Former Mastermind To Chaebol Son-in-Law

Chapter 1

That Place is Empty

The erratic sound of a heart monitor.

The noise of breath scraping the floor broke the silence of the sophisticated yet desolate hospital room.

Lying there was Kang In-hyuk, the chairman of Bluewall, one of the leading companies in the world.

He was an extraordinary figure with a personal fortune exceeding 8 trillion won.

Yet now, at the mere age of forty-five, he had been diagnosed with terminal pancreatic cancer, just moments away from death.

'As expected, but to think it'd end so futilely...'

In-hyuk felt his whole body tremble with each shallow breath. His clouded eyes wandered aimlessly in the air.

'Still, I managed to bring down Tae Seokho...'

The chairman of Taeshin Group—a man who had only reached that position because of In-hyuk.

But Tae Seokho lived in fear of In-hyuk's existence. Soon, the deaths of President Tae Gun-seung and his eldest son Tae Seok-hyun occurred, and all the corruption charges unfavorable to Taeshin Group were pinned on In-hyuk to be used as a scapegoat.

Of course, In-hyuk wasn't one to sit back and take it.

He immediately left Korea, gathered strength and influence, and destroyed Taeshin Group itself.

But it hadn't ended there.

Together with Taeshin Group, In-hyuk was manipulating the Korean government and economy.

He had accomplished many things over the years. Now, though all had to be left behind, he had no regrets.

After a moment, a man entered the hospital room. It was Baek Si-hwan, In-hyuk's closest secretary, colleague, and friend.

"Are you all right, chairman?"

In-hyuk didn't even have the strength to speak and merely listened quietly.

"..."

"You've been through so much. And thank you."

For a simple greeting, the atmosphere was strange.

Baek Si-hwan kept talking.

"Didn't you also take care of Taeshin Group, which was such a thorn in our side?"

His tone was almost unchanged from usual, yet In-hyuk instinctively sensed that something was wrong.

"What..."

"And on top of that, you built up Bluewall for us. Thanks to you, the organization higher-ups are satisfied."

At that moment, In-hyuk's trembling eyelids shot open.

'Organization? Higher-ups...? Who does he mean? No way—!'

At the same time, Baek Si-hwan's cold expression twisted.

With a fishy smile, he pulled out a syringe and a vial of transparent red liquid from his pocket.

"This is a drug the organization has been developing. It's said to enhance certain physical abilities if injected into a healthy person. But the side effect is that the effect is so strong it overloads the heart and nervous system. On the other hand, the advantage is that within an hour, it leaves no trace in blood or organs."

At that, In-hyuk wondered. His body was dying anyway, so why bother hurrying it along with drugs?

As if reading his thoughts, Baek Si-hwan said,

"Ah, you're probably wondering why I'm giving this to you."

It was proof of how long Baek Si-hwan had stayed by In-hyuk's side and understood everything about him.

Though In-hyuk's pupils shook, he couldn't say anything.

"They want to know what happens if someone like you, terminally ill with cancer, is given this drug. How fortunate you're still useful until the end."

With that, Baek Si-hwan injected the syringe into the IV tube.

The red drug mixed with the clear solution, becoming paler as it flowed into In-hyuk's body.

The effects took no time.

Was this what it would feel like if a stake were hammered through the heart?

Pain coursed through his body as if every vessel was being torn apart down to the genetic level.

Bee-bee-beep— bee-bee-beep—

The sound of the heart monitor rang loudly.

"Keuh-uh-uh!"

The agony forced a scream so strong that even the emergency bell, which he'd been unable to press, was finally triggered.

But no one came into the hospital room.

His back, which had been too weak to even move, arched in reflex, and In-hyuk, red-eyed, glared at Baek Si-hwan.

The man, always so cold, was now beaming.

"I'll make good use of everything you left behind. Even your body."

"Keuh-uh! Hek—!"

In-hyuk's back fell to the bed.

The heart monitor, having been busy before, now let out one long, unbroken tone.

Beeeeeeeeep—

Even as his eyes stayed wide open in death, In-hyuk stared daggers at Baek Si-hwan.

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Darkness descended in an instant.

Strangely clear-headed in that place, In-hyuk found himself unable to move even a fingertip.

But that didn't last long.

Suddenly, he felt like he couldn't breathe, as though someone was forcing air into his mouth.

"Keuuh—!"

His locked mouth opened, and a violent scream erupted out.

Then, strange visions unfolded before his eyes.

"Aaaaagh!"

Even greater pain hammered his head than before. He screamed again and again, as if vomiting.

How much time had passed? His ragged breath grew steadier and his vision brightened.

A flood of light rushed in. As things slowly came into focus, an unfamiliar scene entered his view.

"Wh-where is this...? What were those things just now?"

This wasn't a hospital.

On a simple bed with black sheets and blanket.

Since it was his first time seeing this place, In-hyuk became confused.

"... A wedding?"

Just before his death, he'd seen something like a video passing before his eyes.

An unfamiliar woman in a wedding dress, wearing a cold expression, held his hand.

She looked anything but happy. After the ceremony words, the couple bowed to the officiant...

"Tae Seok-hyun and Lee Sun-hye?"

They were the eldest son and daughter-in-law of the second president of Taeshin Group, Tae Gun-seung.

But In-hyuk couldn't understand why he had memories of a wedding attended by that couple.

"... What's going on here?"

For some reason, his body—which couldn't move atop the hospital bed—now moved freely.

Rising from bed and stepping outside, he found himself in a spacious living room.

"Maybe I wasn't killed, but... kidnapped?"

He walked slowly toward the center of the room and noticed a large photo on one wall.

A man and woman, dressed in a tuxedo and wedding dress, had their arms linked, their faces expressionless.

It was the scene he'd remembered just now.

"Why am I in the picture? And next to me is... Tae Ju-ha?"

That was certainly Tae Seok-hyun's youngest daughter.

"What's...?"

Reeling backward in confusion, In-hyuk saw his reflection in a mirror set against another wall.

"Why do I look fine? More than that... I seem younger?"

Before death, Cancer had ravaged and emaciated his body. Now, he looked healthier than ever.

All his scars from countless battles were also gone.

"What on earth happened?"

Just then, a phone, wallet, car key, and employee badge on the dining table caught his eye.

The face and name on the badge were his.

But the company...

【Taeshin Asset Management, Equity Investment Team 3, Team Leader】

【Department Head Kang In-hyuk】

He reached for the unfamiliar phone. The lock opened with his fingerprint.

Missed calls and message notifications filled the screen. As he was about to check them, a calendar took up a portion of the main screen.

【February, 2025, XX】

"...2025? Not 2037?"

This was when he was 33—twelve years prior.

His confusion only deepened at this bizarre situation.

"Could I have... gone back to the past?"

He even checked the internet, but the date and year didn't change.

Searching up Taeshin Group brought up familiar headlines.

【Taeshin Trading begins construction of second super-tall building in Dubai...】

【Taeshin Energy aggressively pursues major European solar power project...】

【Taeshin Electronics SpaceU25 set to launch soon, pre-orders break 100 units...】

The headlines matched those from that period.

He had no choice but to accept it—he really had returned to the past.

But at this time, he hadn't married anyone.

He wasn't connected to a company called Taeshin Asset Management either.

Originally, he'd have been working on the security team of Taeshin Trading, Taeshin Group's holding company.

In fact, he had been one of the personal bodyguards assigned to Tae Seokho, his target for revenge.

"Tae Ju-ha got married last year, and the groom definitely... that's right. He had the same name as me. But my appearance—what's happened?"

He kept checking the mirror but saw no change. Fragmentary, foreign memories kept surfacing in his mind.

"Was that wedding memory I remembered earlier... from the original Kang In-hyuk?"

No other explanation came to mind.

At that moment, as various memories collided, Baek Si-hwan's wicked last smile resurfaced.

"I should have killed that bastard... No, wait. If this really is the past..."

Baek Si-hwan should exist at this point in time, too.

Deep distress followed.

Where had it all gone wrong...?

He had been a puppet dancing on a stage Baek Si-hwan had prepared.

Recalling what Baek Si-hwan said before death, it had not been a betrayal—he had belonged to and worked with the organization from the start.

Buzz— buzz—

His phone vibrated in his hand.

【Noh Dongjun, Equity Investment Team 2】

As he saw the name, a memory surfaced.

"Entry-level colleague...?"

It seemed to be the orientation scene at a big auditorium.

Kang In-hyuk had joined Taeshin Group through an open recruitment in 2018.

He was assigned to Taeshin Trading's sales team, while Noh Dongjun joined Taeshin Asset Management, a subsidiary of Taeshin Life.

They hadn't been particularly close.

But recently, In-hyuk had transferred from Taeshin Trading to the Equity Investment Team 3 at Taeshin Asset Management, so they'd occasionally seen each other and chatted.

So In-hyuk cautiously pressed the call button.

"... Hello?"

[Team Leader Kang! Aren't you coming to work?]

"... Work?"

[Are you sick? Hold on.]

He heard sounds as if Noh Dongjun was moving somewhere. Then his informal tone returned.

[Hey! Are you really sick?]

Unlike before, Noh Dongjun dropped the honorifics.

"... A little?"

[Sick enough to skip work? Your team's in chaos right now!]

"... Chaos?"

[The A2 client case that Team 1 leader dumped on you—the client just called to withdraw their money. You need to come and deal with this ASAP. Can't you really make it in?]

Not even grasping his own situation, he was faced with incomprehensible circumstances that only muddled his mind further.

"I get it. I'll hang up now."

As he set the phone down, another thought occurred.

"Wait. If I became Kang In-hyuk, Tae Ju-ha's husband... what happened to the original me?"

He quickly dialed his old phone number from those days.

After a few rings, it connected.

[Hello?]

But on the other end was a woman's voice.

"Is this Kang In-hyuk's... phone?"

[No, it's not.]

Click—

The call ended abruptly. He checked the number, but nothing was wrong.

"So what happened to my original self?"

It didn't take long for his thoughts to stall and circle in place.

In-hyuk threw off sweat-soaked pajamas, hastily pulled on a suit from the closet, grabbed his phone and wallet, and headed out.

Stepping out, he found himself in a luxury officetel in Hannam-dong. He caught a taxi and headed to the area around Gasan Digital Station where he used to live.

It was a multi-family house with seven households, including a rooftop room.

He went up to the third floor and entered the code on the door at the end of the narrow hallway.

Bee— bee— bee— bee—

The entrance was identical to the place he'd lived before.

But no matter how many times he tried, he only got a "wrong code" message.

"What's wrong with this code!"

Just then, an old man coming up the stairs saw In-hyuk and spoke.

"That place is empty... Isn't this the wrong house?"

"... It's empty? Since when?"

"It's been over two years now."

"..."

The old man shook his head and went inside, as if he found it strange.

Meanwhile, calls and messages kept coming in from Noh Dongjun and other unfamiliar names.