ... ”

“Do you think that a patient’s internal carotid artery will get smaller than eight micrometers even if a patient’s artery constricts due to high blood pressure? I’m curious about your opinion as a doctor.”

“As I told you, we just wanted to get a safer starting point just in case anything happens...”

Young-Joon stared straight into Koh In-Guk’s eyes.

“So there is no scientific reason.”

“... Yes.”

“Do you know why I am asking you this aggressively?” Young-Joon asked.

“Pardon?”

“The patient who was put in the place of Park Joo-Nam. It was Shim Sung-Yeol’s mother, right? I heard that he put pressure on you.”

Koh In-Guk froze.

“Please be honest. There were only eight participants approved by the Ministry of Food and Drug Safety, and you already had eight people. So, in order to fulfill Shim Sung-Yeol’s request, you had to take someone out, and the person chosen was a patient with high blood pressure, whom you would have an excuse for. Is that right?”

“ ...”

“How could you allow external pressure in the selection process and...”

“I’m sorry.”

Koh In-Guk bowed.

“I am truly sorry. I will be honest. I couldn’t bear it because it was weighing on my conscience, but I can’t do it anymore. I will just resign. This was what the hospital director ordered me to do.”

“The hospital director?”

“Yes, I’m sorry. I will make it right now. I’m so ashamed.”

“... Then, it’s not something that can just be settled with you, Professor,” Young-Joon said. “I think I need to meet the hospital director.”

Chapter 50: A-Bio (5)

Lee Jun-Hyuk, the hospital director of Sunyoo Hospital, was having tea with Shim Sung-Yeol in his office.

To him, the hospital was a business. In that sense, Sunyoo Hospital was succeeding, and it was because of a rare genius scientist named Ryu Young-Joon. Succeeding in clinical trials was a bonus factor for hospitals. It made the hospital more famous by giving it the reputation that it was the first to cure a difficult disease. After succeeding in the glaucoma trial, Sunyoo Hospital received a lot of investments from several places, and it became the first place that patients with eye conditions came to.

“I’m glad the hospital is doing well,” Shim Sung-Yeol said.

“It’s all because you looked after us,” Professor Lee Jun-Hyuk said with a chuckle.

Shim Sung-Yeol had a political connection with Lee Jun-Hyuk for a long time.

Sunyoo Hospital was a huge university hospital; they didn't just treat patients, but also conducted research and education. Despite their lack of significant results, Sunyoo University received 19.2 billion won in government funding in the last eight years as they were selected as a research-oriented hospital.

Behind their funding was Shim Sung-Yeol; he was one of the directors of the Sunyoo Social Welfare Foundation, which supported Sunyoo Hospital. It was a public interest foundation and was supporting Sunyoo Hospital, but Shim Sung-Yeol actually benefited more from it than them. It seemed obvious that it was going to be that way with the Alzheimer's clinical trial as well.

Ring!

The office phone rang.

"Please excuse me."

Lee Jun-Hyuk picked up the phone.

"This is Lee Jun-Hyuk. Yes. Yes." magic

He frowned a little.

"... Yes, I will be there right away."

After hanging up the call, he glanced at Shim Sung-Yeol like there was a problem.

"What is it?" Shim Sung-Yeol asked.

"I think I might have to head out for a moment... But it's nothing. The professor in charge of the clinical trial wants to see me for a little bit. I will be back soon."

For some reason, Lee Jun-Hyuk looked like he was carrying a lot of worries as he quickly ran out of the office.

Shim Sung-Yeol just stared at the office door that Lee Jun-Hyuk closed on his way out.

* * *

“Was there any lobbying or request involved in Park Joo-Nam’s participation in the clinical trial as well? For example, an employee from the Stem Cells Department at A-Gen. Please be honest with me,” Young-Joon said.

“I do not know anything about that,” Koh In-Guk replied. “The only case where there was external pressure in the participant selection process was from Congressman Shim Sung-Yeol.”

“I am asking because I think that Shin Young-Yeon, a Scientist from A-Gen’s Stem Cell Department, knows Park Joo-Nam, the patient who was excluded.”

“I do not know. Park Joo-Nam only came with her husband to volunteer.”

“Hm.”

Young-Joon crossed his arms.

‘Does Shin Young-Yeon have nothing to do with it?’

Park Joo-Hyuk, who was beside him, said, “They could have just gone to the Stem Cell Department for the clinical trial, met Shin Young-Yeon, and she just brought them to you. Or they knew each other before, but she just told them how to volunteer.”

Young-Joon nodded his head.

“Maybe. I guess I was too sensitive.”

Click.

The conference room door opened, and a professor who looked like he was in his fifties or sixties appeared. It was Lee Jun-Hyuk, the hospital director.

“Why, Doctor Ryu, hello. Thank you for coming all the way here. You should have called us before.”

Lee Jun-Hyuk approached Young-Joon with a smile, acting like they were friendly.

“It is not that far. It’s ten minutes by car.”

“Haha, is it?”

“That was why I gave the clinical trial to this hospital, since it is convenient to provide fresh iPSCs or nerve cells and technical support. Do you know what I mean? It means that there is no reason for me to insist on this hospital as the investigation institution other than the fact that it is in a convenient location.”

“... I heard that you were angry about the patients being changed,” Lee Jun-Hyuk said as cold sweat dripped down his neck. “Did you know Park Soo-Nam?”

“It’s Park Joo-Nam.”

“Yes, Park Joo-Nam. Haha, my apologies. We must have made a mistake; we didn’t know that they were important to you... We will fix this right away.”

“Important to me?”

Young-Joon frowned.

“All those patients are important to me! What are you talking about? Do you think I am doing this because of some personal relationship? Selecting patients subjectively is data manipulation, you know that, right? I am bringing this up because I want this clinical study to be strictly controlled.”

Lee Jun-Hyuk looked like he realized he made a mistake, then tried to laugh it off.

“Now, now. Please relax, Doctor Ryu. Would it be such a big problem that one patient out of eight were switched? They are all Alzheimer’s patients after all.”

“I am the principal investigator, and the paper will have my name as the first author. The data that will be included in that paper will be manipulated. Even if you or Professor Koh are included as co-authors, the final responsibility comes down to me. Do you think I can relax?”

“How can you call this data manipulation? It’s a small issue, and you are overreacting. Hahaha. We can just say that the person we randomly selected was Congressman Shim Sung-Yeol’s mother in the first place.”

“I’m saying that this kind of attitude is wrong.”

“Then what should we do now? Shin Mal-Ja, the congressman’s mother, is a clinical study participant who is already registered on our side. We can’t take her out now.”

“How old is she? I assume she is quite old as she is Congressman Shim Sung-Yeol’s mother.”

“She is eighty-three.”

“Then isn’t she included in the aged, eighty and over category, and classified as a separate age group in clinical trials?”

“There are a lot of places that do that, including the FDA in America. But since it’s a clinical study on Alzheimer’s, it would be good to obtain data on aged, eighty and over patients.”

“My point is that you did not use that classification of age when we got the permission to do the clinical trial.”

“We can revise something like that easily.”

“Revisions are something I should discuss with the doctor in charge and decide. According to the clinical study guidelines, she should have been excluded. Why are you trying to gather participants and then change the criteria?”

“Haha. Doctor Ryu, we won’t be able to do clinical trials if we are strict about every single thing.”

“Is that so?”

Young-Joon stared at Lee Jun-Hyuk.

“Then don’t do it.”

“ ... ”

Lee Jun-Hyuk froze, and Koh In-Guk’s eyes widened.

“I guess it can’t be helped if you can’t manage something as small as that. If this hospital isn’t capable of that, I don’t want to conduct my clinical trial here. Stop the study. I will talk to the Ministry of Food and Drug Safety and the clinical trial evaluation committee. I will have to go through tedious paperwork

again, but it doesn't matter. I will transfer this to another institution and conduct it there."

Lee Jun-Hyuk let out a sigh.

"Doctor Ryu, I will be frank. You shouldn't go against politics if you want to run A-Bio. What are you going to do?"

"Who said I am going against them? I am only saying that we should keep principles and ethics."

"I don't understand why you are not cooperating with someone as huge as Congressman Shim Sung-Yeol when he is reaching out to you first. If you let this go just this one time, his mother becomes healthy, you get a supporter, and the congressman gets a young, talented individual and a new network. Everyone is happy, right? To be honest, it's frustrating."

"I hope you find another scientist like that. I'll stop here. Please organize everything that was prepared here since I'll be conducting the clinical study at another hospital."

As Young-Joon was about to take his bag and leave, another person opened the door and came in. It was Shim Sung-Yeol. He slowly approached Young-Joon. Standing close, Young-Joon and Shim Sung-Yeol stared at each other.

Chuckle.

Shim Sung-Yeol laughed.

"It seems like you don't like me, Doctor Ryu."

Young-Joon didn't reply.

"I want to be friends with you, but it's not easy."

"I am open to being friends personally, Congressman. But I will not help your political activities. And I will not ask you anything regarding research. You must remember that business is business in our relationship. Do you still want to be friends?"

"Why are you trying to distance yourself from politics so much? With your fame and reputation, it's worth a shot to cooperate with me."

“It would definitely be easier if I had someone like you backing me. It would be easy to get permissions for clinical trials, and my products would easily be given permission to commercialize.”

“That’s true, especially if you have someone who could use their power. They could discretely ease the restrictions on drug standards that congress develops.”

“That is why it has to be separate,” Young-Joon said.

“ ... ”

“I also know what kind of position I am in among Korea’s scientific community. Of course, I’m not the first one, but I think I will make a huge step. I think I told you before, but science is independent and the study of objectivity.”

“Hm.”

“All drugs developed by scientists must obtain permission and regulation according to their level of side effects and efficacy. They cannot be loosened because someone is friends with someone. I know how pharmaceutical companies used to do things by the rule of thumb, and it’s not just in Korea. But I want to change that culture as much as I can. I want to make a culture where we prove development by data instead of lobbying. I hope you understand.”

“... Yes, of course,” Shim Sung-Yeol replied in a subdued voice. “Alright. I understand your ideology, Doctor Ryu. And I made a mistake with this Alzheimer’s clinical trial. I don’t know much about medicine and pharmaceuticals or clinical trials.”

Shim Sung-Yeol added, “Doctor Ryu, I didn’t want to break the law or research ethics or anything like that. I asked the director if there were any openings because I wanted to help my mother, and this is what happened.”

“So you’re saying that the director did this out of loyalty even though you didn’t ask him?”

“He knows how I think about my mother and how I take care of her. He just made a mistake while trying to help me out of pity.”

“See, this is why we must stay away from politics,” Young-Joon said.

“Yes, I understand. I guess this reaffirmed your beliefs,” Shim Sung-Yeol replied. “My mother will apply for phase two of the trial, and I will make sure that she is randomly selected. So please do not worry anymore and let’s conduct according to principles, like you want.”

“Yes, thank you.”

Shim Sung-Yeol smiled, patted Lee Jun-Hyuk on the shoulder and left. Young-Joon stared at him as he walked toward the door.

Something that happened at Lab Six at A-Gen came to mind. Even then, Shim Sung-Yeol was shut down when he tried to get Young-Joon on his side. He also apologized and left, just like he was doing now. But unlike the last time, this might sour their relationship a little.

‘He might become an enemy, but I can’t help that.’

Lee Jun-Hyuk approached Young-Joon and said, “Well, it’s a bummer, but I guess it’s done. Then, we’ll just continue with the patient that was originally selected, yes?”

“What?” Young-Joon replied. “We will continue with the patients that were originally selected, but I cannot trust you anymore. We will continue this trial at a different institution. Thank you for your hard work.”

“...”

“Let’s go, Joo-Hyuk.”

“Wait!”

Lee Jun-Hyuk urgently grabbed Young-Joon’s arm.

“S-Sir, wait. We wrote a contract to hold the clinical trial here and everything. You can’t do this...”

“The primary investigator said he was going to resign, too,” Young-Joon said.

Lee Jun-Hyuk turned to Koh In-Guk in surprise. Koh In-Guk confirmed it with a serious face.

“I will resign. My pride has been hurt too much over this incident, and I feel ashamed at the work I am doing here.”

“ ... ”

“Goodbye. I won’t be giving clinical trials to Sunyoo Hospital anymore.”

Young-Joon said goodbye to Lee Jun-Hyuk and left with Park Joo-Hyuk.

On the way back to A-Gen, Park Joo-Hyuk glanced at Young-Joon, who was lost in thought. His hands were trembling lightly.

“Hey. You went in there like a bulldozer, but... You overdid it, didn’t you?”

“ ... ”

“You did good.”

“Thanks.”

“Hey, but I have something to ask you.”

“Why did you bring me? You can take care of it by yourself.”

“Just in case we fought about legal problems.”

“So I was your law robot.”

“And I need someone to stop me if I get too heated.”

* * *

Young-Joon called the Stem Cells Department and talked with Shin Young-Yeon on the phone. She actually had no relationship with the old couple. All she did was tell them how to apply and fill out their application form. She also said that she told them multiple times that they could not be selected. They only came to Young-Joon after they were absurdly removed from the trial afterward even though they were selected as participants.

—I did not break research ethics! How could I dare to come see you if I did that? You have no compromise about that.

“Right?”

—Of course. At A-Gen, your personality and attitude toward research is like what you'd see in textbooks. If I got the participants selected by lobbying, it would be suicide to come see you.

“Alright. Could you please give me the couple’s contact information?”

—Contact information?

“Yes. I want to visit them.”

Young-Joon got their contact information and made time on his weekend to go to the old couple’s house. There were rows of worn-out, ragged houses in the suburb. The old, dark streets and dirty roads reminded him of his parents’ house in Daejeon. Young-Joon brought them to an apartment he got near Jungyoon University, and they were going to move in soon, but they still lived there.

“...”

Kang Hyuk-Soo, who was standing in the living room, which also was the kitchen, looked very disheartened.

“Sorry, I don’t have anything to offer you...”

Kang Hyuk-Soo handed Young-Joon a glass of water.

“Your wife will be able to participate in the clinical trial.”

Kang Hyuk-Soo’s face lit up when he heard Young-Joon.

“Thank you!”

“There is no need to thank me. I didn’t do anything. She was randomly selected.”

“Still, thank you.”

“But the clinical trial investigation institution will change, so it will take longer than planned.”

“... Is that so?”

“Don’t worry too much. She will get better quickly when the treatment starts. But I think it will be hard for you to take care of her alone until then, so why don’t you get a caregiver?”

“I did look into it. The hospital said that without a professional caregiver, it’s easy for people with Alzheimer’s as advanced as her to get sepsis or something, and they said that she had to be admitted into a nursing home to be properly taken care of.”

“Is that so?”

“Yes, but it was too expensive. I live paycheck to paycheck from my job as a taxi driver. How could I afford something like that? Even the health insurance doesn’t work because of something about my wife.”

“... I would like to help you, but large sums of money or valuables should not be exchanged between clinical trial personnel.”

“Haha, it’s alright. I did not tell you so that you could help me. I’m just grateful that you developed a drug like that.”

Young-Joon grinned. “She will get better, I promise. Don’t worry about the selection process and have hope.

“Yes, thank you. Thank you so much.”

Young-Joon left the house as the old man bowed to him multiple times. He stopped in front of Kang Hyuk-Soo’s front door. After checking that he went back inside, Young-Joon slipped a little envelope in his mailbox. It was some money for him to be able to use a professional caregiver or go into a nursing home until the clinical trial.

It was funny and bitter, but one of the most powerful disease suppressors in the world was money. In the bounds of science, that determined treatment and survival.