Former Mastermind To Chaebol Son-in-Law

Chapter 12

Hearing This and That

The publication party for the autobiography of KQ Group Chairman Kang Cheon-gyu proceeded smoothly, accompanied by the clamor of the attendees.

In-hyuk left his argument with Tae Ju-ha and wandered off alone to find a secluded spot.

'Baek Si-hwan, after Tae Seok-ho became chairman, stayed by his side as a close aide and leaked information to me. And when I needed him, he even delivered a fatal blow to Taeshin Group.'

From the start, Baek Si-hwan was never Tae Seok-ho's man.

Back then, he had approached In-hyuk expressing his desire to help, and he had indeed fulfilled a major role.

Of course, In-hyuk had experienced countless betrayals while taking over Philippine and Chinese organizations alongside Tae Seok-ho.

That was why he never trusted anyone easily—only after thorough investigation did he accept someone as one of his own.

Even so, there had never been any suspicious traces found with Baek Si-hwan.

'Unless he switched allegiances midway, it must mean he belonged to some faction from the very beginning.'

It wouldn't be an exaggeration to say they'd all been manipulated by some force working behind the scenes.

In that case, it was even more necessary to approach the matter carefully.

Especially, making the first approach to them openly was dangerous.

Therefore, it was necessary to rise to a position where they would approach you first.

'For those bastards to even notice me, surviving comes first, though...'

Bzz Bzz—

Just then, the phone in his pocket vibrated.

'So someone really did mess around with Tae Ju-ha's car?'

Displayed on the phone screen was a real-time dashcam video from the car.

It showed a man getting into the car and messing with something.

As soon as the man got in, he reached for the dashcam and pulled out the SD card.

In-hyuk furrowed his brow slightly.

However, this dashcam was a privately purchased unit that In-hyuk had installed himself, so even after removing the SD card, the footage was still uploaded in real time to his phone.

Meanwhile, the man inserted something into the car's USB connector and fiddled with it.

'This man... He's the KQ Group guard who was standing at the entrance.'

In-hyuk recalled catching a glimpse of him when he passed by earlier.

Given what had happened, he had thought Tae Ju-ha's death was Tae Seok-ho's doing.

But the one who actually moved was with KQ Group, which made no sense to him.

'Did Tae Ju-ha have any bad blood with someone from KQ Group? It'd be strange to call this Tae Seok-ho's instigation... Is there an underlying connection that hasn't come to light?'

He realized he had too little information about her.

Inside, the atmosphere of the venue was steadily heating up.

Amidst it all, In-hyuk turned his gaze toward the entrance. The man he saw on his phone re-entered the venue.

In-hyuk kept watch on him without drawing attention.

The man quietly stood near Kang Do-young, the only son of KQ Group Chairman Kang Cheon-gyu, who was beside the stage.

'Was he Kang Do-young's assigned bodyguard?'

Another possibility was confirmed.

Then Tae Ju-ha, after mingling with the guests, stepped away, and Kang Do-young followed her.

. . .

Tae Ju-ha, after meeting other CEOs and executives invited to the event, stepped toward a deserted area behind the garden to rest for a moment.

"It's been a while, Ju-ha."

Tae Ju-ha's brow twitched as she spotted Kang Do-young approaching from behind.

"..... Indeed. Executive Director Kang Do-young."

"Isn't that title a bit too stiff, considering our relationship?"

They were alumni of Korea University, once senior and junior in the business department.

"I can't think of any other title to use."

"Calling me 'sunbae' like in college would be fine."

"I'm not a college student anymore. And I'm a bit busy, so if you'll excuse me."

As she tried to leave, Kang Do-young quickly grabbed her wrist.

"What's got you so busy? You look like you just came out for a bit of a rest. Surely you have time for a chat."

"I don't think we have anything to talk about."

At Tae Ju-ha's chilly answer, Kang Do-young's lips curled into a smile.

"After a year apart, and you treat me like this?"

"Be that as it may, could you let go of my wrist?"

"Oh! I guess I got too happy to see you after so long and forgot to let go."

"....."

A short sigh escaped Tae Ju-ha's lips.

Kang Do-young, in turn, gave an even broader smile.

"I was thinking about asking how your married life is going, but you took off to New York right after the ceremony so I never had the chance."

"I don't think that's your business, executive director Kang."

"How about being single again? If you need help with anything, I could be your support."

Since college, Kang Do-young had been famous as KQ Group's heir.

Thanks to his wealth, there was almost nothing—women or otherwise—that he couldn't have his own way with.

But the one he'd never been able to bend to his will was Tae Ju-ha.

No matter the circumstances, as the illegitimate child of the Taeshin Group's eldest son, she never bowed her head among the heirs of second and third-generation chaebol.

That very fact had stoked Kang Do-young's competitive spirit for over a decade.

"I manage my affairs on my own. I don't need your help, executive director Kang."

"Don't you regret getting married? Honestly, you were forced into it because of your stepmother, weren't you? Wouldn't it be better to come stand by my side instead?"

A year ago, when news of Tae Ju-ha's marriage to Kang In-hyuk broke, she had received a similar offer from him.

But all Kang Do-young really wanted was the trophy of conquering Tae Ju-ha as a woman.

Of course, she knew this well, and had rejected him flatly.

"Given the setting, shouldn't you choose your words a little more carefully?"

"Why? Afraid rumors will start of you and me being involved?"

"Of course. That would be totally inappropriate for business."

"You only went to New York because you didn't want the marriage. Not to mention, because you wanted something in return."

It referred to her deal with her father, Tae Seok-hyun.

Thanks to that, after a year, Tae Ju-ha became the CEO of Taeshin Asset Management.

"You must have someone planted at Taeshin."

"No need. Anyone can figure that out seeing the big picture. More importantly, what's your answer to my proposal?"

"I have no plan to become single, nor to go to KQ. So, if you'll excuse me."

Tae Ju-ha, sighing again, tried to leave. The distance between them grew.

Then, with a sly smile that suddenly hardened, Kang Do-young reached for her shoulder.

Thwack—

But his hand was blocked by someone intervening from the side before it could touch her.

"Ah, excuse me."

It was In-hyuk.

Kang Do-young, awkwardly frozen mid-gesture, frowned.

"Have you come to keep your wife in check?"

He was clearly making a snide remark, fully aware of In-hyuk and Tae Ju-ha's relationship.

"I was passing by and got lost."

Perhaps because of the shamelessness of the reply, Kang Do-young's face scrunched up even further.

"Please exit that way. We're not done talking, so please give us some privacy."

"I must have interrupted your conversation without thinking."

"It's fine. We've said what needs to be said. Let's go back together."

Tae Ju-ha, apparently tired of his persistence, grabbed In-hyuk's arm.

"Ju-ha."

As Kang Do-young called out and reached for her again, In-hyuk stepped in front of him.

Kang Do-young glared coldly at In-hyuk.

"Don't you think it's disrespectful to keep this up with a woman who already has a husband?"

Kang Do-young's words became curt in clear annoyance.

"So you think being the Taeshin Group's son-in-law makes you special?"

"Hardly. And I don't think we're on terms to speak informally."

"... What?"

When In-hyuk also began speaking curtly, the tension thickened.

But In-hyuk wasn't the type to be intimidated.

"Considering you're KQ Group's only heir, executive director Kang Do-young, shouldn't you at least maintain some decorum?"

"What nonsense are you spouting—!"

"I know it all. Besides, given the situation, it's disrespectful to the person you're discussing marriage with, isn't it?"

Kang Do-young's face stiffened.

Talks had never been made public outside their families.

No matter how powerless, a son-in-law from the Taeshin Group shouldn't have known this.

"How did you...?"

"Seems my ears are wide open these days—I keep hearing all sorts of things. So, unless you want trouble, may we go now?"

For a moment, voices almost rose; but Kang Do-young, recalling the ongoing event nearby, held back.

"....."

In-hyuk gently nudged Tae Ju-ha's shoulder and left the spot.

Once they had put enough distance between themselves and the others, Tae Ju-ha looked back at In-hyuk.

"What were you thinking?"

"What do you mean?"

"You know perfectly well who Kang Do-young is! Why did you do that?"

After all, it was Kang Do-young—the KQ Group's heir.

Even if In-hyuk was under the Taeshin name and not KQ, he could face pressure in any number of ways.

"You need to stay in the chairman's good graces for the next year to hold onto your CEO position at Taeshin Asset Management, don't you? Isn't it unwise to cause trouble at an event like this?"

"That's...!"

"And if I hadn't intervened just now, would Executive Director Kang Do-young have backed off?"

Tae Ju-ha understood all too well how persistent Kang Do-young could be.

To some extent, he was one of the reasons she'd chosen to go to New York right after the wedding.

"... By the way, what was that you just said?"

"What do you mean?"

"That Executive Director Kang Do-young is already set to marry someone."

When families reach a certain level, you hear all sorts of rumors whether you like it or not.

Especially for the heirs of conglomerates, marriage gossip is always a hot topic.

Such dealings are kept as secret as possible because of their economic consequences, but nothing is perfectly hidden when big players are involved.

Yet Tae Ju-ha had never heard about Kang Do-young's upcoming marriage.

"It's true; and that's why he couldn't object just now."

She recalled Kang Do-young's reaction earlier.

"Who is he supposed to marry?"

"As far as I know, it's Baek Hae-na, the second daughter of WISE&WIRE."

"That Baek Hae-na, infamous for her nasty temper and power trips?"

She was notorious even among heirs of other conglomerates.

"That's right."

WISE&WIRE is a major media group created from the growth of the Hyunseon Ilbo newspaper.

Lately, it had changed its main name to W&W Days, absorbed broadcaster MBS, and established itself as a large corporation with subsidiaries across entertainment, studios, logistics, stock management, and more.

"Really? Where did you hear that?"

"I have my own information network."

"What, did you hire some ex-intelligence agency broker?"

In response, In-hyuk just smiled faintly.

"They're good at what they do."

"So, what if Kang Do-young tries something now?"

She sounded worried all over again.

"He'll be mindful of others watching. He won't make a move right away."

"How can you be so sure? You know what he's like."

Tae Ju-ha disliked Kang Do-young so much she even avoided facing him.

"The marriage with WISE&WIRE Group is at stake. If Baek Hae-na finds out about today, she won't let it slide."

"... Ah."

The bottom line: Kang Do-young needed the power of WISE&WIRE Group.

Then In-hyuk changed the subject.

"How long are you planning to stay here?"

By now, the event was nearly over and many people had already left.

Tae Ju-ha looked around.

Aside from the two of them, even the Taeshin Group family members had left after brief conversations.

"Shall we head back too?"

In-hyuk walked with her toward the car.

At the same time, his gaze shifted to the KQ Group bodyguard from the dashcam.

The man brought his left sleeve to his mouth, as if reporting to someone.

When In-hyuk approached the driver's seat, Tae Ju-ha cocked her head.

"You're driving yourself, even on the way back?"

"That's right. Is there a problem?"

"You really didn't have even a single drink inside?"

"It didn't seem like the right atmosphere for it."

Once he confirmed she had fastened her seatbelt in the passenger seat, he started the engine.

Instantly, a loud noise erupted from the car and the RPM shot up.

Vroooom—

His foot wasn't even on the accelerator. Suddenly, the car shot forward.