Former Mastermind To Chaebol Son-in-Law

Chapter 141 : Are You Serious?

Are You Serious?

The following afternoon.

Someone arrived at the executive floor of Taeshin Trading and kicked open the door to Tae Seok-ho's office.

"Tae Seok-ho—!"

It was Tae Seok-hyun, who had just returned from Incheon International Airport.

Tae Seok-ho, sitting calmly at his desk, didn't react at all at the sight of him.

In fact, it was almost dismissive as he turned his gaze to the monitor.

However, Tae Seok-hyun did not stop there and strode right up to him.

"What do you think you're doing right now? An emergency shareholders' meeting because father collapsed? Are you really going to go through with this?"

It was only then that Tae Seok-ho let out a short sigh and met his gaze.

"Are you asking because you really don't know what's going on?"

"Who's asking because they don't know? I'm saying how could you do this!"

"Do what? Call a shareholders' meeting because father collapsed? Or act for Taeshin's sake when the company is swaying just because father's fallen ill?"

Bang—

Tae Seok-ho slapped the desk as he stood, and Tae Seok-hyun flinched back momentarily.

"F-father could get up any time! Do you really think it's right to covet his position just because of this?"

"Was I the only one eyeing it?"

"Then you weren't?"

"Weren't you quietly accumulating shares behind father's back through what you did at Taeshin Electronics and pretending to be clean?"

Tae Seok-hyun's face twisted.

After all, that was another thing he'd done while building a slush fund.

When something that hadn't even come out at the last meeting was dragged into the open, he couldn't help but be shocked.

"And you pretend you're clean?"

"Do you even know anything about what you're talking about?"

In truth, Tae Seok-hyun had found nothing to pin Tae Seok-ho's corruption on.

Of course, his suspicions were stronger than anyone's, but he hadn't found any real evidence.

Tae Seok-ho had been thorough as executive vice president at the head office.

"You..."

"Don't do this here. Go home and think about your future. Ah, with the shareholding you worked so hard for, you won't be starving."

Tae Seok-hyun's face flushed a deep red.

"When father wakes up, do you think he'll just let you be?"

"What if he doesn't?"

"Grrr..."

"Father has kept the chairman's position at Taeshin for too long. Don't you think it's time he took a break?"

"And you call that talking?"

A long sigh escaped Tae Seok-ho's mouth.

"If you have nothing more to say, please leave. Unlike some people, I'm not exactly free right now."

"You bastard?!"

In the end, Tae Seok-hyun flew at Tae Seok-ho as if to grab him by the collar.

But Tae Seok-ho's security guards entered at that moment and grabbed Tae Seok-hyun by both arms.

"Do you know who you're touching? Let go of me!"

Tae Seok-ho, who had been watching the scene coldly, snorted.

"There's nothing you can do in this situation. Just wait quietly. Unless, of course, you want me to take away your children's places as well."

"Are you threatening me?!"

"It's not a threat. It's advice. At your age, you should at least have some dignity."

At that, the security guards withdrew at Tae Seok-ho's signal.

Of course, with their grip, Tae Seok-hyun had no choice but to be dragged out.

The door, which had been opened the whole time, was quietly closed again by Reina Blackwood, who had been watching the scene.

"It was noisier than I expected."

"That's because father spoiled his first son too much."

"By the way, we got word from the hospital. Tae Ju-ha's gone to the UK."

Tae Seok-ho tilted his head at the unexpected news.

"The UK? Suddenly?"

"Lumen Holdings is in the UK, right? She probably went because of the Taeshin Trading shares they hold."

Lumen Holdings owned about 4.83 million shares of Taeshin Trading, making up 2.96% of the total—one of the major shareholders.

Even though this was one of the scenarios they had worried about, Tae Seok-ho showed no reaction.

"She went to ask the chairman for his support, I see. But is that even possible?"

"We think so too. From the perspective of an overseas private equity fund, it would be better to support the next CEO than Chairman Tae Gun-seung, if profit is the priority."

"She must be anxious. Honestly, she's better than her father. At least the daughter is trying to do something; all her father does is come here and argue with me."

Reina smiled slightly at those words.

"Are you envious?"

"I almost wish she were my daughter. If that were the case, even Kang In-hyuk wouldn't be able to defy me like this."

What he regretted most wasn't Tae Ju-ha, but Kang In-hyuk.

After this was wrapped up and if he became chairman of Taeshin Group, the first person he'd kick out would be Kang In-hyuk.

At the same time, Kang In-hyuk's words flashed through his mind.

【There's also the option of selling Taeshin Asset Management's shares to Greenbyte Labs. Or selling them to AMK Partners and increasing Taeshin Asset Management's funds.】

Even thinking about it now, it felt arrogant.

Yet it was not something that could be dismissed.

He was worried about what would happen if Kang In-hyuk really cut all ties between Taeshin Asset Management and AMK Partners on his way out.

Reina could see what Tae Seok-ho was thinking.

"You know Kang In-hyuk can't stay here. Even if you let him, as the future chairman, he could do more harm than good."

His old self might have been different, but now Kang In-hyuk was both cynical and aggressive.

One result of that was Tae Seok-hyun, who had had such a solid footing as CEO of Taeshin Electronics, getting ousted in an instant.

If Tae Seok-ho had left even a trace behind, he might have ended up like Tae Seok-hyun.

Of course, with positions reversed, things may have turned out differently, but there was no need to keep someone poisonous by his side.

"I already know. You don't have to stress that."

Still, his pride did not allow him to readily agree.

* * *

A few days passed.

In-hyuk was still at the hospital in Flagstaff where Tae Gun-seung was hospitalized.

He sat on a bench outside the hospital, scanning the surroundings with a relaxed expression.

"They're really not coming back?"

He was referring to those who had tried to approach the hospital with murderous intent a while ago, only to retreat.

Judging by the circumstances, it was clear they were with Kooou.

He couldn't help but wonder just how confident Tae Seok-ho and Kooou were about this emergency shareholders' meeting, to have made such a decision.

"Did they gather even the chairman's friendly shares?"

There were a considerable number of individual shareholders besides the corporate ones.

If they had received proxy rights from just the major shareholders holding 1% or more, they would wield significant influence.

That was the scenario In-hyuk could surmise for Tae Seok-ho.

Just then, Song Tae-ho, Tae Gun-seung's secretary, called.

[The chairman is asking for you.]

After a brief call, he went up to the ward and saw the doctor and nurses exiting.

Passing by them, he entered and found Tae Gun-seung sitting up in bed.

"Did you have them agree to say you just woke up?"

"It was about time I get up anyway. Now I'll be able to see more clearly what Seok-ho does."

"Are you really thinking of handing over the company to a foreign enterprise?"

That was the worst possible scenario for Tae Seok-ho.

Of course, In-hyuk didn't think Tae Gun-seung would do that for petty reasons, but, given the current circumstances, there weren't many options.

"I can't say it's a zero possibility."

"For someone saying that, you seem rather calm. Did you perhaps hide shares elsewhere?"

"That's impossible now. No matter who I am, there are limits."

Even the shares he had hidden overseas were worth over two trillion won at current prices.

It was an amount amassed over a long period, so it wouldn't have been that much at the time, but still far from insignificant.

Just as Tae Gun-seung said, if he tried to hide any more, it would have left traces, and Tae Seok-ho would have noticed.

"That's true. So what will you do, really?"

Tae Gun-seung had now officially revealed he was awake. With that news spreading, public opinion in Korea would heat up.

But he hadn't given a proper answer, which frustrated In-hyuk.

After a moment's thought, Tae Gun-seung spoke seriously.

"Have you contacted AMK Partners?"

Like Ju-ha, who was visiting Lumen Holdings, In-hyuk had decided to talk with AMK Partners as well.

Of course, In-hyuk was substantively managing both companies.

However, there were other ideas, and since he could not reveal his identity, he kept answering vaguely.

"I've put in a request. But as you can imagine, it may not be easy for them to give a positive answer."

"Hm... Then can you arrange a meeting with branch manager Norman McGrath? It would be even better if you could get CEO Gordon Grimes."

At that moment, In-hyuk looked at him seriously.

"... Are you serious?"

"Would I make that kind of request as a joke?"

A meeting at a time like this between Chairman Tae Gun-seung and a foreign investment company could itself be an issue.

Tae Gun-seung definitely knew that. Even so, requesting it outright meant he'd made up his mind about something.

"It could stain everything you and Taeshin Group have built."

"What makes you think I'd do some transaction with AMK Partners?"

In-hyuk looked at him meaningfully before replying.

"I can guess, but it's not something I should say myself."

"Is that so? Anyway, can you do it?"

"I'll try contacting them."

"I'd appreciate it if they could come here, if possible. As you can see, I'm convalescing right now."

With that, In-hyuk left the hospital room.

He stood by the window at the end of the corridor, looking out.

People were moving about, but it felt silent and lonely.

That look on Tae Gun-seung's face just now was one of letting everything go.

"Is he exhausted...?"

As he muttered, his phone vibrated in his pocket. A message from Go Mi-ah via Ghost Link.

【Red Witch : Sent you all the nearby airport immigration records. I even used my vacation days for this. Now I'm going to sleep, so do NOT wake me up!】

Her words were full of annoyance.

In-hyuk checked the file she'd sent with the message.

Just then, another call came in.

【Raven】

It was Raven Delacroix from SGA in Hong Kong.

Making sure no one was around, In-hyuk moved to a secluded spot and answered.

"What brings you to call?"

[Did you anticipate this emergency shareholders' meeting at Taeshin Group?]

To her, In-hyuk was HERMIT, who provided investment advice to SGA.

And previously, on In-hyuk's advice, SGA had transferred their shares in Taeshin Group to AMK Partners, so she was naturally curious about the situation.

"I was anticipating it."

[It doesn't seem like a bad gamble. Of course, with our SolarView shares, we're making enough profit, but given the current state, could we not have laid hands on a pretty decent Taeshin Group affiliate?]

Raven Delacroix was essentially contacting him to chastise HERMIT (In-hyuk) for a possibly mistaken decision.

"Which side do you think the situation is favoring?"

[Obviously executive vice president Tae Seok-ho. Other major shareholders and the board would too, wouldn't they? Besides, since Chairman Tae Gun-seung still hasn't gained consciousness, it's obvious who wins.]

At her greedy question, In-hyuk quietly sighed so she wouldn't hear over the phone.

"How much do you estimate Chairman Tae Gun-seung's shareholding at?"

[Officially, about 8%. Including shares under others' names, maybe just under 15%.]

"It's over 20%. Also, Chairman Tae Gun-seung has regained consciousness."

He heard an intake of breath from Raven Delacroix.

[Are you serious?]

"Would I lie about something like that? If you're going to jump into the fray without solid information, it's better to secure the profits in front of you. I recommend focusing on the projects currently in progress, rather than chasing empty hopes."

No more light answers came from her end.

"I'll be passing on other investment info soon. Please make sure things proceed according to the plan in the attached file."

[...]

"Do you understand?"

[... I understand.]

The call ended.

In-hyuk shook his head as he set down the phone. It was the same with SGA and other companies.

People moving only for money...

Yet all of them were in the palm of In-hyuk's hand.

Chapter 142 : There's No Gain Without Loss

There's No Gain Without Loss

【America, Chairman Tae Gun-seung of Taeshin Group, who had been hospitalized in a △△ hospital in Arizona, has regained consciousness! However, since his precise health condition is uncertain, it is unclear how he will respond at the upcoming emergency Taeshin Group shareholders' meeting...】

【Taeshin Group Chairman Tae Gun-seung regains consciousness while hospitalized in Arizona! His exact health status has not yet been confirmed, and he has made no separate announcement regarding the emergency Taeshin Group shareholders' meeting...】

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National Intelligence Service, Third Deputy Director's Office.

Im Deok-chang was busily checking the incoming news articles.

"This time, Tae Seok-ho made a pretty decent decision."

There were only three days left until the emergency Taeshin Group shareholders' meeting.

On top of that, enough shares had been gathered that, even with Chairman Tae Gun-seung awake, it wouldn't change much.

"If things keep going like this, there won't be any problems."

It was a situation where he could relax a little.

Of course, there was still the issue with the agents who had failed their raid at Bellbyte Technology.

The current first deputy director, Choo Jae-min, was looking into the matter, and if their trail were to be discovered during the investigation, things could become very difficult to handle.

bzzz—bzzz—

His phone vibrated on the desk. The screen displayed the name "USAGI".

It was Reina Blackwood, who was with Tae Seok-ho.

[Hyottoko. There's a problem.]

At her very grave voice, Im Deok-chang's face twisted in a grimace.

"I thought things were going smoothly?"

[Norman McGrath from AMK Partners visited the hospital. I suspect he made contact with Chairman Tae Gun-seung.]

"What?! Why those two? Don't tell me..."

AMK Partners was the second largest shareholder of Taeshin Trading after Chairman Tae Gun-seung.

They held about 1.4 million shares, which was 8.21% of the total.

If you combined that with Tae Gun-seung's roughly 20% holding, it made 28%.

Of course, that still didn't reach the shares Tae Seok-ho had secured, but with a new ally for Tae Gun-seung, other shares might get on the move as well.

[Isn't it as you're expecting?]

"Are they meeting now?"

[I couldn't check directly because of security guards. And while it's possible Kang In-hyuk is involved given their relationship with AMK Partners, looking at the circumstances...]

"The odds favor Tae Gun-seung over Kang In-hyuk. But what were you doing until Norman McGrath got there? Weren't you surveilling the airport for emergencies?"

The two making contact was not supposed to happen.

That such an unimaginable event had occurred left Im Deok-chang bewildered.

[It looks like they avoided the airport.]

"They used the road? Could it be that our agents were discovered?"

[I don't think so... I'll report again once I have a better grasp of the situation.]

With a deep sigh, Im Deok-chang ended the call.

Immediately, he was filled with mixed thoughts.

If AMK Partners decided to side with Chairman Tae Gun-seung, the response from foreign companies holding shares would not be positive.

Yet Tae Gun-seung would surely know this. If so...?

"Tae Gun-seung, is he really trying to push all his shares to AMK Partners? No... Even if he's been driven to the edge, would he do something so reckless?"

That would be the absolute worst outcome for Tae Seok-ho and the Hongu Society.

Moreover, it would be tantamount to Tae Gun-seung abandoning Taeshin.

The odds were slim, but an uneasy feeling kept growing within him.

He called out to Choi Dong-hoon, who was waiting outside.

"Find out if any outsiders have visited Lumen Holdings or Orbis Investment recently. And also check whether any associates from those companies are scheduled to enter the country before the Taeshin Group shareholders' meeting."

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At the same time.

Flagstaff, Arizona, America—it was morning.

In the hospital, Tae Gun-seung sat up in his bed, facing Norman McGrath.

"So, Chairman, are you asking whether AMK Partners could secure Taeshin Group's management rights?"

This was Norman McGrath's question.

There were only three people in the hospital room. In-hyuk stood quietly off to the side.

"Yes, that's right. If possible, I will delegate my shares to AMK Partners. Of course, this doesn't come without conditions. Regardless of my sons, I would appreciate it if, together with employment succession, you could guarantee positions for my grandchildren."

At this, Norman McGrath exchanged a serious glance between Tae Gun-seung and In-hyuk before responding.

"It's not a bad offer for us, but there are still a lot of questions."

"Please, go ahead."

"I assume this is because of the upcoming emergency shareholders' meeting. If your sons are the problem, couldn't you put your grandchildren, who are already involved in management, at the forefront? As far as I know, several are participating."

He was referring to Tae Su-jin, Tae Yeo-jun, Tae Seung-hyun, and Tae Ju-ha.

Since he'd made the retention of their positions a condition, Norman McGrath found it difficult to understand the current situation.

"Do you really think any of those kids can stand against Executive Vice President Tae Seok-ho?"

"Frankly, I think it would be hard. But from the viewpoint of the board and majority shareholders, it might be easier to convince one of your grandchildren than the slippery Executive Vice President Tae Seok-ho."

Tae Gun-seung's brow twitched at this answer.

"That sounds like you're saying I should sacrifice one of my grandchildren to keep control."

Norman McGrath held up his hands.

"I can see how it might sound like that. What I mean is that, even by such methods, you could buy yourself some time. Admittedly, it would mean deceiving your partner companies, but with the urgency of the upcoming shareholders' meeting, you might need a breather."

In the end, his point remained the same.

Tae Gun-seung couldn't relax his stiff expression.

It wasn't out of anger. The truth was, he had thought along similar lines himself.

But perhaps he didn't want to degrade himself so far, so he hadn't spoken it aloud.

"I want to do as I decided."

Norman McGrath, upon hearing his determined answer, let out a shallow breath.

"In the end, this isn't something I can decide here. I need to relay the conditions."

"You mean you need to ask CEO Gordon Grimes. So when can I expect your response? There's not much time, you know."

It was three days by Korean time, but with the time difference, only two in America.

"I'll go ask right away."

With that, Norman McGrath left the room. In-hyuk watched him silently.

Soon, Tae Gun-seung's gaze drifted toward In-hyuk.

"Kang, what do you think—will this work out?"

"To be honest, I think it will be difficult."

"Is it because you're uncertain whether the other companies with shares will support AMK Partners?"

"That's one reason. Also, I think Executive Vice President Tae Seok-ho may have predicted this as well."

By now, word of Norman McGrath's hospital visit would have reached Kooou.

They would be running all sorts of calculations, likely including this situation.

'Originally, I was just going to sort things out internally at Taeshin Group and leave them as mere figureheads... In the end, it's come to this.'

Just then, the hospital room door opened again, and Norman McGrath came back in.

"I conveyed your message, and the answer is yes."

The decision had been made.

Of course, from Tae Gun-seung's standpoint, it wasn't unconditionally good.

In the end, it meant handing Taeshin Group's management to an overseas company.

"That's good news. Then let me ask again: Can AMK Partners actually secure management control?"

It was the original question.

Only a firm answer from Norman McGrath would formalize this transaction.

"The CEO said it's possible."

"Hoo... I see. Then I'll prepare the proxy over the shares at once. Director Song, can you come in for a moment?"

"....."

Calling in Song Tae-ho, Tae Gun-seung again spoke up while waiting.

"CEO Gordon Grimes graciously accepted my terms."

The existing owner family would inevitably become an obstacle once management shifted hands.

Even so, AMK Partners had accepted much more willingly than expected.

"Our CEO says there's no gain without some loss."

"True. I suppose my demands are a loss for AMK. It wasn't an easy decision for them."

"But it's still a big gain for us."

Soon, Song Tae-ho brought in the proxy over the shares paperwork.

Without the slightest hesitation, Tae Gun-seung took it and signed.

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Thud—

A marble chess piece in the shape of a horse hit the wall and bounced across the floor.

The one who threw it was Tae Seok-ho.

"And you call that news?!"

His secretary and aide, Reina Blackwood, had just delivered news from America.

"It's an unfortunate situation, but nothing has changed much."

"And what if other leeches rally to AMK's side?"

He was concerned about the shares held by Lumen Holdings and Orbis Investment.

If those were combined too, the total would exceed 35%, making the 31% Tae Seok-ho himself had secured insufficient.

Of course, he had already aligned with other friendly majority shareholders, but you could never guarantee they wouldn't flip when push came to shove.

"It'll all be decided in two days. That's too little time for AMK Partners to reach an agreement with the other two."

"But what if they do manage to reach an agreement? If those guys unite around AMK Partners and take control—then what?!"

"....."

Reina did not answer immediately.

This made Tae Seok-ho feel even more stifled.

"The old man's gone crazy. And to do it with no one else but those guys. Selling my Taeshin's shares to a foreign company?!"

At this point, he no longer referred to him as father or chairman.

"Someone might hear you from outside. Please calm yourself."

"Calm down? And whose fault do you think this is?!"

Tae Seok-ho picked up another ornament and threw it at her this time—not at the wall, but aiming right at her.

Thwap—

But Reina caught it in front of her face, like fielding a baseball.

"Getting worked up won't change anything."

"Are you trying to lecture me now?"

"It's advice. Also, we're already keeping close surveillance on those two companies. If anything goes wrong, we'll try to stop it as best we can."

Fuming, Tae Seok-ho twitched the corner of his mouth at her explanation.

"Can you guarantee it?"

"Would things change if I made big promises? And this is a situation you brought on yourself, Executive Vice President. So you have to keep pushing ahead without stopping, no matter what."

Tae Seok-ho's face twisted in anger.

As she said, he had chosen not to deal with Tae Gun-seung and to force through an emergency shareholders' meeting. If he failed now, he would have nowhere left to stand.

"This really is a damned situation."

"I expect AMK Partners will use the media as much as possible in the remaining time. So please make sure the other major shareholders don't waver."

"..... I'll do that."

With this response, Tae Seok-ho sat down, exhaling a breath full of rage.

Chapter 143 ·Isn't this too much work for us?

Isn't this too much work for us?

【Taeshin Group Emergency Shareholders' Meeting D—1. Who will be the next CEO? The fate of Taeshin Group, one of Korea's leading corporations, has yet to be decided... Public

attention from countless shareholders and citizens is focused, with rumors that even overseas companies are jumping in...】

【Shaken Taeshin Group, who will lead the next management? Recently, Taeshin Group saw a record-breaking volume of stock trading as mismanagement and inefficiency at Taeshin Electronics came to light, shocking many. The company is now in a state of calm before the storm internally, and is drawing major attention from overseas economies as well...】

【Owner risk strikes Taeshin Group as well! Experts analyzed that the effects of family-run management are significant at subsidiaries like Taeshin Trading, Electronics, Construction, Life, and Heavy Industries... There's major attention as to whether this emergency shareholders' meeting will help overcome such problems...】

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In-hyuk was still at the hospital in Flagstaff.

From time to time, he checked the situation at the nearby Bellbyte Technology plant, but never strayed far from Tae Gun-seung's side.

"Mister Kang, aren't you going back to Korea?"

By contrast, Tae Gun-seung, still sitting on the bed, asked, as if curious at his actions.

"Would it change anything if I did?"

"So you're not interested in who'll take over Taeshin Group?"

"I'm just a division director."

A small chuckle slipped from Tae Gun-seung's lips.

"If I'd known this would happen, maybe I should have put you in charge of head office or an entire affiliate, not just made you a division director. That way you would've jumped into this war, even if you didn't want to."

"If that's the case, I would've refused."

"Aren't your answers a bit too cut-and-dried?"

Perhaps Tae Gun-seung's health had improved; he seemed more at ease as he spoke.

"More importantly, are you really all right?"

Yesterday, Norman McGrath had left for America after receiving the proxy over the shares from him.

It was as if Tae Gun-seung had fully withdrawn from the Taeshin Group emergency shareholders' meeting, so In-hyuk asked out of concern.

"Do you think I'd regret it now?"

"You might."

"It would be ridiculous to have lingering regrets about something I already let go."

Bzzz— bzzz—

Just then, In-hyuk's phone vibrated.

【Norman: The purchase contract with BlueForce has been signed at 3.2 billion dollars. I'll proceed with the rest after the Taeshin Group emergency shareholders' meeting.】

This was a matter ongoing until Norman McGrath visited the hospital.

Since BlueForce had originally been in charge of AMK Partners' security, they chose to purchase instead of replace.

In-hyuk nodded in understanding.

"I'll just step out and take a call."

Out in the corridor, after confirming no one was around, In-hyuk called Noah Vantrail.

[Yo~ boss!]

"No problems on your end?"

[Well, except your wife looked depressed when she went back to Korea.]

Currently, Noah Vantrail was secretly assigned to protect Tae Ju-ha.

Tae Ju-ha had flown to England to meet the CEO of Lumen Holdings, got refused, and then returned to Korea.

"So those guys aren't after her anymore, huh. And thanks for calling in my place yesterday."

He was referring to when Norman McGrath called Gordon Grimes at Tae Gun-seung's suggestion.

In-hyuk had been with Tae Gun-seung at the time.

There was no way Gordon Grimes could have spoken with Norman McGrath.

Noah Vantrail stepped in for In-hyuk.

Of course, it was obvious what decision Tae Gun-seung would make, and they could predict the likely conversation.

[Honestly, I didn't expect you'd ask me to pass along that decision. But it's not like it was impossible.]

"It's not easy living a double life."

[So, boss, you're not coming to Korea for the shareholders' meeting?]

"No need, really. Plus, given I need to keep an eye on things at Bellbyte, it's more convenient for me to stay here."

Noah's tongue, clicking in annoyance, echoed through the receiver.

[Tch—! Isn't this too much work for just us? Yu-geon and Ban are exhausted, too.]

"I pay you enough, don't I?"

[I'd complain if you paid us less.]

"Hang in there."

After ending the call, In-hyuk opened the Ghost Link app on his phone.

【Dorian: Departed for Korea.】

【Kael: Arrived in Korea.】

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Night deepened.

Now, in about twelve hours, the Taeshin Group emergency shareholders' meeting would be held.

Meanwhile, Reina Blackwood visited a fishing spot on the outskirts of Gyeonggi Province.

Inside, Im Deok-chang had arrived earlier and was waiting.

"Everything prepared?"

"We've secured 69 million shares. That's about 43% of the total."

Normally, shareholder turnout at shareholders' meetings is about 70%. Emergency meetings tend toward lower turnout.

Compared to such statistics, they'd secured a significant amount.

Of course, Im Deok-chang knew this and nodded, a touch of satisfaction on his face.

"I see it was worth informing major shareholders about Tae Gun-seung's situation."

"No matter how close someone is, when money's at stake, they can't just stick by a chairman who could pass away any day."

"Exactly—people keep stock to make money."

"By the way, have you still not identified the shareholders of the missing shares from last time?"

In the process of tracking Taeshin Trading's shareholders, there were about 27 million shares whose owners were unaccounted for.

A total of 21 people, holding a combined 16.6% stake.

From their position of already securing 43%, it was essential to find those shares in case of an unexpected twist.

"We still haven't determined if those are all overseas nominee shares."

"You don't think just one person holds them all, do you?"

"Judging from how scattered the registration dates are in the public records, that's unlikely. Plus, those shares are worth more than 3 trillion won. How could just one person hold that much?"

That amount would make someone the second-largest shareholder of Taeshin Group, after the shares allegedly held by Chairman Tae Gun-seung under borrowed names.

If one person held them, surely the National Intelligence Service's information network would have been able to discover the identity.

Still, Reina was nervous, feeling those shares could become a major variable.

"If it was just one or two people, maybe, but it's strange that we can't identify any of them."

"It could be nominee assets secured by foreign states or funds. If so, not only us, but the other guys are in the same situation."

"What if AMK Partners manage to find them? You know that would turn the tables."

Tae Gun-seung's shares had been transferred over via proxy.

Officially, AMK Partners held 28.54% of the shares.

If they acquired the unidentified shares, their stake would surpass 45%.

That would mean Tae Seok-ho failed in his bid for management control.

"Let's not get ahead of ourselves. Everyone knows what's at stake here. But the odds are slim. The emergency meeting is now less than a day away."

A tense silence settled.

Reina quickly calmed her excitement.

"... I'm sorry."

Im Deok-chang sighed deeply at her reaction.

"This project isn't just important to you. So try to stay calm and keep a cool head."

"....."

After a brief silence, they went their separate ways.

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At the same time.

Tae Seok-ho was sitting in a traditional Korean pub built in a hanok style outside Seoul.

After a while, the door opened and a man walked in.

"You're here, Chairman Kang."

It was Kang Cheon-gyu, chairman of KQ Group.

Tae Seok-ho rose and sat opposite him as Kang approached.

"With the meeting so close, you must be busy."

"We're almost done wrapping things up."

Tae Seok-ho poured Kang a drink, and the two raised their glasses in silence.

In the quiet, Kang spoke first.

"You asked to see me urgently. What's the reason?"

He was eager to get to the point.

Sensing this, Tae Seok-ho lowered his glass and got straight to business.

"To be blunt, sir, I need your shares in Taeshin Trading."

KQ Distribution owned 13.38 million shares, or 2.89%.

They weren't acquired recently, but held from when KQ Distribution's founder and first chairman, Kang Gil-seok, first bought in—long before Taeshin Trading grew as big as it had.

Now, their value had increased dozens of times.

"Are you saying you want to be given authority over those shares, Executive Vice President Tae?"

With the emergency shareholders' meeting right around the corner, it wasn't hard for Kang to understand his intention.

"That's correct."

Kang fell into thought.

This wasn't just about any company, but about Korea's leading corporation and its next CEO, hinging on a card like that.

So it was hard to immediately grant his request.

"Hm... What do I stand to gain from this?"

That was, above all, the key issue.

"I intend to offer you something you need."

"For me?"

"Kang In-hyuk. Your son."

At that reply, Kang leaned back and poured himself another drink.

"To be honest, he never agreed, no matter what conditions I offered. Do you really think you can make it happen?"

Tae Seok-ho smiled faintly.

"It will be possible after I become the CEO of Taeshin Group."

"How?"

"No matter how talented Director Kang In-hyuk is, he's still inside Taeshin's fence. Think of the orders I could give him."

A question for a question.

Kang Cheon-gyu understood what was really being said.

"You mean you'll sideline him?"

"If there's nothing for him to do at the company, he'll take action on his own. Well, I know it's a petty move. But can we really keep letting a member of another company's bloodline work inside?"

"But even so, that wouldn't completely sever the connection with Taeshin Group, would it?"

After all, Kang In-hyuk was Tae Ju-ha's husband.

"That part is beyond my control. But if KQ and Taeshin join forces in advance, it should be good for both of us."

If Kang In-hyuk left Taeshin obediently as Tae Seok-ho said, it wouldn't be a problem.

But Kang Cheon-gyu's thoughts didn't stop there.

"As you know, Director Kang's skills and network are the talk of the town. Even if not KQ, there are plenty of companies eager to snap him up. AMK Partners, for example, is at the top of that list."

Tae Seok-ho fell silent.

"... Sorry, but I can't make any guarantees that far. In the end, it's up to you to win Director Kang's heart."

"Then what do I get out of this?"

The conversation circled around without progress.

Eventually, Tae Seok-ho cautiously asked,

"Is there something else you'd like?"

Kang Cheon-gyu didn't need long to answer.

"I'd like to add one more condition: the exclusive import and sale rights of Maison LTwoa in East Asia from Taeshin Department Store."

Maison LTwoa was a famous luxury fashion brand from Europe, and had been growing rapidly since last year.

It had yet to make a full-scale Asian debut, but Taeshin Department Store was negotiating a contract.

Tae Seok-ho furrowed his brow slightly.

"That's an unexpected condition."

"A businessman should do business, shouldn't he?"

Maison LTwoa's anticipated domestic annual profit was 300 billion won; if expanded across Asia, the profit could multiply several times.

Tae Seok-ho knew about this from the management reports.

So, to simply delegate authority over the shares, not even acquire them, felt like a huge loss.

Under the table, he clenched his fist out of sight.

Chapter 144 ·Let's Not Raise Our Voices

Let's Not Raise Our Voices

The atmosphere in the restaurant's private room grew heavy. In that tension, Kang Cheon-gyu replied calmly.

"If you're not willing, you don't have to do it. As for me, I have nothing to lose in the current situation."

Tae Seok-ho, who had been lost in thought, weighed his options intensely.

He debated whether to use a contract worth 300 billion won per year as stock lending fees.

However, in the current situation, he was the one with regrets. He wouldn't be at ease unless he gathered even one more share.

With that, he picked up the liquor bottle and refilled Kang Cheon-gyu's glass.

"No, I'll do as you say. But I ask that there won't be any circumstances that would make the written proxy over the shares uncomfortable for me."

The proxy that was written last held legal effect.

Of course, Tae Seok-ho didn't believe Kang Cheon-gyu would play games with that, but he needed to prepare in case of any unforeseen situations.

"I'll make sure there won't be any cause for concern."

Afterwards, the deal was concluded, and the proxy documents were prepared—of course, on the condition of handing over the contract for Maison LTwoa that was underway at Taeshin Department Store.

Only after both had stamped the documents did Tae Seok-ho let out a relieved smile.

"Honestly, it stings to hand over the Maison LTwoa deal, but I'll bear with it, thinking it's for both our benefit."

"I trust things will go smoothly for you as well, Executive Vice President."

They clinked glasses again. After chatting about this and that for quite a while, they left the bar only at midnight.

Tae Seok-ho climbed into his car and departed first.

Kang Cheon-gyu received his phone from Noh Geun-cheol, who was next to him.

After a few rings, the other party picked up.

[Yes, Chairman Kang.]

The call was with Kang In-hyuk.

"I've just handed over the proxy to Executive Vice President Tae Seok-ho. You always said it didn't concern you, but I thought you should at least be informed."

It was the content that Tae Seok-ho had passed on to Kang Cheon-gyu previously.

However, contrary to his worry, In-hyuk sounded completely indifferent.

[It's not something I need to care about. Nothing will change even if I do.]

He was still nonchalant. Kang Cheon-gyu let out a sigh.

"Seeing Executive Vice President Tae Seok-ho going this far, it looks like he's confident about winning at the shareholders' meeting. Even then, do you still think you can stay at Taeshin?"

[You haven't given up yet, have you?]

"How could I? Honestly, I thought you might switch sides if I offered you shares, but you don't budge an inch...."

[I've told you before, but I have no interest in KQ.]

"Even so, I won't give up."

A sigh could be heard from In-hyuk on the other end of the line.

[Anyway, thank you for letting me know.]

"Right. I'll see you next time."

The call ended like that. Kang Cheon-gyu got into the car parked in front.

In the passenger seat, his secretary Noh Geun-cheol turned to ask.

"It seems it didn't work out again this time."

"He's just too stubborn. Why does he insist on the hard road, leaving the easy path behind... even going aboard a ship that might sink."

His voice was filled with regret.

"I suppose he's just like the chairman."

"Like me? Am I that stubborn?"

"You're also quite headstrong, Chairman."

"Ha—!"

With their conversation, the car headed toward his residence in Hanam, Gyeonggi Province.

* * *

The next day, the main auditorium at Taeshin Trading's head office.

Before noon, a crowd of people was coming in from outside.

Tae Ju-ha watched the scene from a slight distance from the auditorium entrance.

"... How do you think it will go?"

The question was directed at Heo Yu-rim, her secretary, who stood beside her.

Heo Yu-rim was also deep in thought about the emergency shareholders' meeting.

Adding to that was the frustrating experience a few days prior when she and Ju-ha had visited Lumen Holdings and returned with only a vague answer.

[We'll decide based on the flow that benefits us.]

That was the message relayed by an employee from Dorian Dusk, the CEO of Lumen Holdings.

In the end, it was impossible to know what decision they would make.

And currently, the mood for the shareholders' meeting was very troubled.

"To be honest... the momentum is heavily shifted toward Executive Vice President Tae Seok-ho's side."

"It's as I thought, isn't it?"

Not only Ju-ha, but others could predict as much.

There were rumors that Tae Seok-ho's faction had secured a huge number of shares.

Already, the executives aligned with Tae Seok-ho seemed lighthearted in demeanour.

Then, as someone influential entered, the hall was filled with a stir.

"That's Dorian Dusk, CEO of Lumen Holdings! He came all the way himself for the shareholders' meeting?"

"Kael Morburn from Orbis Investment is right behind him!"

Both entered, accompanied by their secretarial staff and security guards.

Recognizing them, rumors spread throughout the crowd.

After all, they were famous private equity CEOs in Europe, the Middle East, and Africa.

But the commotion didn't end with just those two.

"That's Norman McGrath from AMK!"

Everyone was shocked.

Three world-renowned private equity firms had gathered for Taeshin Group's shareholders' meeting.

At the same time, those in Tae Seok-ho's faction were struck with a mix of surprise and tension.

AMK Partners held as much as 8.21% of Taeshin Trading's shares.

Furthermore, it was rumored they sided against Tae Seok-ho, making them anything but welcome.

In the meantime, attendees went through share verification before heading inside.

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Tae Seok-ho was sitting backstage behind the auditorium. Then, an employee hurried in and reported the situation.

Tae Seok-ho's expression hardened and he sighed.

"They all personally came... So, they really want to go all out?"

At his side, Reina Blackwood offered her opinion.

"Thanks to your efforts at the last minute, Executive Vice President, you've secured up to 45%. No matter how much foreign companies try, their combined shares won't have much effect."

"And for that, we had to sacrifice a huge business deal..."

He had agreed to the deal under the conditions offered by Chairman Kang Cheon-gyu of KQ Group.

Tae Seok-ho's stomach felt soured by this, but with Taeshin Group within reach, he felt some comfort.

"We can make up for the loss with new business. There's also our shares of Bellbyte Technology, which Taeshin Asset Management holds."

Bellbyte Technology was attracting massive attention in the global power equipment production sector.

The expected profits were so impressive that Taeshin Asset Management's value was set to rise due to holding those shares.

"That's what I most look forward to. But, are you sure Father is still in America?"

"I checked again this morning."

"So he really gave up... Well, he did hand his proxy over to AMK Partners."

He judged that Tae Gun-seung had relinquished management control of Taeshin Group. Yet, Tae Seok-ho remained fully alert.

Time passed, and then an employee from the general affairs division entered.

"Executive Vice President, it's time to head up."

At last, the shareholders' meeting was about to begin.

Tae Seok-ho, together with Reina, walked to the auditorium.

Inside, the shareholders filled every seat.

At the front podium, Taeshin Trading's executives and members of the Taeshin family—except Tae Gun-seung and Kang In-hyuk—were seated in two rows.

There, Tae Seok-ho made his entrance as if he were the star of the show.

Instantly, the rowdy atmosphere in the auditorium grew heavy.

In this, Lee Yoon-seok, department manager of general affairs, stepped up to the microphone.

"We will now begin the shareholders' meeting. Before proceeding with the agenda, I confirm the attendance of 525 shareholders, representing 152 million shares."

With the announcement, low murmuring began to spread.

Taeshin Trading's total number of shares was around 163 million, so over 90% attendance was implied.

This made Tae Seok-ho, seated at the center podium, wear a slightly grim expression.

Simultaneously, Reina scanned the seats to try and spot the owner of the proxy shares she hadn't identified.

"Now, for the convening agenda. It has been determined that current Taeshin Trading CEO Tae Gun-seung is unable to continue management due to injury, age, and illness. Taking into consideration the company's image and shareholder concerns, we submit a proposal and, through this emergency shareholders' meeting, raise the agenda item of dismissing the CEO."

Everyone already knew the contents from the prior notice.

Yet, with the decades-held CEO position of Chairman Tae Gun-seung now at risk, there was no avoiding the uproar.

Department manager Lee Yoon-seok, overseeing proceedings, continued.

"As just explained, the first item on the agenda is the dismissal of Taeshin Trading CEO Tae Gun-seung. The shareholders present will exercise their voting rights by on-site ballot. If a majority is reached, the motion passes; otherwise, it will fail."

Other staff from the general affairs division busily directed people toward the voting booths installed at the right.

Simultaneously, as several people headed to vote first, the murmuring swelled like an echo.

The first to move were the minor shareholders.

The long line snaked into and out of the five voting booths over and over.

Meanwhile, on stage, Tae Seok-hyun glared daggers at Tae Seok-ho.

Of course, Tae Seok-ho was fully aware of this.

"Is there something you want to say to me?"

"You're really going to go through with this?"

The two, seated side by side, could easily speak in subdued voices.

"What do you mean?"

"Are you really going to kick Father out like this?"

"Should we just leave Taeshin Group as is? And who do you think is responsible for this mess?"

It was Tae Seok-hyun who started this.

After sidelining him for poor management and all kinds of scandals, the resulting losses were still being dealt with.

"I only tried to save the company, you know. Don't you, being in that position, understand how I feel?"

"In the end, you're saying the same thing. I don't want to hear it anymore. If you want at least one affiliate, you'd better behave yourself."

"... What?"

"Or would you rather I make sure you're never able to set foot in Taeshin again?"

Tae Seok-hyun's face scrunched up in frustration. Still, he couldn't ignore Tae Seok-ho's words.

He understood his own predicament better than anyone.

"It's not a hard choice. Father was going to step down eventually, wasn't he?"

"So if I support you, will you return me to my original position?"

For an instant, Tae Seok-ho's eyes went icy as he looked at Tae Seok-hyun.

"You want Electronics back after all the mess you caused? Do you have any shame?"

"Then what will you give me?"

"How about the president's seat at Taeshin Next? You always liked that place."

That wasn't even an affiliate.

Furthermore, while president of Taeshin Electronics, Tae Seok-hyun had played dirty with the funds of that particular subsidiary.

It was also a company soon to be disposed of due to its massive losses.

"You bastard—!"

"Let's not raise our voices; people are watching."

"You're the one making this happen!"

"It's just an example. Who knows? If you back me, I might not give you Taeshin Electronics, but I could consider another affiliate."

As their exchange went on, the majority of people finished voting. Tae Seok-ho, too, rose to cast his vote.

With only a handful left, the fate of Chairman Tae Gun-seung's CEO position was about to be decided.

Chapter 145 ·Like a Wild Horse Off the Leash

Like a Wild Horse Off the Leash

In the end, the vote for the first item on the shareholders' meeting agenda, "The Matter of CEO Tae Gun-seung," was completed.

Everyone returned to their seats and sat down. Meanwhile, the staff bustled in one corner, tallying up the shareholders' votes.

Sarak— Sarak—

Inside the large auditorium, only the loud sound of papers being turned echoed around.

About thirty minutes later, the vote count from five locations was finished.

The staff handed the consolidated results to department manager Lee Yoon-seok.

"Ahem—!"

His throat-clearing, magnified by the microphone, drew the shareholders' attention.

"I will now announce the results of the vote. In favor... 116,044,552 shares. Opposed, 30,988,240 shares. Abstained, 4,967,208 shares. With a majority in favor, the motion to dismiss CEO Tae Gun-seung has been approved."

Most had cast votes in favor.

Tae Seok-ho, seated at the podium, clenched his fist tightly.

He had finally succeeded in bringing down his father, the unshakeable pillar of the Taeshin Group.

At that same moment, murmurs swelled again among the people present.

The general mood was one of disbelief—few had anticipated such a large margin.

Then, department manager Lee Yoon-seok tapped the microphone to calm the increasingly noisy hall.

"We will now proceed to the second agenda item, the appointment of a new CEO. The director nominated for new CEO is Executive Vice President Tae Seok-ho of Taeshin Trading, who has received a majority recommendation from the board. Please vote in the same manner as before."

Once again, people began to move.

However, the mood was slightly different than before.

A heavy atmosphere emanated from the AMK Partners, Orbis Investment, and Lumen Holdings delegations.

The three companies together held about 15% of Taeshin Trading's shares.

Moreover, AMK Partners also held an additional 20% stake entrusted by chairman Tae Gun-seung.

That totaled 35%. Although this was far less than the 46% secured by Tae Seok-ho, it was still not a negligible amount.

'Where are the holders of the additional 30% who voted with us for dismissal?'

Tae Seok-ho found his mind growing increasingly complicated as he watched the people lining up to vote.

If that much shareholding voted against his appointment, his nomination as CEO would be rejected.

More and more people passed through the voting booths and returned to their seats.

After even the Taeshin Group executives had voted, the secretaries of the Taeshin family began to move.

"Hyungnim. I hope you made the right choice—for the sake of the child."

He had said this to Tae Seok-hyun, seated beside him.

The overwhelming share consolidation in favor of Tae Seok-ho at the dismissal vote was apparent.

Because of this, Tae Seok-hyun clenched his teeth and let out a long sigh.

Just as his younger brother, Tae Seok-ho, had said earlier, there was only one choice left.

Shortly after, ballot counting commenced again.

With the item concerning the appointment of Taeshin Group's CEO at stake, people's attention was even more focused.

Then, Tae Seok-ho made eye contact with Norman McGrath, who was seated in the right corner of the auditorium.

The distance was not close, but the staring was tangible.

Norman McGrath, noticing Tae Seok-ho's serious look, gave a subtle smile.

'Does he think he has a chance based on the earlier situation?'

For now, Tae Seok-ho judged that the 30% he had worried about earlier were on his side.

Otherwise, they would have blocked the dismissal motion in the first place.

Time passed, and the vote count for the second agenda item was completed.

Department manager Lee Yoon-seok, standing at the podium, received the results.

But as he glanced awkwardly and looked at Tae Seok-hyun, his expression turned troubled.

At the same time, a sense of foreboding gripped Tae Seok-hyun.

But, even in an emergency, it was the shareholders' meeting.

Once the item was tabled and counted, it could not be stopped.

"I will now announce the results of the vote for the new CEO appointment."

People's stares were loaded with mixed emotions.

With a tense face, Lee Yoon-seok continued reading.

"In favor... 71,629,240 shares. Opposed... 78,789,504 shares. Abstained, 1,581,256 shares. The motion to appoint Executive Vice President Tae Seok-ho as CEO has been rejected by a majority."

In terms of shareholding ratio, that was 47.12% in favor, 51.38% opposed.

Murmur murmur—

With these results, the noise swelled once more.

Meanwhile, Tae Seok-ho, sitting in the center of the podium, became frigid and scowled deeply.

The foreboding he sensed from Lee Yoon-seok's earlier awkwardness had come true.

Simultaneously, his gaze returned to Norman McGrath. The smile on Norman's face was even broader than before.

'So this was the picture those guys were painting?'

The outgoing CEO was dismissed, but the appointment of a new CEO was rejected.

That left the CEO seat representing Taeshin Group vacant, inevitably causing disruption in the administration.

Moreover, under Taeshin Trading's board bylaws, CEO appointments could only be made via the shareholders' meeting.

But under the current regulations, a new appointment couldn't be tabled at this meeting—a definitive problem.

Soon, the auditorium erupted in raised voices.

"Everyone, please calm down! The meeting is not over yet!"

Lee Yoon-seok tried to reassure the crowd, but it was to no avail.

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At the same time,

In Flagstaff, Arizona, America, midnight was approaching.

In-hyuk was sitting on a bench outside the hospital, wearing earphones and staring at his phone.

The feed was showing scenes from the ongoing Taeshin Trading shareholders' meeting.

"That's right..."

He muttered as the camera zoomed in on Tae Seok-ho at the podium. The screen, enlarged from a distance, had no audio.

But just by looking at Tae Seok-ho's face, In-hyuk could tell what sort of feelings he was having.

"You should start by experiencing the feeling of everything you've built so far starting to collapse."

That was the reason he hadn't killed Redfall, who had tried to assassinate In-hyuk by colliding with Warborn, when he had the chance.

Using people and then ruthlessly killing them—such ways belonged to a past that no longer existed.

Just then, a message arrived via Ghost Link.

【Norman : The appointment of Executive Vice President Tae Seok-ho as CEO has been rejected.】

It was a report on the situation he had just witnessed.

【Gordon : Good work. Please proceed with the remaining tasks as planned.】

【Norman : I'll make sure there are no issues.】

It was a reply brimming with reliability.

Ever since Norman McGrath became branch manager of AMK Partners' Korea office, he had handled everything neatly and thoroughly.

Especially since being given 3% of AMK Partners' non-public shares recently, he seemed to be working even harder.

In-hyuk smiled. Of course, this wasn't over yet, so he couldn't be complacent.

He checked another message on Ghost Link.

【Yu-geon : I've found what I suspect to be Kooou's camp. The location is called Shakalulu in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.】

【Guest5436 : Do not approach for now. Only scout the surroundings.】

【Yu-geon : Ok. But aren't you running around causing too much trouble like a wild horse let off its leash since we're not there with you?】

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That was the conversation he'd had with Hong Yu-geon the day before.

It had taken nearly a month just to find the camp.

Of course, it wasn't yet certain. If there really were Kooou's agents there, it would be extremely dangerous.

No matter how skilled Charybdis, Hong Yu-geon, and Van Hester were, facing an organized group would be impossible.

They needed solid evidence and to prepare proper countermeasures.

"And if it's the DRC (Democratic Republic of the Congo), there are options..."

But the most pressing matter for now was the conclusion of the Taeshin Group situation.

In-hyuk took one last look at the ongoing shareholders' meeting on his phone, then put the device in his pocket.

"Then, shall I start preparing?"

* * *

"Aaargh—!"

With Tae Seok-ho's scream, the executive vice president's office was thrown into chaos.

Everything on the desk was swept to the floor, and the golf clubs in the corner were swung about, bent like wire.

Reina Blackwood, entering through the door, dodged a glass cup he threw with only a twist of her head.

The cup shattered against the wall in a spray of glass.

Jjaeng-geurang—

"Let's stop this now."

Tae Seok-ho heaved deep breaths, glowering at her.

"Stop? Stop what? How could you say something like that in this situation?!"

Tae Seok-ho had been certain that he would have the Taeshin Group by today.

The decision to dismiss chairman Tae Gun-seung as CEO had made that certainty feel just within reach.

But then, the CEO appointment had been struck down by an unreasonable gap in shareholding.

At that moment, Reina pulled something from her sleeve and threw it at him.

It was a palm-sized flying knife.

Shuaaa— Pak!

The blade grazed Tae Seok-ho's left cheek and stuck in the wall.

"....."

"Are you calm now?"

Tae Seok-ho was too stunned to speak.

Reina continued.

"I don't blame you for reacting like this, executive vice president. But it's not as if all chances are gone."

For a moment, Tae Seok-ho was unable to accept her words.

"They've already secured over 50% of the shares. Don't you get that it's over?"

"AMK Partners doesn't hold all those shares in their own right. 20% of them belong to chairman Tae Gun-seung, and most of the rest do, too."

"Then what's your plan? Nothing seems likely to change."

Some of the shares were probably held by Orbis Investment and Lumen Holdings.

At the shareholders' meeting, both companies had sided with AMK Partners.

"Consider this an opportunity to buy more time until the next extraordinary shareholders' meeting. In the meantime, we need to proceed with the plan we put on hold."

"... Put on hold? You mean that one? Don't you realize that's just going to arouse suspicion?"

She was speaking of their plan to take out chairman Tae Gun-seung.

"But you know better than anyone that there are no other options right now. Once the chairman is dealt with, those shares will be scattered, and then we'll have a chance."

Reina's explanation made Tae Seok-ho even grimmer.

"It absolutely cannot look like murder."

"Indeed. Plus, with the chairman's age and health, as long as we make it look like a sudden illness, there will be no problem."

In the end, Tae Seok-ho made a decision.

Reina sent a message to someone via her phone.

【Code USAGI: Operation start. Make it look like an accident. Absolutely no exposure.】

The recipients were her subordinates who had previously staked out the hospital.

A reply soon came.

【Code IRUKA : Target lost. Confirming situation.】

At that moment, Reina's expression froze.

Chapter 146 ·The One Who Flies Above the One Who Runs

The One Who Flies Above the One Who Runs

In-hyuk was driving himself with Tae Gun-seung in the passenger seat.

"Looks like we managed to shake most of them off, thankfully."

At his muttered remark, Tae Gun-seung asked in a calm tone.

"Did you already expect someone would target me if the shareholders' meeting ended ambiguously?"

It was only natural to be suspicious, since In-hyuk had requested they move even before the results came out.

"It was obvious, wasn't it? In this situation, the only thing Executive Vice President Tae Seok-ho needs is to scatter the chairman's shares."

"That way he could neutralize the shares AMK Partners secured... But where are we headed right now? And what were all those cars parked at each intersection like they were waiting?"

At first they'd gone north, but now they were heading steadily southwest.

Along the way, In-hyuk had dispersed Tae Gun-seung's security guards a few times, splitting them up.

At the end, even Song Tae-ho was sent off separately.

"I had people prepared in advance."

"So... are you saying you anticipated this situation from the beginning?"

"Since chairman said he'd meet Norman McGrath, yes. But it seems that whoever's after him isn't even trying to hide it anymore."

Bzzz— bzzz—

In-hyuk's phone vibrated, displaying Tae Seok-ho's name.

Seeing the name, Tae Gun-seung beside him sighed.

"Calling because he wants to know my location?"

"I doubt he's just calling to check in under these circumstances."

"Then I'd better not answer."

"No. Now's the time to be brazen."

With that, In-hyuk pressed the call button and switched to speaker.

"Yes, Executive Vice President. What can I do for you?"

Perhaps it was his nonchalance, but there was a pause of silence from the other side.

[The hospital said the chairman was discharged.]

"That's right. His condition improved. He wanted to do a bit of sightseeing, so I'm accompanying him."

[... Sightseeing?]

"Yes. By the way, did the shareholders' meeting go well?"

Maybe he'd hit a nerve; once again Tae Seok-ho fell silent.

In-hyuk kept talking into the phone, glancing at Tae Gun-seung beside him.

"I've also heard about the situation. I understand things didn't go as planned? Must be very disappointing."

He intentionally provoked him.

And it seemed to have worked, as Tae Seok-ho didn't immediately reply.

[Ahem! Forget about that! You should at least have left your destination if you were accompanying an elder from the family.]

"I made the decision so suddenly, I forgot to mention it. We're heading to Las Vegas. And since I'm driving, it's hard to keep talking— I'll get back to you later."

Click—

With that, the call ended. Watching from the side, Tae Gun-seung looked puzzled.

"You went to all that trouble to shake them off, even sent Director Song separately, but you still told him your destination?"

That was because In-hyuk's original destination was Las Vegas.

"You have to say something so they can decide whether to believe you or not."

"So you think they might not believe it?"

"The more suspicious they get, the better for us."

In-hyuk gave a slight smile and sped up the car.

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Meanwhile, after finishing his call with Kang In-hyuk, Tae Seok-ho furrowed his brow deeply.

He'd only just gotten his mood together after the disaster of the shareholders' meeting and now Kang In-hyuk had poured oil on the fire.

But now wasn't the time to get agitated again, so he looked over at Reina Blackwood.

"Did you trace their location?"

They weren't alone in the office. Reina's security guards were seated at the sofa table, working on laptops and other equipment.

One guard checked a screen and reported,

"Current coordinate: 36.23094, -112.57945. That's along Route 66 near Ash Fork. The direction is consistent with heading to Las Vegas."

Their location had been traced via the phone call In-hyuk just made.

But Reina's expression was far from pleased. Tae Seok-ho noticed and frowned.

"What's wrong? We've found their location—shouldn't we just track them now?"

Reina sighed.

"That's precisely the problem. If their goal is to fly abroad, there are seven airports accessible from where they are now. Of course, three of those don't have regular flights, so it's likely one of the other four if they're leaving the country."

The other four were in or around Las Vegas and two cities south of there.

The airports weren't nearby, so unless they knew the exact destination, it was meaningless.

"Are you saying they anticipated this much when they made their move?"

Reina directed a guard to project the locations of the possible airports onto the central screen.

It was clear Kang In-hyuk had taken all this into account when heading toward Las Vegas.

"Most likely. I thought things were suspicious back in Vladivostok... but now he's showing some unexpected skill."

"If they're heading that way, it's a straight shot, isn't it? Not many people around."

"That's the only saving grace."

The road from Flagstaff to Las Vegas had very few inhabited towns, making CCTV scarce.

Accidents occurred frequently, and even deaths were often dismissed as accidents.

However, the issue now was that Kang In-hyuk was with Tae Gun-seung, and there were two possible ways to Las Vegas.

Reina knew she had to make a decision.

"The situation is urgent. Tail them as far as you can into the deserted sections, and finish it there."

With the command issued, the security guards relayed it to the tracking team at once.

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Two black sedans and three vans raced along Route 66 headed west from Flagstaff.

Inside were the agents from Reina Blackwood's direct team, Kureha (紅刃).

[This is Alpha. Order relayed. Order relayed. Pursue as quickly as possible. Pursue as quickly as possible.]

That was the voice coming from a phone on the dashboard of the lead sedan.

Karin, team leader of Kureha's 2nd unit, frowned and answered in English,

"Bravo. Check the situation. Tracking now."

With a frustrated gesture, she put the phone's microphone on mute. Watching from the back seat, Arisa spoke up mockingly.

"何のためにそんなにイライラするの?" (Why are you so irritated?)

She spoke in Japanese. Karin retorted in the same language.

"How could I NOT be? If they'd just let us take care of that old man Tae Gun-seung from the start, we wouldn't be in this mess!"

"We had no choice. It was a decision from the Organization."

Up until a moment ago, they'd been chasing Tae Gun-seung from the hospital, ending up far north. Only later did they realize Song Tae-ho was used as bait.

They turned and headed south, pursuing after receiving Reina's update on their position.

"In that case, the boss should've pressed harder. Seriously, sometimes she's too soft."

Karin pouted, but Arisa shot her a frosty look.

"Is that really what you should be saying right now?"

Maybe it was the chill of her killing intent, but Karin scowled.

"Why so sensitive?"

"Just keep your mouth shut. Mio— pick up the pace. You never know when they might make a sudden turn, so prep the drones to scout ahead as far as they'll transmit."

"Tch—!"

Mio was team leader of the 3rd unit, currently at the wheel.

Meanwhile, Karin grabbed the radio and gave the order per Arisa's instructions. Soon, the rear door of one van slid open and two scout drones shot forward outside.

Watching the scene, Karin spoke again.

"Come to think of it... that Kang In-hyuk guy supposedly broke through KIRIN's cordon in Vladivostok."

"Why? Think he'll get through us, too?"

"No, not that. It's just... kind of exciting? Been ages since we had a proper hunt."

Unlike other agents, these two worked as Reina Blackwood's special squad. Their usual missions: executions or assassinations. They reliably eliminated traitors within or noisy obstacles outside, regardless of collateral fuss.

"This is no time for hunting games. Just take out the target quickly, then get out."

"Not even a little?"

"You know how urgent this is. Based on the target's last known position, if he filled up at Ash Fork, the quickest way is the southern bypass."

"But they might double back."

Karin was thinking of what happened with KIRIN's Li Weicheng.

"That's right. You can't completely rule it out. Plus, seems they're expecting a tail."

"So we should split up."

"How do you want to do it?"

The northern and southern detours differed by about 30 minutes.

Karin pondered over the map before making a decision.

"I'll take the north. But if I catch them, I get to do things my way?"

Arisa sighed.

"No. Keep it looking like an accident, no matter what."

"Not even a little?!"

"Do what you want if you don't mind being chewed out by the boss."

Karin pouted.

"I'll switch cars then!"

"I'll say it again: don't do anything reckless."

With that warning, the car stopped.

Karin stiffened her expression, then switched to the rear car. The vehicles took off again.

In the back seat, Arisa let out a long sigh as she radioed in.

"Have the targets been spotted yet?"

She was speaking to the agent piloting the drones.

Since the transmit range was up to 10km, she thought they ought to catch sight of the moving car soon.

[No confirmation yet.]

"Find them as fast as you can."

The vehicles picked up speed, racing along the deserted Route 66. At the fork near Seligman, the fleet split into two.

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At the same time.

In-hyuk and Tae Gun-seung were in the air together.

The engine noise, muffled by their headsets, pressed in on their ears.

"Chairman! Are you all right?"

He asked through the headset.

Tae Gun-seung, gazing at the blue sky and the plateau and desert below, replied,

"I feel a bit dizzy, but not too bad."

"That's good."

Relieved, In-hyuk looked out toward the road they'd traveled. From this altitude, the cars below really did look like toys.

However, the five cars moving and then splitting up made for a different sight.

'That was close.'

The two were in a small plane. After drawing their pursuers to the moving vehicle's location, they'd switched to a light aircraft at Seligman Airport.

Tae Gun-seung turned to look at In-hyuk.

"Is this how you and Ju-ha survived in Vladivostok too?"

"Well, something like that."

"So this is what they mean by 'There's always someone flying above the runner.'"

Tae Gun-seung's hearty laughter rang through the headset.

Their destination was Flagstaff, their original starting point. Now that the trackers would be gone, they should be able to travel safely by air.

Chapter 147 ·What Did He Used to Do?

What Did He Used to Do?

【What is the future of Taeshin Trading? The motion to dismiss CEO Tae Gun-seung has passed, but the appointment of Executive Vice President Tae Seok-ho as the new CEO has been rejected. It is expected that, according to Taeshin Trading's regulations, an extraordinary shareholders' meeting will be convened as soon as possible, and until then, the Taeshin Group's board of directors will assume operational authority...】

【Removing the cornerstone from the top to prop up the bottom? With the dismissal of Chairman Tae Gun-seung from his position as CEO and the subsequent rejection of the new appointment, dark clouds loom over the corporate outlook. The board announced that after the extraordinary meeting, a new CEO would be selected, but...】

【Chairman Tae Gun-seung's shares delegated to a foreign company? The main reason for the rejection of a new CEO at this meeting was the foreign company that voted against it. However, there is an allegation that most of the shares used in this process actually belonged to Chairman Tae Gun-seung...】

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The doors to the arrival hall at Incheon International Airport opened, and Tae Gun-seung, riding in a wheelchair pushed by Kang In-hyuk, emerged surrounded by Taeshin Security guards.

Click— click— cha, click—

Flashes poured in like crazy, all at once.

A huge number of reporters had crowded in due to the arrival information of the two.

"Do you have anything to say regarding your dismissal as CEO?"

"They say it was for health reasons. Is there a serious problem?"

"There are rumors that a foreign company has intervened in the management dispute of Taeshin Group. Is it true?"

"There's talk that you've delegated your shares to AMK Partners—what do you think about that?"

"What were your original thoughts on the succession structure...?"

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Reporters' questions stormed down on them.

Yet Tae Gun-seung, wearing a cap, sunglasses, and even a mask, remained completely silent.

Soon the security guards pushed the reporters back, carving out a path.

But the reporters, eager to confirm the facts of this event, wouldn't give way easily.

In-hyuk, pushing the wheelchair slowly, looked at the reporters with a cold expression and raised his voice.

"The chairman's health is still poor. Are you really going to keep blocking the way like this? If something goes wrong because of this, are you going to take responsibility?"

The reporters hesitated for a moment, rendered speechless.

During that gap, In-hyuk brought the wheelchair to the waiting vehicle and boarded with Tae Gun-seung.

But the real Tae Gun-seung had already boarded the car.

And when the recently-boarded Tae Gun-seung removed the items from his head, Song Tae-ho's face was revealed.

"Phew—! I thought everything might come off because of those reporters."

Song Tae-ho let out a deep sigh.

"It was still risky, but you took on the role of stand-in with real resolve."

"Well, since the chairman's life was being threatened, I had to do what I could."

In reality, while the two drew the reporters' attention, the real Tae Gun-seung had already approached the car with another guard, keeping his face hidden as much as possible.

The reason, of course, was the possibility that those who had chased from Flagstaff might still be trying to kill him, even at the airport.

But upon hearing this, Tae Gun-seung clicked his tongue.

"You're likely to have more years ahead of you than I do—what if something really happened to you?"

He had actually objected to the scheme they just carried out.

Nevertheless, Song Tae-ho had insisted on having the guards look after Tae Gun-seung while he himself sat in the wheelchair as decoy.

"Still, it's better than something happening to you, sir."

"Huh..."

Meanwhile, the security guard in the driver's seat started the car.

As they left the airport behind, Tae Gun-seung looked at In-hyuk.

"So, what's your next move?"

"Mine? What do you mean?"

"You went through all that chaos to bring me here—surely you already have a plan for what comes next?"

He said it as if it was only natural.

But In-hyuk simply shrugged.

"I only brought you here safely because your life was in danger, sir."

"That's all?"

"Would I need any other reason?"

Tae Gun-seung had been impressed from the very start by In-hyuk's uncanny foresight and escape route planning, dating back to their escape from the hospital. It was something altogether different from the ability he had shown in skyrocketing Taeshin Asset Management.

"What did you used to do, anyway?"

In contrast, In-hyuk stared at him blankly, not understanding the question.

"I'm really not sure what you're getting at, sir."

"I mean, how did you figure out Tae Seok-ho would try to have me killed, devise the escape plan, and even reserve a plane in advance to shake them off? It was as if you could see right through everything those guys would do."

Even Song Tae-ho had tried to dissuade In-hyuk when he first heard the plan, claiming his security team was enough to deal with any threat.

But they went through with the plan due to Tae Gun-seung's decision.

And after seeing the scale and momentum of their pursuers, Song Tae-ho was certain that, without In-hyuk, Tae Gun-seung would have died at the hospital.

"I just made an educated guess."

"That's all?"

"When you have no countermeasures, sometimes intuition is just as important."

"Huh..."

Hearing the old man's sigh, In-hyuk continued.

"But you still aren't safe. Until the next extraordinary shareholders' meeting, Executive Vice President Tae Seok-ho will continue to target you because of the shares you hold."

"I have no idea who the people are helping that guy. Do you know?"

"Do you think I'd be sitting here if I did?"

Even if he knew, there was no evidence.

Unless you caught them in the act, Kooou would never leave behind any evidence.

"By the way, was it Seok-ho who tipped off the reporters, too?"

In fact, In-hyuk had planned to bring Chairman Tae Gun-seung in quietly and hide him somewhere no one could find.

But Kooou and Tae Seok-ho's camp had leaked Tae Gun-seung's arrival information to the media. They had foreseen such countermeasures and acted accordingly.

"Probably."

"They're thorough."

"For now, the best you can do is go home. If you meet anyone, be wary. Especially—only keep people you can really trust at your side."

"I trust mister Kang the most."

Despite his now-serious expression, Tae Gun-seung's tone had a half-joking edge.

"I have a lot of other work, sir."

"Something more important than protecting me?"

"There are plenty of people to keep you safe besides me. And since this is Korea, Executive Vice President Tae Seok-ho won't be able to use drastic measures like he tried in America."

By now, the management dispute at Taeshin Group was spreading rapidly through the press.

In such circumstances, if Tae Gun-seung came to an untimely end, the first person to be suspected would be Tae Seok-ho.

Of course, they could try to manipulate public opinion, but with so many failures and AMK Partners involved, it would be difficult to clear away all doubts.

"I'm a bit disappointed, you know."

"Well, you've transferred your shares to AMK Partners. Hopefully they'll resolve things quickly, so you can enjoy a relatively peaceful retirement."

"At this age, retirement—what does that even mean..."

As they conversed, the car entered Seoul and arrived at the residence in Seongbuk-dong.

The walls and entrance of the house were surrounded by Taeshin Security guards.

As they entered, Tae Seok-hyun and his wife, Tae Su-jin, Tae Yeo-jun, and Tae Ju-ha were waiting for them.

"Father!"

"Father!"

Especially Tae Seok-hyun and his wife rushed forward, cane in hand, to greet the returning Tae Gun-seung.

"Are you really alright?"

"Is anything troubling you physically?"

Annoyed by their fussing, Tae Gun-seung furrowed his brow deeply.

"You're what's making me uncomfortable. Director Song—"

At his call, Song Tae-ho brought a wheelchair so he could sit down.

"Is it difficult to walk, sir?"

"Shall I push you?"

Tae Gun-seung's expression did not relax.

If anything, the wrinkles on his brow deepened with every word from their lips.

"Enough. Kang, you push. And the rest of you, don't get flustered out here—come inside."

As requested, In-hyuk pushed the wheelchair.

Meanwhile, the child members who had been in the garden followed along behind them, circling as if playing a round dance.

"Sit down already! You're distracting!"

When he barked again, everyone looked at each other for a second before finally settling into the sofa.

Tae Gun-seung scrutinized them slowly, then spoke.

"When is CEO Choi supposed to arrive?"

He was asking Song Tae-ho.

"He should be here soon."

Almost on cue, the radio clutched in Song Tae-ho's hand went off.

[Attorney Choi Myung-jin from Yulmyung is here to see you.]

"Have him come in."

A short while later, the front door opened and Choi Myung-jin entered, greeting Tae Gun-seung first.

"You've been through a lot, sir."

"I certainly have."

Given his arrival, the other child members looked over, wondering what was going on. At the same time, Song Tae-ho took out his phone and began recording, focusing on Tae Gun-seung.

Tae Gun-seung sighed once more.

"I'm revoking the previous will as of this very moment. Instead, I'll proceed with a living transfer of assets. So, nobody is to say a word until I'm finished."

Everyone was shocked by this declaration.

But when their eyes met Tae Gun-seung's resolute gaze, any protest caught in their throats.

"First, to my first son, Tae Seok-hyun, and second son, Tae Seok-ho, I leave no assets of any kind."

"Ah..."

"Tsk!"

Just as Tae Seok-hyun seemed about to say something, Tae Gun-seung's glare flared intensely.

Again, the contents of his will continued to flow from his lips.

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Meanwhile, at the same time—

Tae Seok-ho was watching news about the return of Chairman Tae Gun-seung.

With a deep sigh, he turned toward Reina Blackwood.

"You said you'd handle it no matter what. Is this really all there is?"

His tone was openly sarcastic.

Reina was equally frustrated—she hadn't expected Kureha's team to fail in dealing with Tae Gun-seung and Kang In-hyuk.

Especially not when, while being tracked, those two escaped on a light aircraft back to Flagstaff—it was beyond anything she'd imagined.

"There's nothing more I can say about that."

"So, what now? My father is in Korea—is there still a way to take action?"

"Well, at least he didn't disappear, so we'll have to think things over. As I said before, there's still time before the extraordinary shareholders' meeting."

This time, unlike last, notice for the extraordinary shareholders' meeting was set two weeks out.

If they couldn't scatter Tae Gun-seung's Taeshin Trading shares in that time, the same scenario could easily repeat.

"You've failed every time so far. Do you really think it's possible?"

At the same time, Reina shot Tae Seok-ho a sidelong glance.

If they'd finished off Tae Gun-seung when Kureha first moved, things wouldn't have become so tangled.

But now, regret was pointless. She swallowed her words.

"We'll take care of it."

"Hah... You sure do talk."

Bzzz— bzzz—

At that moment, Reina's phone started vibrating.

As soon as she checked the display and took the call, her face stiffened.

Watching from across, Tae Seok-ho sensed the gravity of the situation.

"Did something else happen?"

After ending the call, Reina spoke slowly.

"Attorney Choi Myung-jin from Yulmyung reportedly visited the residence. All of your elder brother's family is assembled there."

Tae Seok-ho's face instantly crumpled like tissue paper. He knew exactly who Attorney Choi was.

"That damn old man! So now he's going to mess with the will first!"

Chapter 148 ·A Difficult Battle

A Difficult Battle

The failure of the Taeshin Trading shareholders' meeting plan, Tae Gun-seung and Kang In-hyuk's safe return to Korea, and the lifetime transfer of assets...

Im Deok-chang, who sat organizing the situation in the National Intelligence Service office, felt a headache coming on.

"Why did Orbis Investment and Lumen Holdings decide to back AMK Partners?"

This was the part he could understand least.

All three companies were private equity funds and were essentially competitors.

Of course, if AMK Partners seized management rights in Taeshin Group, the two firms holding shares there would also surely profit.

However, even if they offered support, as competitors, checks and balances are the norm.

It was strange to see them joining hands, despite knowing all this.

With this in mind, Im Deok-chang called in Choi Dong-hoon, who was outside, through an internal call, and asked:

"Lumen and Orbis still not making any moves, right?"

"It seems they intend to return after wrapping up the temporary shareholders' meeting. After returning to their hotels, they haven't come out."

"Anyone make contact? Especially with AMK Partners?"

"No. They're only moving inside the hotel."

At the very least, Im Deok-chang had expected a light get-together after the shareholders' meeting.

But as soon as the meeting ended, the three companies left without so much as glancing at each other.

In particular, Lumen Holdings and Orbis Investment, while rejecting the motion for appointing a new CEO, even displayed an awkward atmosphere with AMK Partners.

"Did AMK get some dirt on the two companies? Or did they promise some kind of deal?"

Of course, Im Deok-chang had no information proving either case at the moment.

Choi Dong-hoon thought for a moment and then carefully said:

"Even so, would it outweigh the profits they get from Taeshin Group?"

Taeshin Group is a world-renowned company. As shareholders, the benefits could shift greatly, depending on where they throw their support at the shareholders' meeting.

Moreover, from the perspective of Lumen Holdings and Orbis Investment, siding with CEO Tae Seok-ho would be more favorable than with the similar AMK Partners.

By helping him secure management rights with their shares, they could also secure stakes in certain business projects.

Surely, they should have done this simple math. But their actions were more peculiar than expected.

"This is such a mess. And the director is acting strange too. Ah, have you checked all of the director's recent movements?"

He was talking about the previously ordered background check on Director Jin Jong-man.

Of course, he'd already received preliminary reports on communications and movements. Nothing unusual had been found.

But Im Deok-chang didn't give up; he continued the investigation.

"Should I only report what we've confirmed so far?"

"Just bring it here."

Soon, Choi Dong-hoon returned and handed Im Deok-chang a tablet.

As Im Deok-chang checked the contents, his brow twitched.

"No suspicious individuals at all. So who the hell tipped off the connection between Notex and Hwain Techon?"

"Could it have been Deputy General Manager Choo Jae-min or Deputy General Manager Shin Jin-hong?"

Im Deok-chang let out a dry laugh.

"If Choo Jae-min had known, would he have just let it happen? And Shin Jin-hong? How could that money-obsessed, incompetent trash manage such a thing?"

In the National Intelligence Service, information is power—authority.

Information about the Notex crisis that drew global attention could be used anywhere.

"But if it wasn't Director Jin Jong-man, maybe it leaked through his channels."

"There's a chance, but... there are too many suspicious aspects for that to be the full explanation."

Saying this, Im Deok-chang tapped his fingers on the desk.

The true source of the Hwain Techon information, Skull's backer, the Taeshin Group situation—there was just too much to consider.

"Wouldn't it be better to just get rid of Director Jin Jong-man?"

That would be the fastest way to solve things.

If Jin Jong-man disappeared, any ongoing investigations would come to an abrupt halt.

But Im Deok-chang's expression didn't loosen.

"Is there any guarantee that I'd be the next director? And even if I was, would I be able to keep the post next administration?"

He might end up in the director's seat only for the remainder of the president's term.

And with all the matters Jin Jong-man had stirred up, if things went wrong, his successor would likely take the fall alone.

Thus, though Im Deok-chang had considered after the current administration ended, things weren't going as he wished.

"My judgment was hasty. I apologize."

"It's fine. It's not like I haven't thought of it too. Anyway, let's just focus on wrapping up the Hwain Techon side properly."

"Is Deputy General Manager Choo Jae-min's investigation into Seunghwa going to be alright?"

"They'll take care of it. It's not our place to get involved anyway."

"Understood."

With that, the conversation ended, and Choi Dong-hoon stepped out again.

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[Former Taeshin Group Chairman Tae Gun-seung declares lifetime asset transfer! In the process, he left out his eldest son Tae Seok-hyun, former CEO, and his second son Tae Seok-ho, executive vice president... Also, it's been shocking that the shares of Taeshin Trading and Taeshin Electronics held personally by the former chairman will be sold off as company-held shares...]

[Former chairman Tae Gun-seung, second chairman of Taeshin Group, to step away from management disputes alone? Amid rumors that he delegated voting rights to foreign capital without proper explanation, he announced the conversion of his shares to company-held shares through lifetime gifting...]

[Taeshin Group up in the air—what's next? The CEO position remains vacant, with another temporary shareholders' meeting scheduled. With the former chairman selling his personally held shares as company-held shares, the outcome remains uncertain...]

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On Monday morning, as soon as Na In-hyuk woke up, he checked his phone.

Since returning to Korea on Friday, the media had only gotten noisier with news about Tae Gun-seung and Taeshin Group.

"Hoo... The chairman's bombshell has left everything in total ruins."

After informing his children at home about the lifetime gift, the press received the corresponding release.

As a result, follow-up articles kept appearing, and even today, three days later, it dominated the main page of the news sites.

"There was a ruckus at the chairman's residence, too."

In particular, Tae Seok-hyun, who had been excluded from the gifting list, raised the most objection.

Of course, the reasons were clear to everyone.

The Taeshin Electronics corruption scandal. It was Chairman Tae Gun-seung who kept him from being sent to the prosecution despite the massive damage to the group.

Afterward, all shares and assets—stocks, real estate, financial, and personal—were divided accordingly. Among them, the shares of Taeshin Trading went to no one; they would be sold as company-held shares.

Naturally, the child fiercely opposed it, but Tae Gun-seung's decision was unbreakable.

Knock, knock—

At that moment, a knock sounded. There was only one person who would knock at home now.

"Just a moment."

In-hyuk slipped on a black tracksuit and opened the door.

"Were you up?"

Outside stood Tae Ju-ha, also casually dressed as if freshly awake.

"It's been a while. What's up?"

They lived together, but she rarely sought him out like this, so it felt a bit awkward.

"I wanted to ask you something before heading to work."

"Then let's talk in the living room."

They both sat down in the living room.

A wedding photo hanging on one wall caught his eye. It was a photo In-hyuk first saw when he returned to the past as the current Kang In-hyuk.

Usually, he went straight from his room to the door, so he hadn't had the chance to look; it felt like seeing it again for the first time in a while.

'When I first saw that, I was so shocked...'

While In-hyuk was staring at the photo, Tae Ju-ha spoke quietly.

"First, thank you for protecting grandfather in America. And for letting me meet with people from Lumen Holdings, too."

In-hyuk looked at her with an awkward expression.

"That was just my job. All I did was arrange a meeting with Lumen Holdings. You didn't really get the answers you were looking for."

"But we got the outcome we wanted at the shareholders' meeting."

At the time, Tae Ju-ha was very surprised when the resolution to dismiss Chairman Tae Gun-seung as CEO passed.

And when the motion for Executive Vice President Tae Seok-ho's appointment as CEO was rejected, she was genuinely relieved.

Of course, she knew that this wasn't the end.

"It's not something we can be relieved about. Since the chairman's shares will be converted to company-held shares, those votes can't be included in voting rights."

At that, Tae Ju-ha nodded.

"I know. It means he intends to completely let go of management control in the dispute."

"Now that the date for the temporary shareholders' meeting has been set, the shareholder register would be closed too. That means acquiring proxy forms for Executive Vice President Tae Seok-ho and AMK Partners will be key."

The closing of the shareholder register is a provision in the Commercial Act to block share transfers until the shareholders' meeting.

With buying and selling stock impossible, the proxies collected from major shareholders will have a big impact.

"That's not really favorable to AMK Partners."

"Given the domestic situation, handing management over to a foreign firm is less ideal than to Executive Vice President Tae Seok-ho."

"But it's not like his intentions are good."

Chairman Tae Gun-seung even excluded Tae Seok-ho from the recipient list, along with Tae Seok-hyun.

And Tae Ju-ha had even faced threats to her life in Vladivostok because of shares Chairman Tae Gun-seung entrusted her with. Looking at things now, it wasn't hard to guess Tae Seok-ho was behind it.

Naturally, she could not welcome the idea of handing Taeshin Group over to Tae Seok-ho.

Tae Ju-ha spoke again.

"In-hyuk, how do you think this shareholders' meeting will go?"

After some thought, In-hyuk answered calmly.

"I just know it's going to be a tough battle."

"That's obvious. I mean—who do you think will win?"

In-hyuk shrugged.

"I only got back from America three days ago. I haven't even gone back to work yet; I can't say I understand the situation here, so how could I possibly know?"

"You've got your information network. Haven't you heard anything through there?"

"Nothing much. Things are so complicated now, even they can't get a read on it. Was that what you wanted to ask me before I even went to work?"

At this, Tae Ju-ha bit her lip, sighed, and then answered curtly.

"It's just that you're so well-informed in information. I thought you might have heard something useful."

"Sorry I couldn't help you."

"No, it's fine. I guess I'm just frustrated. Grandfather inherited the company from great-grandfather and built it up so much... it just feels like he's having it all snatched away, so helplessly."

Looking at her bitter expression, In-hyuk replied.

"Honestly, it can't have been all good, being part of the Taeshin family. I didn't expect you to feel that way."

She had entered the Taeshin family after her biological mother Yoo Hye-rin's death from illness.

Because of her status as an illegitimate child, she had devoted herself to her studies to gain recognition and had risen to branch manager of Taeshin Asset Management's New York office.

Of course, through all this, she was forced into a marriage with Kang In-hyuk as well.

Her life had been anything but smooth, and Taeshin Group was always at the root of it, so In-hyuk didn't take her feelings lightly.

"Grandfather was a person who recognized ability, at least."

"That's true."

"Anyway, sorry for troubling you with a difficult question. I'll go get ready for work now."

With a long sigh through her nose, Tae Ju-ha turned and went to her room.

Left alone in the living room, In-hyuk scratched the back of his head, looking embarrassed.

Chapter 149 ·The Bond of Shared Work

The Bond of Shared Work

Taeshin Asset Management was under a gloomy atmosphere due to the shareholders' meeting held at the Mulsan head office of Taeshin Group. At the same time, the word among employees within Taeshin Group couldn't help but become noisy, in stark contrast to the mood.

"Isn't the management rights in danger of being handed over to a foreign company at this rate?"

"Come on... Would that really happen? It's not an easy thing, after all."

"I heard even the appointment of Executive Vice President Tae Seok-ho as CEO was rejected at the shareholders' meeting."

"Is this treason or betrayal...? Is that what this is?"

Every sort of rumor was flying around.

It was only when In-hyuk and his secretary, Baek Si-hwan, arrived at the elevator in the underground parking lot that the staff finally fell silent.

After that, In-hyuk went up to the 6th floor. Baek Si-hwan, following behind, spoke.

"The documents that require immediate approval can be reviewed before noon."

"Understood. And this is the new welfare project investment plan proposed by the Korea office of AMK Partners. Conduct a preliminary due diligence on the listed foundations, and flag any with issues."

Baek Si-hwan accepted the documents In-hyuk handed over, wearing a puzzled look. As he glanced through the contents, something caught his eye.

"... Is AMK investing in the welfare sector?"

"It seems so. For now, they're considering domestic foundations connected to the welfare business, centering on the Korea office."

That was because among the organizations he'd just seen, the Seunghwa Foundation, which their organization managed, was included.

"But you were in America until three days ago—when did you receive this request?"

"I got it while I was in the hospital. The investigation has been delayed until now because it was hard to look into immediately. Why do you ask?"

Sensing a tinge of suspicion in In-hyuk's tone, Baek Si-hwan seemed to realize he might be overstepping and quickly tried to recover.

"I just thought you must be very busy with ongoing work."

Reading his reaction, In-hyuk smiled faintly.

"Is that so? In any case, check this within the week and send it back."

Baek Si-hwan nodded slightly and exited.

Once the door was closed, In-hyuk connected to Ghost Link on his computer.

【Guest5436: Did you get to work alright?】

This was a message to Go Mi-ah.

【Red Witch: All office workers are the same. By the way, I heard the chairman made quite a scene? Was that part of the plan?】

【Guest5436: Not that far.】

【Red Witch: So, what's going on this morning?】

【Guest5436: Plusystems' Quantum Pulse prep is almost done. So just upload all the related materials and resign.】

Bzzz— bzzz—

At that moment, instead of a reply, Go Mi-ah called.

"I sent a message because I thought you might be at your desk. Is it okay to talk?"

[I just walked into a conference room. But resigning suddenly?]

"We were going to take over Taeshin Group's system and move once your side was ready anyway."

This was something they had already discussed. But Go Mi-ah seemed uncomfortable, which made In-hyuk suspicious.

[Still, after working together for so long, how can I just say I'll quit?]

"... A bond?"

In-hyuk was flustered.

[Geez... You talk like you've never worked with people before. Didn't you get close to anyone while working here?]

"..."

In this life, the only person he was even remotely close to from when he joined was Noh Dongjun. And even that was just Noh Dongjun occasionally coming over to chat; it didn't really count as a deep relationship.

[Anyway, as the boss said, I'll let them know. But I'll need to hire a replacement and hand over duties, so it won't be immediate.]

"Do as you want."

With a sigh, In-hyuk ended the call.

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Back at his desk, Baek Si-hwan was checking the investment list of welfare foundations he received from In-hyuk. All sorts of foundation names were listed, from those supporting children and youth, disabled and vulnerable groups, veterans and seniors, to public and educational institutions.

Among them, the Seunghwa Foundation, which specialized in educational support, was a high priority.

"I heard the National Intelligence Service is also investigating Seunghwa Foundation. Could this be related?"

It was a rather uncanny coincidence. Moreover, in the uncertain future of Taeshin Group, AMK Partners had entrusted work to Kang In-hyuk at Taeshin Asset Management.

"Does AMK think they can secure Taeshin Group for themselves? Or does it mean that Kang In-hyuk is important to AMK even in this situation?"

Countless thoughts occupied his mind. But due to lack of information, there were no clear conclusions, and the isolation of Chairman Baek Ji-woong, after being disciplined by the Association, added to the complications.

After pondering a moment, Baek Si-hwan grabbed his phone and stepped into the conference room.

"Chairman. I have something to report."

[What is it?]

On the other end of the line was Chairman Baek Ji-woong of WISE&WIRE Group.

"It looks like AMK Partners is planning an investment in welfare foundations. They'll select from a list and conduct initial due diligence, and Seunghwa is on the list."

[Welfare foundations? Do you know why?]

"I haven't heard the exact reason, but I guess it's for image improvement and tax benefits, considering the recent shareholders' meeting."

Baek Ji-woong went quiet for a moment, lost in thought, before speaking.

[Handing it to Taeshin Asset Management instead of doing it themselves... that means they want to quietly test the water before making a move.]

"I thought so as well."

[What do you think is the likelihood of Seunghwa making the list?]

"The cut-off hasn't been set yet. I believe they'll finalize the criteria after their initial due diligence."

The key point now was whether AMK Partners had any particular intention. However, it was too soon to judge anything clearly.

[Make regular reports related to this. By the way, anything unusual with Kang In-hyuk since his return to Korea?]

"Nothing especially noticeable."

[What do you think?]

Baek Si-hwan didn't have to think long.

"At the moment, he doesn't seem interested in the Taeshin Group management dispute."

[Even though he smuggled out Chairman Tae Gun-seung from America?]

"He's a quick calculator. So even when Tae Ju-ha traveled to England to contact Lumen Holdings, I assume he let her go alone. Chairman Tae Gun-seung's survival had become an immediate problem that had to be solved."

This was a very subjective opinion.

[So you're saying he's drawing a line?]

"That's my take."

[Alright, then. Have you found out how he's communicating with AMK yet?]

Both had already checked Kang In-hyuk's call history in the past.

But there were no traces of calls or messages exchanged with AMK Partners associates. This meant he must have a separate device besides his main phone.

Baek Si-hwan had even searched Kang In-hyuk's office thoroughly after he returned from America, but found nothing.

"... I'm sorry."

[If he'd carried it around, there would have been a chance to spot it—even just once. Maybe there's something special about the phone he's using now?]

"Is that possible? Even the cipher programs our agents use leave some kind of trace."

[If it were truly impossible, there would have been a slip-up from Kang In-hyuk by now.]

Given the current context, this was the most plausible theory.

Baek Si-hwan hadn't ignored this possibility either.

But the Kang In-hyuk he knew was extremely sensitive to bug sweep detection—he would regularly check his car and office.

Targeting his phone, knowing this, meant risking exposure of his identity.

"What do you want me to do?"

Of course, the decision wasn't his to make—only Baek Ji-woong could do that.

There was a momentary sigh from the other end of the line.

[Can you create an opportunity to clone his phone?]

"To be honest, it won't be easy."

Kang In-hyuk wouldn't even let others handle his jacket. Naturally, his phone was always on him—making such a chance nearly impossible.

[Try it anyway. Make Kang In-hyuk separate from his phone, or even cause it to malfunction. That would give us an opening.]

"Understood. I'll set up a plan and proceed right away."

[Counting on you.]

After finishing the call, Baek Si-hwan let out a sigh.

Even the phone that Baek Ji-woong had just used was a burner—to hide the record as much as possible. There were only so many ways to cover your tracks with phone calls.

But in Kang In-hyuk's case, there wasn't even a burner phone to be found, making things even more mysterious.

* * *

A few days later.

Summoned by Tae Ju-ha, In-hyuk was seated in the CEO's office.

It was time to discuss the first round of welfare project investment, whose shortlist had been finalized not long ago.

"How much is AMK Partners planning to invest? Has a specific amount been set?"

"We expect at least 20 billion KRW."

"That much?"

Even for a large company, that was a significant sum—especially since it wasn't going directly into a profit-making sector. Tae Ju-ha couldn't help but be surprised.

"As a foreign company, they're extending their reach into domestic business, so there are a lot of points to be cautious about."

"But it's bigger than I expected. So what targets have been chosen for investment?"

At her question, In-hyuk handed over a document.

Her eyes scanned the list inside.

"There's quite a range of fields."

"We'll initially prioritize projects involving public facilities—especially private foundations in the children, youth, and education sectors."

"If the goal is tax reduction, is there really a need to go as far as private welfare foundations? Or perhaps..."

"I think you're right. AMK Partners is looking to not only improve their image and tax benefits but also build more ties with certain firms."

In other words, by promoting welfare foundation investments, they aimed to expand the company networking pie.

Tae Ju-ha nodded and sighed.

"Even in times like this, they seem to be playing many moves ahead."

At that moment, the office door opened and a young staff member brought in hot coffee. Tae Ju-ha tilted her head at her.

"Where's Secretary Heo?"

Secretary Heo typically attended to all of Tae Ju-ha's needs.

"Oh, she got a call that someone hit her car in the parking lot and went down."

"I see."

The employee replied as she moved. As she set the coffee in front of In-hyuk, she stumbled as if she were about to fall.

The steaming coffee was aimed directly at In-hyuk's torso.

In that instant, In-hyuk quickly stood, caught the cup with his right hand, and steadied the staff member with his left.

Clink—

That was the sound of the slightly swaying cup on the coaster.

"... Are you alright?"

The staff member, held steady by In-hyuk, snapped back to attention. She quickly bowed and stepped back.

"I'm sorry!"

"It's nothing, I didn't even get wet. You can go. Just be careful next time."

After In-hyuk's reply, the young lady also bowed to CEO Tae Ju-ha and hastily left.

Meanwhile, Tae Ju-ha, who had quietly watched, looked quite surprised.

"I noticed it in Vladivostok too, but your reflexes are impressive."

"They're not bad."

In fact, this sort of thing had happened a few times lately. Ever since a certain point, near-run-ins with strangers had become frequent—in the officetel parking lot, office hallway, restrooms, and at various external venues. He had a good idea as to why.

'Seems like they're after my stuff... Maybe my phone?'

He had even found signs someone had searched his office after his return from America. Of course, the traces were subtle—not obvious to just anyone.

Only In-hyuk could spot the faint differences.

Chapter 150 ·Come here

Come here

Former chairman of Taeshin Group Tae Gun-seung sat across from Taeshin Trading's executive director Jung Min-seop, who had visited him unexpectedly.

"You look completely dead since I last saw you."

It was Tae Gun-seung who spoke first. To this, Jung Min-seop replied with a bitter expression as he looked at him.

"I could say the same for you, chairman."

"Don't call me chairman. I've been kicked out of that position now, so you shouldn't call me that anymore."

"Then how should I address you?"

"How about 'uncle,' like in the old days?"

Jung Min-seop was the son of Jung Soon-cheol, the youngest among Taeshin Group's founding members.

d Jung Soon-cheol had been a sworn brother, with a significant age difference, to Tae Jeong-beom, Tae Gun-seung's father and the group's first chairman.

Because of this relationship, Tae Gun-seung and Jung Min-seop had once interacted like uncle and nephew.

"I'm almost seventy now—how could I call you 'uncle'? Isn't that a bit much?"

"What's so strange about that?"

At his half-joking reply, Jung Min-seop's expression grew more bitter.

After a moment of silence, Jung Min-seop slowly opened his mouth.

"..... Have you really washed your hands of it all?"

"It's not about whether I let go or not. As you know, I was kicked out. Besides, I have to consider my age too. I already missed the time when I should've rested."

Jung Min-seop let out a sigh.

"But still, Seok-ho is not the right person, is he? If things stay like this, Taeshin will be ruined."

"That's why I did what I could in my own way."

"Are you really thinking of handing Taeshin over to AMK Partners?"

The relationship between Chairman Tae Gun-seung and AMK Partners had basically become a known fact since the last shareholders' meeting.

But Jung Min-seop found it hard to truly believe, which was why he had come to meet him in person like this.

"At the very least, they won't let the company go under."

"But public opinion won't be in favor. You know how things are going right now, don't you, chairman?"

Rumors had already been circulating that Tae Gun-seung was selling Taeshin Group to a foreign entity.

Because of this, both the board and shareholders were increasingly supporting Tae Seok-ho.

"Whatever's happening inside the company, it's a fight over shares in the end, isn't it?"

Since that wasn't wrong, Jung Min-seop let out an even deeper sigh than before.

"So you're convinced AMK Partners will take control of Taeshin Group."

Tae Gun-seung shrugged his shoulders.

"Even I don't know for sure."

"Then why did you delegate your shares? And why did you sell them as company-held shares?"

The shares he held totaled about 13.5 million. The selling price came to about 1.6 trillion won.

Of course, there was no way Taeshin Trading had that much cash on hand right away. But it was also uncomfortable for Chairman Tae Gun-seung to keep holding those shares.

So, shares that had lost efficiency within the group—stocks, bonds, real estate—were bought instead.

"Me holding onto them would only add confusion. Besides, AMK Partners said I can dispose of them as I like after the first shareholders' meeting."

"What on earth are they thinking?"

"I don't know either."

AMK Partners' movements attracted a lot of attention.

But with the next extraordinary shareholders' meeting just around the corner and no visible activity, it only caused more frustration.

"Is your health really all right?"

"They say my body was just shocked by the big events. But now, at least, I can move around."

"I really hope you'll be careful."

Tae Gun-seung smiled at his repeated plea.

"At my age, does being careful make any difference? You just go when it's your time. But I'll probably get scolded a lot if I meet your father on the other side."

"Is my father scarier than the first chairman?"

"To be honest, I learned more about business from your father than from mine, so yes."

The two had a refreshing conversation amid the drastically changed atmosphere.

But it couldn't last long, given Tae Gun-seung's health.

"I'll be going now. I'll come visit again soon."

"If a busy man like you comes, it's a favor to me."

After exchanging farewells, Jung Min-seop went outside and got into the back seat of his car. After pulling out his phone and hesitating for a moment, he spoke to the chauffeur.

"Not home. Take me to Myeong-dong instead."

"Where in Myeong-dong should I drop you?"

"Just let me out in front of the station. You can head straight home from there."

With that, the driver started the car.

Thanks to weekend traffic, it took about thirty minutes to reach Myeong-dong Station.

Bzzz—Bzzz—

After getting out, Jung Min-seop checked the message on his phone.

【2nd floor, 16 Myeongdong 4-gil, Jung-gu, Seoul, CAFE OUN】

The sender was restricted; only the address was written.

Exhaling with suspicion, Jung Min-seop headed out. It was about a ten-minute walk.

"..... Is this place out of business?"

Low buildings lined both sides of the narrow alley.

And when he arrived at the place named in the message, there was a banner on the wall by the stairs to the cafe with "For Lease/Sale" written on it.

After hesitating, Jung Min-seop looked around, then went up.

Inside, there were only dusty tables and chairs. But then, the clicking of shoes came from within and a foreign man in a suit appeared.

Startled, Jung Min-seop stepped back and asked cautiously,

"..... Who are you?"

"Nice to meet you. My name is Gordon Grimes."

At that name, Jung Min-seop's eyes widened in surprise.

And when the man spoke flawless Korean instead of English, he was astonished again.

"If you're Gordon Grimes....."

The CEO of AMK Partners—a name, at least, everyone knew.

Jung Min-seop could hardly not know.

Eyeing him warily, he held out his phone.

"Were you the one who sent this message to me?"

He'd received a message from "number withheld" not long ago.

That message was still up on the phone.

【I'd like to discuss Taeshin Group's future. Please reply if you're interested.】

Gordon Grimes checked the message and answered,

"That's right."

Of course, the one standing there was actually In-hyuk. He had left Noah Vantrail to watch the office while he came out to meet Jung Min-seop.

Meanwhile, Jung Min-seop's expression was openly uneasy.

"I'm sorry, but I don't think there's anything to discuss with you."

With that, he turned to leave the way he came.

But he couldn't help stopping at In-hyuk's next words, spoken with Gordon Grimes' face.

"Even if I said our goal isn't to take over Taeshin Group, but only to replace the management?"

Jung Min-seop slowly turned his head.

"..... What do you mean?"

"We have no intention of dismantling and selling off Taeshin Group. Nor do we mean to change its parent company."

"So, you just intend to swap out the executives for AMK Partners people?"

In-hyuk shook his head.

"We plan to fill the management with capable people from within Taeshin Group itself."

Apparently surprised by this unexpected answer, Jung Min-seop's eyes grew even wider.

"..... Are you telling me to believe that?"

"If you can't, there's nothing I can do—but it's the truth."

"Can you explain why?"

"In the end, it's about image. We do business within Korea as well, so it's an issue we can't ignore."

After some thought, Jung Min-seop fired back with a sigh.

"Are you certain your side can block this shareholders' meeting?"

Recently, the shares turned into company-held shares by Chairman Tae Gun-seung accounted for 8.32% of the total. That much had been taken out from AMK Partners' delegated shares, putting them at a disadvantage.

"We never move without certainty."

"So you're saying you've already secured all the required shares?"

There was a little more than a week left until the next extraordinary shareholders' meeting.

During that time, the shareholder register would be closed and no shares could be transferred.

Executive Vice President Tae Seok-ho had also sent out notice of the meeting as quickly as possible to guard against any possible surprises.

But if Gordon Grimes' words were true, it meant there was some factor Tae Seok-ho was unaware of.

"That's right. Also, AMK Partners plans to appoint you, Executive Director Jung Min-seop, as the next CEO."

Jung Min-seop's face twisted even further.

"Are you telling me to become AMK Partners' lapdog, like Kang In-hyuk?"

Among many executives, Kang In-hyuk had been branded like that.

Naturally, In-hyuk knew this all too well. So he showed a slight smile.

"Would you become anyone's lapdog, Director Jung?"

It meant they had gauged him pretty well.

Jung Min-seop found this even less understandable.

"What do you mean by that?"

"It means you would be Taeshin Group's shield. As CEO, you could rebuild the board with trustworthy people and lead the group forward."

"Then why choose me?"

In-hyuk had fully expected this question.

"Because you're the only one not swayed by Executive Vice President Tae Seok-ho's influence."

There was more, but In-hyuk didn't need to investigate further.

In his previous life, when Chairman Tae Gun-seung died and Tae Seok-ho took over as chairman, Jung Min-seop left Taeshin Group right away.

Of course, his abilities were so outstanding that Tae Seok-ho had tried to keep him.

But at that time, Jung Min-seop gave not a single opportunity.

"What if I refuse?"

"You're our only candidate. If you refuse, Taeshin Group's hope will disappear with it."

In other words, after the acquisition, they would break up and sell off the company.

Jung Min-seop's face grew even more twisted.

"So you're threatening me?"

"Rather than a threat, I'm just explaining the consequences of your options. To us, you are an essential element for Taeshin Group's peace."

With Gordon Grimes' face, In-hyuk radiated gravity.

Sensing this, Jung Min-seop could tell it wasn't a lie.

Then, In-hyuk checked his wristwatch and went on.

"I'll give you some time to think. Until the extraordinary shareholders' meeting ends. Of course, you can decide after you see the results."

"..... Is that really all right?"

"I'd like to press more, but we seem to be under surveillance. On your way down, my men will escort you home safely."

"Under surveillance?"

"It just means a lot of people are interested in the recent moves of the executives. Please get home safely."

With that, In-hyuk himself walked over and opened the door for him.

Jung Min-seop, still dazed, went down the stairs. And when he reached the first-floor alley, three intimidating foreign men with sharp eyes and solid builds were waiting—just as Gordon Grimes had said.

"Mr. Jung?"

A black man among them asked.

"..... Yes."

"Come here."

The men escorted Jung Min-seop out to the main street, placed him in a waiting car, and drove off.

Even then, Jung Min-seop found it hard to make sense of the situation.

But it was no dream—he had met Gordon Grimes in person and been asked to become Taeshin Group's next CEO.

Meanwhile, on the rooftop of the café building, In-hyuk stood in the guise of Gordon Grimes, watching until Jung Min-seop safely made it out.

Then, a man with brown slicked-back hair, a beard, and blue eyes approached and said in French,

"Les gars qui les suivaient s'évanouissaient et les enfonçaient. (The guys who were following them have been knocked out and taken care of.)"

He was Marc Laurent, the leader of Sandrix, a mercenary unit recruited in cooperation with the security company BlueForce.

"Vous avez fait du bon travail. Nous y allons aussi. (Great work. Let's move as well.)"

With that, In-hyuk moved off the rooftop and left for another location.