Former Mastermind To Chaebol Son-in-Law

Chapter 16

Not Even Sorry

Puhk— Crack!

Momentarily relieved, Pyo Jun-woo did not sense the fleeting presence and was slammed to the ground by something.

"Kuh—!"

The thing that fell from above was In-hyuk.

At the same time, he twisted Pyo Jun-woo's left arm behind his back and restrained him.

"So you thought you could finally relax after running this far? Was it only this far?"

"Ugh... Was it Chairman Kang Cheon-gyu who sent you?"

In-hyuk tilted his head slightly.

"You don't need to know that. I have lots of questions for you as well, so let's move to another spot first."

Tear— Crack!

Muttering to himself, In-hyuk ripped a piece of Pyo Jun-woo's clothing, stuffed it into his mouth, and twisted his left elbow and right knee in a chilling motion.

"Mmmph—!"

He had taken into account that a scream would echo through the mountain.

In-hyuk made sure Pyo Jun-woo couldn't move, then dragged him to a warehouse at the bottom of the mountain.

There, the others who had been subdued earlier were sprawled helplessly on the floor, their arms and legs mangled.

"Now we need to have a little talk, just the few of us."

After pulling the cloth out of Pyo Jun-woo's mouth, he looked around at the others.

None of them could get up; instead, they glared at In-hyuk with faces full of killing intent.

The man who had given orders to Pyo Jun-woo spoke first.

"Were you a mercenary hired separately, not a member of the KQ Group's security team?"

"Does it matter who I am? What I'm more curious about is who you guys are and what's going to happen to you from now on."

Upon hearing the voice distorted by the mask, the man furrowed his brow.

"If you're a mercenary, we could hire you for ten times the fee we were paid."

They were also considering ways to escape, but nothing came to mind, so they took a chance by assuming In-hyuk was a mercenary.

"Only ten times?"

"No, as much as you want. Someone with your skills could get anything!"

At the supposed leader's cry, In-hyuk let out a snort.

"Did Section Chief Kim Seong-tae from the Taeshin Group's security team have that kind of authority?"

At that moment, the man's face hardened.

From the moment he saw him in the warehouse, In-hyuk immediately recognized who he was. He had previously worked with him as part of the Taeshin Group's security team, tSS, in a former life.

"That's just my official status. If you're on our side, you'll get to live in a world you never knew existed."

"Are you saying you belong to a secret organization like the National Intelligence Service?"

"... Something like that. How about it? You won't regret teaming up."

In-hyuk crouched in front of him and tapped his mask's chin with his finger.

"You're with the security teams of both Taeshin and KQ, and you're moving so covertly in the background—it's not normal."

"It's a much greater place than you can imagine."

"So did you learn TMT there, too?"

As the atmosphere momentarily relaxed, Kim Seong-tae's brow furrowed again.

He said nothing, staring hard at the masked In-hyuk.

"..."

"What? Are you scared because I know about TMT?"

Kim Seong-tae and the others' eyes darted about quickly.

Anyone could tell this reaction meant something was up.

"You're not UID alumni. Where did you learn it, and from whom?"

"..."

Their silent refusal continued.

In-hyuk lifted Kim Seong-tae's left hand, which had been broken and twisted.

"Does this symbol have anything to do with it?"

A long pattern ran along the border of the left palm and the ring finger.

【—┼◎┼—】

It looked like two circles of different sizes overlapping at the center of a cross.

If you didn't look closely, you could pass it off as a wrinkle at the knuckles.

He had first noticed this symbol in the hospital when he subdued Pyo Jun-woo.

Back then, he thought it was just a trendy tattoo, but he saw it again when dealing with the others just now.

Of course, if In-hyuk's senses hadn't sharpened since before, it would've been hard to spot.

"It's a symbol to distinguish your members. What does it mean?"

"I don't know what you're talking—!"

Slash—

Without hesitation, In-hyuk grabbed a knife rolling on the floor and slit the throat of the man next to Kim Seong-tae.

Instantly, a faint line appeared on the dirt-smeared neck, blood spurted out, and the man collapsed.

"This... this is..."

"Seemed like you thought I was just some nobody who's never killed before. So, what kind of organization are you? If possible, I'd like to know who your leader is, too."

As he spoke, In-hyuk glanced at the remaining people.

The black-tinted mask hid his eyes, but even a slight movement of his head made them flinch.

Meanwhile, Kim Seong-tae sensed that something had gone drastically wrong.

"You... you're not sent by KQ, are you?"

"I never said I was, did I? So could you answer my question first?"

"And if I tell you? Will you spare me?"

"I'm not even sorry, but I'm afraid that's difficult. Oh, and by the way, you guys were speaking Japanese earlier—why Korean now? Is it related to your organization?"

Kim Seong-tae now wore a look that suggested he wanted to deny it, but said nothing.

So, In-hyuk moved the knife in his hand again.

Just then, a cautious answer came forth.

"Don't tell me... are you sent by Aoshika (青鹿)?"

"Aoshika? Are you talking about a blue-green deer? What's that?"

"Then where the hell—!"

Slash—

In-hyuk's knife flashed again, slicing Kim Seong-tae's throat.

The two remaining men stared at In-hyuk in shock.

"What? Didn't believe I'd kill? There are still two of you left."

"We don't know anything! Honestly, we don't know a thing!"

"That's why I'm asking: what is it that you don't know?"

After two men had died while unable to move, the remaining two became distinctly more compliant.

"We only follow orders from above! We don't know where it is or who issues the orders!"

"Where did you learn TMT and from whom? You didn't learn that through an online lecture, did you?"

"I know their face but not their identity! As for the location, for me, they blindfolded us at the airport and transported us somewhere, so I have no idea! I just trained there for about two years!"

"R-right! They said the tattoo on the finger was a certificate of completion, so they engraved it!"

The other man and Pyo Jun-woo spilled the details in rapid succession.

In-hyuk recalled what the man just said.

"Naya, huh... Do you mean Naya Airport in Mongolia? Then the person who taught you TMT..."

The moment he tried to continue his question,

Rustle—

He heard a faint noise behind him.

Without hesitation, In-hyuk rolled to the side, and at the same time, a sharp gust of wind cut through as a bullet pierced through Pyo Jun-woo's head.

During that instant, In-hyuk threw his knife toward the source of the presence, hitting the shoulder of a shadowy figure.

But the shadow didn't stop there. He shot and killed another man with his pistol, then vanished.

"So there was backup support?"

Just to be sure, In-hyuk had checked for any security forces while circling back to the warehouse.

Aside from those in the warehouse, he hadn't seen anyone else, so it must have been a late arrival.

Therefore, instead of the main warehouse door, he dashed out through the window he'd broken in through at the start.

Vroooom—

A motorcycle with headlights on sped away from a spot some distance from the warehouse.

"Tch—!"

It was too late either to run to his own distant car or to pursue with the car the others came in.

With a deep sigh inside his mask, In-hyuk returned to the warehouse to check whether there was anything to retrieve.

* * *

A few days later.

In-hyuk was at work as usual.

About fifteen minutes left until lunch, his phone rang.

"... I figured they'd call soon. Did they wait longer than I expected?"

The number on the caller ID was not saved.

To prevent others from overhearing, In-hyuk stepped into a conference room and answered the call.

It was Lee Jae-jun, Tae Seok-ho's security guard.

[He says he'd like to see you today.]

It was a request that was more of a command, just like last time.

"Sorry, but I have another engagement today. And if it's about a report regarding Tae Ju-ha, you can say that there's been no unusual activity."

[But—!]

In-hyuk hung up before Lee Jae-jun could finish, then returned to his seat to grab his jacket.

"I have external business to attend to and won't be back until late afternoon. Please only contact me if it's something urgent."

"Where are you going?"

Deputy Department Head Jung Jong-hyun asked.

"KQ Group. I have a lunch appointment with the chairman."

"KQ Group... You mean Chairman Kang Cheon-gyu?"

"Yes. If anyone comes looking for me, please tell them that."

Having given his answer, In-hyuk left the building.

It was a fifteen-minute drive to KQ Distribution's headquarters.

Upon arrival, he met Noh Geun-cheol, the secretary who had been waiting in the lobby, and followed him upstairs.

"I never expected the chairman to invite me to the company like this."

Chairman Kang Cheon-gyu stood from his desk and went over to sit on the sofa.

"When you're thirsty, you dig a well, don't you think? Our side made a big mistake, after all. So, is your injury recovering all right?"

He gestured toward In-hyuk's forehead.

"It's almost fully healed."

"Good to hear."

"So, may I ask what this meeting is about today?"

He was asked to come without being told the reason.

However, In-hyuk had his guesses.

"Did you see the news today?"

"Was there something I should be interested in?"

At that disinterested reply, Kang Cheon-gyu thought for a moment, then spoke.

"The Pyo Jun-woo we'd let slip away has died."

"... He's dead?"

Noh Geun-cheol, the secretary standing behind, handed a tablet with the relevant article open.

【Yesterday at dawn, a body was found in a warehouse somewhere in Hwaseong, Gyeonggi Province... Cause of death presumed to be gunshot wound. The suspect is under investigation by the local police... The body was identified as a member of K Group's security team...】

【A firearms-related fatality inside South Korea? The victim, Mr. P, was part of the K Group's security team... The police only stated they are conducting an investigation...】

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Of course, In-hyuk had seen the article that morning.

He purposely pretended not to know and managed his expression carefully.

"The body mentioned in the article... is that security guard Pyo Jun-woo?"

"That's right. For some reason, he was shot in the head and killed. The police even visited the security team earlier today."

"I thought he'd escaped, but to be shot and killed... Was Pyo Jun-woo involved in something dangerous?"

"I don't know the details, either. The police are investigating, so we'll have to wait and see."

Meanwhile, In-hyuk recalled the details from the article.

Four people, including Pyo Jun-woo, were killed at that location a few days ago.

But only Pyo Jun-woo's body was found.

That meant someone had returned to the site after In-hyuk left and cleaned up the scene.

'It couldn't have been easy to clean up all traces of blood and other evidence at that warehouse... Could the organization even be connected to the police?'

If something got manipulated in such a dusty place, there had to be traces left behind.

"KQ Distribution will be in serious trouble over this."

"We'll try to keep the company name out of the press as much as possible, but there's no preventing strange rumors at this point."

This was far from a normal death—it was a firearms-related homicide.

Reporters and media influencers were already busy spinning conspiracy theories.

Letting out a brief sigh, In-hyuk felt a vibration from inside his coat.

Checking his phone, he saw that it was a message from Go Mi-ah.

Chapter 17

They'll Try to Water It Down, but...

After finishing the conversation, In-hyuk exited the chairman's office.

Kang Cheon-gyu, who was seated inside, stared at the closed door for a moment and then spoke to his secretary, Noh Geun-cheol.

"Could you get me the report I saw before?"

"Here it is."

A tablet was handed over.

On the screen was personal information on Kang In-hyuk, compiled by Noh Geun-cheol.

"He's an orphan whose parents are unknown and graduated from Korea University with the help of the Taeshin Education Foundation. He then joined Taeshin Trading through the open recruitment process, worked in sales for three years, and spent one year in the annex office before marrying Tae Seok-hyun's youngest daughter, Tae Ju-ha..."

Nothing out of the ordinary. This piqued Kang Cheon-gyu's curiosity even more.

"There aren't any particularly close acquaintances, and unlike his time at Taeshin Trading, he's been quiet at Taeshin Asset Management until recently showing significant results... Truly an unusual background and attitude."

Noh Geun-cheol could guess what was on his mind.

"He's been showing a lot of changes in his actions lately, which is why the investment branch has taken notice of him."

"But since he's Tae Gun-seung's grandson-in-law from Taeshin Group, people probably aren't approaching him recklessly."

KQ Group had also paid attention to the recent jump in Raisen Energy's stock price.

Since Kang In-hyuk had made results at Taeshin Asset Management, they could not help but be interested.

"We're currently trying to find a leak in the market where that information came from, but so far, there haven't been any leads."

"And his record since then is considerable, isn't it?"

"His clients aren't handling large sums, so the total amount isn't that high, but in terms of figures, he's maintained an average of about 270% returns."

"Keep monitoring Kang In-hyuk's movements."

"I'll submit regular reports."

After answering, Noh Geun-cheol left the room.

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Having left KQ Group, In-hyuk went to visit Go Mi-ah's place.

In the kitchen, Go Mi-ah was shaking a frying pan, probably making something again.

"Forensics finished quicker than I thought."

"There wasn't much inside, so it went fast."

On Go Mi-ah's desk, covered with monitors, were four smartphones—the ones recovered from those who died along with Pyo Jun-woo.

The locator transmitter hidden in Pyo Jun-woo's clothes had also been collected, of course.

"Anything come up?"

"Nothing special, really. I've put it all up on the monitor, so check yourself."

In-hyuk sat down and began examining each device. Before long, he found something familiar.

"Why is this here?"

Hearing his mutter, Go Mi-ah approached, spatula in hand. The TXT file open on the screen contained a string of alphabet letters.

"What's that?"

"A double-keyword cipher."

"You mean the one where you check the content based on specific keywords?"

Go Mi-ah, familiar with such systems from computers, caught on quickly.

"That's right. Can you make a decoding program for it? Try entering the words sent and received by the smartphones as keywords first."

"The program itself isn't hard to make. But if the keywords aren't correct, I can't say how long it will take to decode."

"That's unavoidable."

In-hyuk sighed and glanced around, sensing something odd.

Even last time, he noted it—things that should obviously be decorating Go Mi-ah's room were missing.

"... Hey, do you by chance like idols?"

Go Mi-ah, punching the keyboard, was startled.

"Hm? What are you talking about? Idols?"

He knew full well who she liked and how, from his previous life.

Of course, Go Mi-ah knew nothing of In-hyuk's true identity, so she feigned innocence with a caught look.

"Y'know. That idol group called DDS. Like Ha Eun-ho from there..."

At his mutter, Go Mi-ah's head snapped back and she glared sharply at him.

"You, you...! How much have you dug up on me?"

DDS was a four-member male idol group currently renowned not just in Korea, but worldwide.

In her previous life, Go Mi-ah had been hooked on them, never missing any broadcasts related to the group even while working with In-hyuk.

He, in turn, had suffered through endless stories about them.

"If I'm working with you, shouldn't I know at least a little? And what's wrong with liking idols anyway?"

"Exactly! Right! Nothing wrong at all! But why mention that?"

In-hyuk hesitated, then continued.

"According to my information network, there's a bad event related to them brewing."

"Huh? What event? Why DDS?!"

"Prosecutors have received tips about celebrities and second/third generation chaebols using drugs—it's under investigation. DDS is among those mentioned."

Go Mi-ah's eyes went wide and she jumped up.

"What?! Drugs? Are you serious?"

"That's what I heard."

"There's no way DDS would do that! Are you sure you didn't get it wrong?!"

She truly looked like she couldn't believe it. In-hyuk scratched his nose as he spoke.

"I'm certain the investigation is ongoing. I'll need to look into the details."

"A real investigation? Geez! Should I try hacking into the prosecutors' servers?"

She was already gearing up to run a hacking program as she sat back down.

"Let's wait and see. I'll check it out some more."

"What if the press breaks the story in the meantime?!"

"They probably will, but not too long from now."

"So does that mean DDS actually took drugs?"

"Didn't you just say there's no way?"

"Of course, they didn't!"

Her face showed unwavering faith.

In truth, as she said, dDS did not do any drugs.

But in his previous life, this case drew massive attention to DDS, and even with nothing proven, one member became a target of investigation and ended up taking his own life amidst harsh public criticism.

Although later proven innocent, by then the real drug offenders got off lightly and slipped away clean.

"As I heard it, what's about to blow up is just a smokescreen. The key players are using DDS as a scapegoat to make their own escape."

"What? Those insane bastards!"

"It's obvious. People who care only about their own survival."

Go Mi-ah bristled, seemingly grasping the situation.

"Politicians or chaebols? Ugh... This won't be easy."

She coolly analyzed the situation. Still, In-hyuk could change things this time.

"There is a way to solve this..."

"Really? What do I need to do?"

"I'll need your help."

"I'll do anything! Where do I hack? Prosecutors' Office? National Intelligence Service? CIA? MI6?"

She looked ready to hack all the world's intelligence agencies.

"No need for hacking. Just make sure the articles I send you don't lose momentum."

"Articles? Not collecting evidence or anything?"

She was baffled—it was about proving her favorite idol group's innocence, yet instead of evidence, In-hyuk asked about articles.

"It's best if the investigation into DDS doesn't proceed, but that's impossible right now. So minimizing the damage is our top priority."

"What articles are these?"

"I'll send sources about the people who really deserve to be punished. Once the articles go up, push the search traffic and spread them around. Focus on media outlets other than major ones—YouTube is good, too."

Go Mi-ah tilted her head at his instructions.

"More firepower is good, but wouldn't it be better for credibility to go through the big outlets?"

Big media is more effective than minor outlets at spreading big stories, after all.

"If politicians and chaebols are involved, where do you think they'll try to control things first?"

"Ah..."

"Keep stirring things up on online communities, too, and just follow the plan I set. Everything will turn out the way you want it to."

Having finished their discussion, In-hyuk was about to head home, but Go Mi-ah suddenly rushed to the kitchen.

"I made some wasabi stir-fried anchovies as a side! Do you want some to take home?"

"No thanks. I don't eat at home."

With his answer, In-hyuk quickly walked out.

Earlier, he'd glimpsed the anchovies—they were as pale green as real wasabi.

"How could anchovies end up that color...?"

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【Seoul Central District Prosecutors' Office Busts Major Drug Scandal! Second/third generation chaebols, politicians' children, and celebrities placed under sweeping investigation...】

【Seoul, the city of drugs? The Seoul prosecutors are probing a huge drug distribution network, launching a broad investigation of involved parties. The drugs are said to have circulated through Gangnam's R Club...】

【Economic red alert from drug scandal! Second/third generation chaebols are allegedly involved. Of them, the younger son, Mr. M, of Company M faces suspicion of drug distribution as well...】

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Articles broke early in the morning.

As In-hyuk got ready for work and checked the news, a smile formed.

Normally it would have been an article about DDS being linked to drugs hitting first.

But this time, he'd twisted things so the real key figures were mentioned first.

In particular, company M was Moon Trading, and Mr. M was Moon Jae-min, who had previously picked a fight with In-hyuk at Rizeburn.

This time, he exposed it all at once, tying the incident to others involved.

"They'll try to water it down, but if we keep striking, it won't work as well."

Frankly, whether it was DDS or DDR, In-hyuk didn't much care.

He just wanted to relieve one major worry for Go Mi-ah, who would be working alongside him from now on.

Of course, he would also take this opportunity to acquire shares of companies that would temporarily stagger via AMK Partners.

After dressing, he entered the living room and ran into Tae Ju-ha, who was coming out of the master bedroom.

"You haven't left for work yet?"

"I'm heading out now. Are you leaving later than usual today?"

Since the last incident, Tae Ju-ha had gone to work early and returned late every day, seemingly pushing herself to forget that the incident had been orchestrated by someone.

"My morning meeting is scheduled for an awkward hour today."

"I see. Have a good day at work."

With a nonchalant 'sure,' In-hyuk headed toward the front door.

As he did, Tae Ju-ha called out in a hurried voice.

"In-hyuk!"

"Yes?"

"I see the plan for Team 3's additional stock operations this quarter hasn't come up yet. Is there a problem?"

In-hyuk tilted his head.

"You, the CEO, are keeping track of a single team's plan?"

Stock operation plans were processed by the Upper Office director and executives.

While CEO Tae Ju-ha certainly had authority, team 3's managed assets weren't so large as to garner her direct involvement.

"Because Team 3's performance has been the highest lately."

"I was just lucky."

"Honestly, the returns are much too high for luck. The executives are all talking about it."

Average returns exceeding 270%.

Though the operation size was small, the performance dwarfed most investments, where 50% returns were rare.

"I assume they're not saying good things."

"... You knew?"

"Even for a company, overly high returns may not always be welcomed."

Taeshin Asset Management was already split among factions.

Tae Ju-ha had just barely solidified her position with shares granted by Chairman Tae Gun-seung.

Yet inside, lines loyal to the current Chairman, Tae Gun-seung, to his heirs Tae Seok-hyun and Tae Seok-ho, and a faction loyal to former CEO Jeon Joon-seok all still remained, meaning she could never relax her guard.

"If you're aware of the complications, I'd like you to attach detailed plans for large-volume investments."

In-hyuk simply made a disinterested expression.

"I recall having set conditions."

That was, team 3's operations were to proceed without interference.

"I know. But I never expected results to be this good. Now the executives are raising concerns about possible insider trading."

A predictable reason. Even to them, In-hyuk's returns were too good to be believed.

"I have no intention of sharing my investment sources. If you'd rather forfeit company profits, then do as you please."

"..."

It clearly meant she could fire him if she wanted. Tae Ju-ha fell silent, quickly grasping his meaning.

"If there's nothing else, I'll be heading out."

With that, In-hyuk turned his back on her and left the house.

Chapter 18

Release the Other Sources

Inside a luxurious hotel elevator.

Soon after arriving at the top floor of the hotel, Baek Si-hwan, who belonged to the Taeshin Group's Security Office, exited into the corridor.

When he pressed the doorbell of the suite room, a man peeked out.

Baek Si-hwan raised his left palm toward him and was soon allowed inside.

"Is your shoulder feeling any better?"

As he entered the living room, a middle-aged man with white hair sitting on the sofa asked him.

"It's still a bit uncomfortable, but it's not a problem. I apologize for causing you concern."

The middle-aged man's identity was Baek Ji-woong, chairman of WISE&WIRE Group.

"I didn't expect someone like you to get hurt that badly. And even more, I had no idea you'd flee without dealing with the situation first."

Baek Si-hwan had recently clashed with a dangerous individual at a warehouse in Hwaseong.

But instead of taking down the enemy, he'd been injured and forced to retreat.

His head lowered deeply.

"..... I have no excuse."

A heavy silence lingered for a moment, then the middle-aged man continued.

"They say the enemies even collected the team members' belongings. Are you sure there are no issues?"

"All communications were encrypted, so there shouldn't be a problem."

"There's no chance it could be deciphered?"

"As you know, without the periodically updated keywords used within the organization, it's impossible. We also changed the keyword immediately after the incident."

Baek Ji-woong nodded slowly.

"At least that's fortunate. But, you can't identify the adversary at all?"

"We did find vehicular traces nearby, but it was discovered to be an unlicensed car with fake plates, so tracking it seems difficult."

"And besides that?"

"Analyzing the movements at the time, the individual is at least as well-trained as us. In addition....."

His words trailed off, making Baek Ji-woong's eyes widen a bit.

"Is there something concerning?"

"It seemed like the individual was using WID's TMT."

At this, Baek Ji-woong furrowed his brow.

"You're sure you didn't see wrong?"

"I estimate the chance I was mistaken is less than 10%."

"So..... from UID then?"

TMT was a combat technique developed by the Army Defense Intelligence Command's intelligence unit UID about seven years ago, which had since been incorporated into the current organization.

That organization included Baek Ji-woong and Baek Si-hwan. In fact, the name UID was originally derived from the present WID.

"Just in case, I checked the list of those killed in action or discharged from UID, but there was still no one who matched."

WID was, externally, a non-existent private military group of WISE&WIRE.

They had accomplished many things using them, and failures had never occurred.

They were also entities that absolutely could not be exposed to the outside.

Yet this time, not only had they failed a mission for the first time, but exposure was also at risk.

"Any chance it was Aoshika?"

"They haven't shown a single sign of activity since splitting from us."

'Aoshika' was a separate team that went underground after internal conflict.

"So unless they resurface, finding them will be hard?"

"That's correct for now."

"That's trouble. Well, there's nothing to be done then."

With that, the conversation ended.

As Baek Ji-woong shook his hand in dismissal, Baek Si-hwan bowed his head again and stepped outside.

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In-hyuk was seated at the office, as usual for a workday.

Then, from the neighboring office, his colleague and fellow recruit Noh Dongjun cautiously approached.

"Team Leader Kang In-hyuk, why are you so busy lately?"

By now, In-hyuk had recalled most of his memories regarding the company.

Noh Dongjun was someone of middling skill who maintained decent social relationships.

Though a bit noisy—a type that wasn't his taste—he was the only one the original Kang In-hyuk could have called a friend.

"I've had it pretty easy last year, so now I need to show I'm working. Anyway, what's up?"

"I thought maybe you were pushing yourself too hard, so I came to check on your state of mind. Want to grab a coffee upstairs?"

In-hyuk considered for a moment, then logged off his computer.

"Sure, why not."

The two headed to a park on the middle floor of the building and got coffee from the vending machine.

"Mix coffee really is the best!"

"Checking on my mental state sounds like an excuse. What are you actually trying to learn? Did the 2nd Team Leader send you to dig into my information network?"

Noh Dongjun grinned slyly.

"Your recent performance is pretty good, right? The other teams are desperate to figure out your source. And, well, Team Leader Go keeps pressuring me....."

Meaning Go Jin-woo of Equity Investment Team 2.

"Seems his pride keeps him from asking directly."

"Ever since you became team leader, there's been a lot of talk. And after that recent quiet spell, your results exploded, so people can't help but gossip even more."

Still, the prevailing view was that In-hyuk's results came from the Taeshin Group's info network.

"Hearing you talk like this, you're just following protocol."

"I get pressured from above too, so I have no choice. But honestly, haven't you changed too much?"

"In what way?"

Though not close, as fellow recruits who'd endured training together, Noh Dongjun had some sense of his character. Naturally, he couldn't help seeing that In-hyuk's demeanor had shifted.

"You used to quietly do your work without ever showing your true feelings. Did something happen?"

Something had happened, for sure. The person had changed overnight.

He'd been thinking about this since returning to this past yet present world.

'Even now, I don't know why the original me disappeared and I became Kang In-hyuk.'

The same past, the same flow. But In-hyuk's actions were warping things little by little.

Yet he still hadn't identified who was behind Baek Si-hwan, which was frustrating.

But approaching Baek Si-hwan too directly would only spark suspicion.

"I just don't want to overlook the things I used to ignore."

"Oh, come on! Why are you talking like that..... Though, honestly, it's not bad. Frankly, when you decided to join Taeshin Group as a son-in-law, it felt like you'd given up on everything. It bothered me."

Noh Dongjun gave a resigned smile as he spoke.

"Did I?"

"You don't remember? You looked like someone who was done with life."

Along with his answer, In-hyuk recalled the situation then.

But the memory seemed like it was from the first person, so he couldn't tell what he'd really felt or thought.

"I don't really remember."

"Oh, by the way, is there any issue with your team's funds after all this?"

"Issue?"

"With the drug incident making the rounds since a few days ago. The office is in an uproar because of it."

That case had caused a major stir, with children of politicians and second and third-generation chaebols involved.

Naturally, the share prices of related companies were affected, impacting investment firms too, including Taeshin Asset Management.

That's why some teams in the office were uneasy.

"We don't manage large funds, and most of ours aren't related to the incident."

"But you invest in stocks, right?"

At that, In-hyuk laughed.

"This was your real reason. You wanted to know if there was damage to the clients I manage."

"Oh, you caught me?"

The question was far too obvious.

"No need to beat around the bush. And there was no damage on my end either. Guess I was lucky, none of my counterparties were involved."

After all, In-hyuk had engineered the event, so he was bound to avoid it. At the same time, Noh Dongjun was surprised.

"Really? What's your stock portfolio ratio?"

"Around 90%."

"And not a single one got hit?"

"Most are overseas companies."

He'd purposely invested in foreign stocks to avoid suspicions of insider trading, even with high returns.

"So you're making that much without betting on local firms... That's really impressive. Where do you get your information?"

"Why? Want me to share if I have something good?"

It was an offer to give Noh Dongjun, one of the few he could almost call a friend, a chance.

"Is that possible?"

"If you can trust me and follow."

That was the key. If In-hyuk couldn't be trusted, sharing anything was pointless.

"Of course I trust you."

His immediate reply caught In-hyuk by surprise.

"..... And if the information's wrong and you suffer big losses?"

"I made the choice, so I should take responsibility. Who else can I blame?"

A surprising answer. In-hyuk stared at Noh Dongjun.

"....."

"What's wrong?"

"It's nothing. I'll pick a suitable company to invest in and let you know later today. But I don't want any complaints, so say it's your own source."

"Oh! Thanks!"

After finishing their conversation, they returned to the office.

As they reached the fifth floor where the Equity Investment Headquarters was located, In-hyuk received a call from Go Mi-ah.

He gestured for Noh Dongjun to go on ahead, then moved to a quiet place to answer.

"What's going on at this hour?"

[Just like you said, the guys have started as well.]

A message link came through.

Checking it, he found an article claiming that the global idol group DDS was implicated in the drug case.

Naturally, the article was full of speculation, with no hard evidence—using celebrity scandal to create a stir and distract everyone from the initial list of high-ranking officials' children and chaebol heirs.

"Release the other sources we prepared, as planned."

[No changes to the plan, right?]

"As long as you handle the pushes well, there'll be no problems. Draw in more traffic to the existing articles too. Absolutely leave no traces."

[Don't worry~!]

After hanging up, In-hyuk returned to his seat and checked headlines linking idol group DDS to the drug case on his computer.

In the meantime, he heard sighs and murmurs in the office as the news spread.

Because the idol group was linked to several advertisers, it couldn't be ignored.

But that didn't last long.

【Anonymous message board exposes major business figures' drug list. Full names and detailed personal information revealed, sending shockwaves through the industry.....】

【Rizeburn drug scandal? High-ranking officials' children and chaebol heirs' illegal drug debauchery.....】

【Prosecutors' flimsy investigation. At the center is Deputy Chief Prosecutor Ahn ○○ of the Seoul Central District Prosecutors' Office, alleged to have taken requests from those involved.....】

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First, the real owner and stakeholders of the club Rizeburn, where the drugs had been distributed, were named in the press.

Then, the actual names of those involved, along with their relatives and bribery deposit histories, surfaced.

'With this much, even if they want to keep playing tricks with the DDS group, they'll be too distracted to manage it, right?'

These clues were things Go Mi-ah had tipped off out of regret for not rescuing DDS during her lifetime.

After returning to the past, using his sharpened memory, In-hyuk had compiled a list and data for Go Mi-ah to leak.

Meanwhile, news sites continued to churn out a complex web of stories.

Chapter 19

Looking to Blackmail Someone

A Korean set menu restaurant, 'Hanul', located on the southern outskirts of Gyeonggi Province.

Inside the main building, Taeshin Trading Executive Director Tae Seok-ho walked leisurely, accompanied by the security guard, Lee Jae-jun.

As the door opened, a middle-aged woman who had arrived earlier stood up as if she had been waiting.

Tae Seok-ho sat across from her, placing Lee Jae-jun in front of him.

"You seem quite worn down, I suppose due to your son's issue."

The woman he addressed was Baek Min-sook, wife of the chairman of Moon Trading.

"I'm well aware you're doing your best, executive director, but the situation is just too dire right now."

Baek Min-sook's second son, Moon Jae-min, was under prosecution investigation for a drug case.

His name and identity had already been published online, causing Moon Trading's stock price to take a hit.

Because of this, Baek Min-sook had teamed up with Tae Seok-ho, desperate to find any way to get her son, Moon Jae-min, out of trouble.

"As you know, even your brother is pulling strings and yet it's come to this."

The 'brother' Tae Seok-ho referred to was Baek Ji-woong, chairman of W&W Group, whose main company was a major media conglomerate.

Even W&W, through its media outlet W&W DAYS, had tried to muddy the waters by running ambiguous articles and even mentioning the idol group DDS, who wasn't implicated in any crime.

"Still, it's obvious someone's intervening behind the scenes. Chairman Baek found it suspicious too and is checking on it."

"I agree with you there."

Baek Min-sook had joined hands with Tae Seok-ho much earlier, after he first informed her that her son, Moon Jae-min, had been linked to a drug investigation at the Central District Prosecutors' Office.

"You said before that if we follow your instructions, jae-min's problem would be solved. That's why I also asked Chairman Baek for a favor."

"To be honest, I didn't expect things to get this tangled either."

Tae Seok-ho's original plan had been to push the narrative that idol group DDS was involved with drugs and then extract Moon Jae-min and other stakeholders who would be profitable to save.

But suddenly, Moon Jae-min's name was mentioned along with Rizeburn, where the drugs had circulated, and even the inspector from the Central District Prosecutors' Office, whom Tae Seok-ho had lined up, was exposed.

From the circumstances, it was clear there had been a leak, but he couldn't find any trace of it anywhere, which was driving him crazy.

On top of that, new articles and anonymous posts naming the identities of second and third-generation chaebols kept surfacing, making it difficult to quiet the scandal.

It was obvious someone was manipulating things behind the scenes, but he couldn't trace them.

"So, are you saying there's really nothing that can be done?"

With concern filling her eyes, Baek Min-sook asked, and Tae Seok-ho let out a low sigh.

"To be frank... the situation isn't good."

He had considered trying to cover things up with a different article, but the people involved in the Rizeburn drug scandal were too high profile for the issue to go away.

"Is it possible to get to the new chief prosecutor overseeing the case?"

"It's already beyond the point where we can cover things up. And if Jae-min had only just done drugs it might be manageable, but... he's implicated in the distribution too."

From an outside perspective, people would say that Moon Jae-min, a chaebol's second son, shouldn't have had any reason to get mixed up in drug distribution.

But within Moon Trading, he had caused so many problems that his father, chairman Moon Dong-beom, had basically disowned him.

Yet Moon Jae-min never learned moderation and kept down a darker path.

"So, are you saying we should just let him go to prison?"

"For now, shutting this down immediately isn't possible. We'll have to stack the defense with former high-level prosecutors. It's hard to influence prosecution, so we'll have to pull strings in court to minimize the sentence as much as possible."

"But..."

Baek Min-sook genuinely hoped Moon Jae-min wouldn't serve prison time at all.

"It's too late to intervene. And you know Chairman Moon's character."

Her husband, moon Dong-beom, the chairman of Moon Trading, was known for his integrity.

He was so principled that he'd break before justifying an ethical issue with family ties.

That's precisely why he never allowed his problematic second son, Moon Jae-min, into the company.

"Ha—! That's what stresses me out every single day."

That was also why Baek Min-sook couldn't openly seek help and accepted Tae Seok-ho's proposal in secret.

"I'll do my best. In the worst case, he'll get a criminal record, but there are options like parole, so please don't worry too much."

"Haaa... alright. But given the outcome, it may be difficult for me to keep my previous promise about the conditions we discussed."

At those words, a slight twitch appeared on Tae Seok-ho's brow.

Baek Min-sook, for all her motherly concern, was no fool.

That's why she met Tae Seok-ho in person to carefully renege on their previous agreement.

"I completely understand."

"Thank you. Well, I'll excuse myself now."

"... As you wish."

Baek Min-sook got up and left first.

Meanwhile, Lee Jae-jun entered the room where Tae Seok-ho remained.

"Executive Director, are you alright?"

"Just who are these bastards messing up my affairs... Have you identified the whistleblower who sent the scoop to the online news outlet yet?"

"I just received an update. They say it's impossible to trace the whistleblower's email IP."

"... Not difficult, impossible?"

On the internet, all actions left some kind of trace.

"The word from the expert is that a very skilled professional is involved."

"In what way?"

"There are a lot of technical terms, but apparently they used a technique that deletes server logs for every proxied IP."

With worry clouding his face, Tae Seok-ho tapped the table with his fingers.

"Was the tip given to everyone but the major media outlets?"

"That's correct."

While wrestling with that, he remembered something.

"Have you checked why the article keeps showing up prominently on the big portal sites?"

"They checked for unusual activity and confirmed a traffic overload, but found nothing else suspicious."

If someone was manipulating the traffic with external IPs, there would be traces due to the overseas routing.

Hearing that, Tae Seok-ho's expression grew even darker.

"It's too clean—that's even more suspicious. Someone knew our plans and took preemptive action."

It was too complex to chalk up to coincidence or random chance.

Furthermore, only outlets that hadn't been pressured from the start were tipped off, lighting a fire that spread—there was clear intent behind it.

"Even the friendly news agencies might not be able to stick to the current line much longer."

Even if the voices were small, if there were enough of them, the impact would multiply.

"Now things have gotten infuriating. The plan's gone bust, and the stocks I was going to get from Baek Min-sook are lost..."

"Why not try talking directly with Chairman Moon Dong-beom, then?"

Tae Seok-ho slowly shook his head.

"Chairman Moon is the kind of man who'd think it isn't enough even if he gives an inch and we take a mile. If we're not sure to get our bite, we could lose our necks instead."

The real reason Tae Seok-ho tried to strike a deal with Baek Min-sook was the shares in Taeshin Trading—the holding company owned by Moon Trading.

A stake of 2.44%.

The plan was to use Moon Jae-min's drug case as a leash to manipulate Chairman Moon Dong-beom.

"I'll look for other options, then."

"Do that. Oh, and what happened to that accident where Kang In-hyuk and Tae Ju-ha almost died?"

Tae Seok-ho had also heard about the two being in an accident.

He considered intervening, but since Kang In-hyuk had delivered Tae Ju-ha's file just in time, he stopped worrying.

Lee Jae-jun replied in a calm tone,

"Perhaps because of all the eyes on them, it seems the matter was wrapped up quietly."

"So, Kang In-hyuk and Tae Ju-ha accepted things as they are?"

"Objectively, it's likely President Kang put some pressure on them. Still, I doubt either of them would ruin corporate relations over something like this."

After a moment's thought, Tae Seok-ho nodded.

"That makes sense. But still no contact?"

The last time Tae Seok-ho summoned Kang In-hyuk, he was ignored.

It was infuriating at the time, but with Chairman Tae Gun-seung's eyes on them, it wasn't easy to bring him in, so he waited quietly.

"Should I call him in?"

"No. We've got lots to deal with on our end—just keep monitoring Taeshin Asset Management and report on internal movements regularly."

"Understood."

With that, the two finished their talk and left together.

* * *

After work, In-hyuk visited Go Mi-ah's studio.

He entered using the code they shared, and inside, he was greeted by her wicked voice.

"How dare they pick on our DDS!"

Tap-tap-tap—tap-tap—

She was posting an actual drug list to drown out articles implicating DDS in the Rizeburn drug scandal.

As a result, major media outlets couldn't keep running contradicting rebuttals and started following her lead.

"You're really loaded for bear."

"Hold on a sec."

Her keystrokes only got heavier.

Soon, as her drug list posts and related articles' view counts soared, they dominated the main pages of various portal sites again.

"If you keep posting like that, won't the numbers get flagged as manipulated? If a lot of overseas IPs show up through zombie servers, they'll get suspicious."

"Ha-ha—! Stop worrying. Do you take me for an amateur? I've only been using domestic proxy servers from the start, and the click manipulation is distributed through algorithms, so there's no way I'll get caught."

Go Mi-ah, though much younger than In-hyuk when they met, was indisputably a computer prodigy.

"Good thing I teamed up with you."

"It's more like I made the right choice. If we hadn't teamed up, I'd have been caught by the National Intelligence Service. Otherwise, this mess wouldn't have been stopped either."

"Somehow, you sound more grateful for the latter than the former."

It was apparent in her tone.

"Hey! That's just your imagination. Ah, you wanted me to install a program on your phone, right? Hand it over."

At her request, In-hyuk handed over his phone.

She connected it to the computer and installed several programs.

"It's the same proxy program you use, right?"

"I've upgraded the volatility. Also, if you're on a network, you can access the server links inside through another phone or computer. But it'll drain your battery fast."

"I'll deal with it. More importantly—if the target replies, it's still safe?"

He meant a messaging app that left no trace.

"No problem. If they don't reply within a set time, the server location changes, erasing any traces."

"Nice."

"But why the sudden need for such a program?"

Normally, messages are used for communication.

But what In-hyuk emphasized was not just communication but volatility and leaving no trace—for the opponent's reply window to be limited, making them nervous.

"I'm thinking of blackmailing someone."

"Blackmail? Hearing you say that is pretty scary. Whoever it is, I feel sorry for them."

"I just need a few people for my purposes."

In-hyuk retrieved his phone and deftly typed an email address and message.

"You're using it right away?"

"This is the time. By the way, what's going on with that stock purchase I asked about last time? The price dropped to 23,000 won."

"You mean Taiwan's SolarView? I was going to mention it—your target of 31% ownership was barely reached. That's why AMK Partners keeps getting swamped with emails."

"I'll reply myself."

"Looks like it's some semiconductor-related company... What are you after?"

In-hyuk offered a faint smile.

"It's just something to grow AMK Partners' assets. Don't worry about it."

"I trust you know what you're doing. But I don't see anything special—it's rumored to be in financial trouble, too."

As she said, solarView was a semiconductor company currently struggling with outdated technology and poor earnings.

Still, the rumors and careful handling had allowed him to nab over 30% shares with little fuss.

"SolarView is just a piece. The person interested in it is the one I need."

"Whatever that means... Want some?"

Go Mi-ah pulled out some potato chips from a bowl and offered them.

In-hyuk reached out for one of the ordinary-looking chips, but hesitated.

"Wait... These aren't homemade, are they?"

"I made them myself."

With that answer, In-hyuk withdrew his hand to its original position.

Chapter 20

Nicely Put, it's Blackmail; Harshly Put, it's Death

The Rizeburn drug incident continued to cause significant repercussions in the political and business circles.

Moreover, with the involvement of children of high-ranking officials, the media became even busier.

In the meantime, In-hyuk was sitting in the conference room with his team members.

"Have you made a decision?"

This was a question regarding the additional Q2 stock investment plan from last time.

Back then, they had discussed whether to take In-hyuk's proposal and accept the associated risks.

However, deputy Chief Jung Jong-hyun and the other team members had all hesitated, looking to each other for a response and ultimately postponing an answer.

"We'll go with what you said, Team Leader."

"You made a good choice."

In-hyuk continued, checking off the items of the existing additional proposal with his pen.

"From now on, we'll be managing information as swing trades. I'll let the person in charge know separately when it's time to exit."

"What kind of profit cap are you anticipating?"

After a brief mental calculation, In-hyuk spoke flatly.

"At the very least... excluding the principal, a minimum of 80%."

At that, slight disappointment appeared on the faces of some team members.

"Ah..."

"What's wrong?"

"....."

No one rushed to answer.

Even at a glance, it was clear that the figure was far below the returns In-hyuk had achieved thus far.

Of course, In-hyuk knew well what their reaction meant.

"You all treated me like a placeholder Team Leader until now, but did you really think just agreeing to my proposal meant I'd pick stocks that would deliver huge profits, right off the bat?"

Apparently, he had hit the mark, as several team members lowered their heads awkwardly and cleared their throats.

"If things go well, I'll try to improve the returns in the future. Also, make sure none of the information we shared leaks out. Unless you want to take the blame for something unnecessary."

In-hyuk's sharp gaze swept across the team.

A few who briefly made eye contact looked startled and quickly averted their gazes.

"Well, let's end the meeting here."

After In-hyuk left first, the rest of the team members did not immediately get up.

After a while, Ahn Woo-chan cautiously spoke to Deputy Chief Jung Jong-hyun.

"About the Team Leader... I've been feeling this since last time, but don't you think his attitude has suddenly changed a lot?"

Everyone nodded, seemingly in agreement. Of course, Jung Jong-hyun thought the same.

"Did he eat something bad, or is he just showing a side he's kept hidden until now... Either way, since we've decided to follow, let's just do our best."

Everyone stood up.

While the lower-ranking employees were leaving, Ahn Woo-chan pulled Jung Jong-hyun aside for a moment.

"Deputy Chief, are things okay up above?"

"Who? Team Leader Kim?"

In fact, before In-hyuk arrived at Taeshin Asset Management, Jung Jong-hyun had worked under Team Leader Kim Seong-ho of Equity Investment Team 1.

When In-hyuk was parachuted into the Team 3 Leader position, Jung Jong-hyun became his direct subordinate, so he naturally had a lot of complaints.

To be honest, back when Kim Seong-ho passed on the difficult A2 client to Kang In-hyuk, Jung Jong-hyun had stood by, almost hoping to see In-hyuk get burned.

However, instead of suffering, In-hyuk had delivered an incredible 223% profit to that client.

"In this situation, what can we do?"

"I know, but... it's Team Leader Kim's personality I'm worried about."

Team 3, led by the parachuted Team Leader In-hyuk, was already out of favor.

Of course, recently, since Ahn Woo-chan's wife, Tae Ju-ha, who was also a member of the Taeshin Group family, became CEO and the team leader started to deliver high returns, the situation wasn't as obvious, but rumors still spread.

"For now, just..."

Bzzbzz— Bzzbzz—

Jung Jong-hyun's phone vibrated. Checking the screen, he let out a long sigh.

Ahn Woo-chan glanced at the caller ID and furrowed his brow as well.

【Team Leader Kim Seong-ho】

"... You're going through a lot."

"You too, hang in there."

With that, Ahn Woo-chan left, and Jung Jong-hyun pressed the call button, sitting alone in the conference room.

* * *

As night deepened, a middle-aged man with white hair, brown eyes, and light brown skin, dressed in a luxurious ash-gray suit, entered a narrow alley near Cheonggyecheon, Seoul.

The area was lined with shops selling lighting equipment and machine parts.

"Hoo—!"

The man was Norman McGrath, who had worked at the Asia branch of the famous U. S. hedge fund FOURGMA.

And now, due to the ongoing issue with a Taiwanese company called SolarView, he had left Singapore, where his branch was located, and just arrived in Korea.

Passing flickering streetlights, he checked his phone. According to the map app, this was the spot.

"This should be the place..."

For a downtown alley, it was eerily deserted. Bzzbzz—

Just then, an email arrived in English, as if on cue.

【Gordon: It's a pleasure meeting you.】

The content, as if someone was watching him, made Norman McGrath dart his eyes around in surprise.

But there were only cracked gray walls on either side, and only dim alleyways ahead and behind.

【Norman: I have arrived. Where are you?】

As soon as he replied, footsteps echoed from the alley behind him.

Tap, tap—

Turning around, Norman McGrath saw a shadowy figure standing on the dark road.

"Fortunately, you came here without getting lost."

The figure was In-hyuk. Responding in English, Norman McGrath stiffened his expression and answered in English as well.

"Thanks to you, I found the place. More importantly, are you really with AMK Partners, the firm that acquired shares of SolarView?"

"That's right. I'm Gordon Grimes."

The name he had just uttered was the representative identity registered under Go Mi-ah's direction when she formed AMK Partners at In-hyuk's instruction.

Naturally, Norman McGrath had done his research before coming to South Korea, so he recognized the name.

However, other than the name and age, there was no information about Gordon Grimes' photo or personal life.

"If you wanted to meet for business, shouldn't you at least show your face?"

At the probing question, In-hyuk didn't budge an inch from his spot.

"You're trying to pitch SolarView not to FOURGMA but to a competitor. Why should I show you my face?"

At that moment, Norman McGrath's brow crumpled. In-hyuk had stated the facts as they were.

"I'm not sure what you mean..."

"The fact that you're here in the first place pretty much proves it, doesn't it?"

The message In-hyuk had sent from Go Mi-ah's studio was clear: if he did not arrange a meeting soon, the relevant facts and evidence would be sent to FOURGMA HQ.

"AMK Partners is a new company. Why all this effort? What exactly do you do?"

In-hyuk couldn't help but let out a short laugh.

"I called because I need you. How about working with me from now on?"

Norman McGrath cocked his head at the proposition.

"Are you... recruiting me?"

"Yes. I'll pay you twice your current salary, plus a 3% incentive based on profits."

The offer was significant, and Norman's eyes flickered beneath the street lamp.

"I suppose my life depends on those conditions as well?"

"That depends on your decision. Ah, and I'll also keep secret the fact that you worked as a lobbyist under the nickname Gold Eye in the Middle East."

Norman McGrath was even more shocked.

There was no official record of his lobbying activities, and yet Gordon Grimes had just mentioned it.

"You know even that... Who are you really?"

"Just someone at AMK Partners with very powerful intelligence sources."

Plop—

With that, In-hyuk tossed a leather pouch about 5cm thick at his feet.

Picking it up, Norman glanced through its contents under the streetlight—then could not hide his shock.

Inside was documentation of every lobbying activity he'd been involved in, the rebate projects at FOURGMA, and detailed records on negotiations with competitors over SolarView.

Norman's hands trembled holding the documents.

"Refusing your offer would mean you're threatening to destroy my life."

"Think of it as blackmail, at best; at worst, death."

Norman's lips twitched.

"It's hard to find much solace in either, honestly."

"In exchange, I'll let you experience accomplishments and money you've never known before."

"Is AMK Partners really that exceptional?"

"Well, you saw for yourself how we gathered so much information and stock in SolarView that even you didn't know. Isn't that proof enough?"

No one who wasn't an insider should have been able to discover or gather that information—yet AMK Partners had it all.

"Do I have to decide now? I suppose so—there's only one option anyway."

After a brief sigh, Norman McGrath pressed on.

"So, what exactly do you want me to do?"

Plop—

Again, a leather pouch was tossed to him. Checking the contents, his expression subtly soured.

"AMK Partners branch establishment in Korea, and securing 30% of initial investment funds from FOURGMA as a loan for less than 3% equity... Do you think that's possible?"

Corporate loans through investment firms usually require shares as collateral.

"Well, that depends on your abilities."

"Unless AMK Partners' unlisted stock market cap and current profits are enormous, and unless the initial investment is sizable, if the equity condition is under 3%, even KRW 10 billion would be tough. If it's lower than that, 1 billion might be the limit."

He was right. In-hyuk stared at him in the darkness for a moment, then replied.

"If you check the middle section of the documents, you'll see the current profit ratio and available operating funds."

Norman quickly leafed through the documents.

"... Profit rate of 328% excluding the principal? Do you expect me to believe that?"

"You can check after the branch is established and account access is granted. From now on, use the phone inside the pouch for communication. Looking forward to working with you."

With that, In-hyuk finished and receded into the shadows.

"What, you're just ending the conversation like this? W-wait!"

For a moment, Norman stood dumbfounded. He quickly ran to where the figure had stood, then checked further down the alley.

But just as if the person had vanished into thin air, there was no trace of Gordon Grimes to be found.

"What the...?"

He had been blackmailed for his misdeeds and then received a sky-high scout offer.

No matter how simply he tried to understand it, it made no sense.

But the hefty documents in his hands left no doubt that what he'd heard was true.

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Meanwhile, In-hyuk was standing on the rooftop of a nearby building, not far from where he'd just been.

He could see Norman McGrath scouring the alleyways below. Taking out his phone, he called Go Mi-ah.

"If you find anything on nearby CCTV footage, edit all of it out."

[Okay. But did you make sure to avoid any store CCTV or black boxes? I can't do anything about those.]

"I made sure to avoid them on my way to the meeting spot."

He himself would not have been caught, but the issue was Norman McGrath.

If anyone later investigated whom Norman met in Korea, there could be a trail.

[Judging from his resume, he's a big shot... Why are you roping him into our work? What if he stabs us in the back?]

Currently, Go Mi-ah continued to grow AMK Partners' assets using information provided by In-hyuk.

Thanks to that, just the accrued funds so far amounted to nearly KRW 20 billion.

She was naturally concerned Norman might try something with it.

"I'll restrict his authority. And we're holding the leash, so there's no need to worry."

[And why exactly?]

"We need someone to act as the public face. You can't do sales, and I can't handle AMK business with my current identity."

[Tch—!]

Finishing the call, In-hyuk quickly made his way through the rooftop, ensuring he avoided building CCTV or black boxes as he moved to the safe zone.