

Once Again 801

Chapter 801. Sequence 7

He threw the phone upwards. The phone spun around in the air like a saw blade before falling onto the bed. He reached his hand out and grabbed the phone before throwing it again. When he threw his phone about five to six times, he arrived at the conclusion that this wasn't the right action. Although he wouldn't usually waste time like this, he needed to for today. He sat on the edge of his bed and checked his text messages. There was a text that came in the afternoon.

-So, we're starting with texting first?

Maru felt as though he could hear her tacky tone. Originally, he should not have sent her a message. He should have widened the distance and ended their relationship as complete strangers. However, the situation pushed him to send the text message. The rabbit that remained behind in the darkness must have been an indication of the death of Han Gaeul. At the same time as that, the Gaeul that lived in the current era collapsed. As it is said that God didn't play dice games, it must have been fate that it happened. Even if it was just a coincidence, the fact that the two incidents overlapped with each other meant that it had to be intended. Who intended it, then? The rabbit? Or the bad guy controlling the marionette from behind?

That being pulled the uncontrollable and derailing train back onto the original track as though they didn't like it. It was indeed out of his own free will that he sent Gaeul the text, but that was thanks to the fact that the very incident was caused by his own free will in the first place. He couldn't help but feel like he was played here.

"What an unmerciful being."

Maru looked up at the ceiling before taking a shower. He washed away the fatigue with water before returning to the sofa. He could feel the blood circulating quickly around his face due to the blood vessels being warmed up from the heat. It was good that his blood was moving quickly. Using his head meant that he needed a lot of blood and oxygen to pass through his head. He took a sip of coffee. There was no shoot until the day after tomorrow. There was plenty of time to think.

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Gaeul distantly stared at her phone. It had been four hours since she sent a reply. Although she did not expect a reply immediately, she thought that he would at least do something before the day went past. The LEDs on the electronic clock indifferently kept on blinking as time rushed towards midnight.

She raised the volume of the TV. The ward looked a lot more desolate today. She wondered if she should have held back Chaerim from leaving since she did say that she wanted to stay for longer as she didn't have anything to do. Chaerim's laughter might have made this place less lonely. She kept changing the channel meaninglessly before finding a drama being broadcasted. It was 'Flaming Lady'. Back then, she thought that she couldn't have done better, but now that she looked back at it, there were many parts she found lacking. She thought that the fact that she could find flaws in her previous acting meant that she had improved. She pulled her knees together and hugged them with her arms before watching the drama. It was back then that the stock value of the actress Han Gaeul's life kept showing red arrows. The acting she did in 'Building' made a good impression on the people in the

industry, but it wasn't enough to be known to the public. There might be many people who might exclaim while looking at the girl being crushed under building debris, but not many people would remember that after all.

-To me, you were everything. But that doesn't seem like the case for you. Regardless, I still love you nonetheless. Look at me. I'm saying I love you. So you can't abandon me.

As she was watching her past self saying those words with a vicious expression she turned her eyes to her phone. Her phone was ringing. She grabbed her phone with her right hand before clenching her eyes shut. Why was it that she was shaking so much when it was just a single phone call? She squinted her eyes open and checked it. Her nervous heart relaxed in an instant. It was director Park Hoon.

"Yes, director."

-You don't sound good. I heard the news. Are you not feeling well?

"No, it's not like that."

-No, you are. You were so out of energy when you first picked up the phone call.

"If I were to tell you the truth, there was a phone call I was waiting for."

-So I'm not a welcome caller, huh.

"Honestly speaking, yes. I'm a little disappointed."

-Is this the point where I'm supposed to feel sorry?

"You know I was just joking."

-I do. That's why I'm saying it. But if you're sick, you should be sleeping. What are you doing?

"I was bored, so I was just watching TV. You know what they say: people can't do the things they want to when they actually can do it. Now that I'm actually in a ward to rest, my mind is as clear as day. When I shot that drama with you before, my only wish was to sleep like a log at home."

-I guess it was hard back then. I did make everyone suffer because of the additional episodes at almost the last moment. I feel sorry about it even now.

"Thanks to that though, I became successful, so I can't really complain. Are you at a shoot right now?"

-No, I'm resting at home. I was watching TV and I found 'Flaming Lady'. I was watching episode 15, and I was wondering how I even shot that. That was when I heard about you.

"You were watching too? I'm watching it right now as well."

-How do you feel, watching your own acting?

"It's good, but I think I'll do better now."

-From how you're all confident, it looks like I don't have to worry about your health.

"Yes, it's not a big problem."

Gaeul looked at herself fallen on asphalt due to a traffic accident. Just then, she recalled a question. It was the thought that came to her mind when she took out the script of 'Flaming Lady' from her shelf.

"Uhm, director."

-Yeah.

"There's something I want to ask."

-Your voice sounds rather ominous. I decline any difficult questions.

"It shouldn't be a difficult question. It's about the past after all."

-Really? What is it?

"Director. I know that it isn't good to think like this as an actress, but I couldn't help but be curious. Why did you cast me back then? It just made me wonder. I did appear in 'Building' as a minor actor, but I was practically nameless back then, so I found it curious that you assigned such an important role to a twenty-two-year-old new actress."

-It's all in the past. It was because the actress Han Gaeul's acting was good.

"Is that really it?"

-Why, you don't think so?

"No. If you're saying that's the case then I guess it must be true."

-You're saying that, but you don't sound like you believe me at all. Just consider it as an unexpected opportunity that landed in front of a new actress. Of course, you were only cast because you had the acting skills to back it up.

"An unexpected opportunity?"

That was something she couldn't just let pass. Gaeul reduced the TV volume.

"Was it my mom? She said she didn't know about it back then."

-Writer Choi Haesoo really knew nothing about it. I should have told you about it before, didn't I? She was instead of the opinion that I should evaluate you thoroughly. Heck, you know her personality better than me, don't you?

"That's true. Mom isn't the type of person who would ask something like that."

-That's how it is. I'll hang up now, then. I can't keep holding up a sick person.

Gaeul quickly spoke to the director who was trying to hang up,

"I would have let it pass if I didn't know about it, but you should tell me after telling me all that. As you said, it's all in the past. I want to know just what it was that made the unexpected opportunity fall in front of a new actress. If you found out about me coincidentally, you wouldn't have expressed it like that."

-Why are you so curious about that?

“Because that drama changed my life. Don’t you think that’s enough of a reason to make me curious? Back then, I was just so happy and busy, no, I did notice it, but I didn’t pay attention to it. I was busy taking care of the things in front of me. But after I took a breather, it kept tugging on my mind. I had received zero promotion, had no connections, and even my agency told me that I should start slowly with minor roles. But suddenly, I got an offer for a fixed role in a public TV drama.”

-This is a pain.

“You can’t tell me about it?”

-No, it’s not like that. I did promise, but if I think about it now, it wasn’t that big of a promise either.

“Sounds like it’s not something I should be left out of.”

-I would never do something like that in the first place. I may look like this, but I’m known for being quite stuck up at my job.

“Can’t you tell me about it?”

-From how I see it, that fellow must have asked me to keep it a secret in order not to scratch your pride, but it’s been a long time, so I guess it should be fine to tell you this much. Actually, I was originally going to get a few recommendations and then pick someone out for the role you played. Back then, I didn’t even know that the actress Han Gaeul existed. To be precise, I did know you through ‘Building’, but I had no intentions of putting you on that list. You were a nameless actress after all. That’s when I heard about you from one guy. He suggested that I do an audition because he knows of a good actress. That actress he was talking about was you. I recalled how you were like in ‘Building’, and I accepted his offer. The rest is as you know it. You played that role and became successful.

“Someone recommended me? Who?”

-It’s not anyone amazing. He should be the same age as you. He did say he knew you as well.

“Someone who’s the same age as me and knows me?”

After hesitating a little, the director spoke again,

-Do you know who Han Maru is?

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He was reminded of the statue of Lady Justice. How would she, someone who decides on the sentence by weighing the sins of the sinner on a balance and delivers punishment with her sword, evaluate this incident? Perhaps a man who is floundering across the numerous cycles of life and a woman who became the culprit without even knowing the reason might not even be a target of punishment. The two of them were both victims and were just innocent people suffering due to the wheels of fate. Maru wanted to ask if she didn’t have any thoughts about being merciful and sparing both. If she said both of them were sinners, he would say to her: try undoing that blindfold on your face first.

“What a pain.”

If he thought about things simply, he was supposed to welcome this situation since the cause of this incident is taking responsibility and is willing to receive punishment, but the problem was that it was Han Gaeul who was going to be on the gallows. Even if she did commit a sin, he would want to get her out of there no matter what he had to do, but she herself was walking towards the gallows herself.

“God or the rabbit?” Maru said as he looked at his own reflection on the powered-off TV.

The repeated lives must be a result of godly powers. Whether it was a punishment or a blessing, it did not change the fact that a supreme being had bestowed such an environment to an individual. The problem was the masked man and the rabbit, especially the latter. Just like how the masked man had split off from Han Maru’s repeated lives, the rabbit must be a double of Han Gaeul as well. Assuming that God is in control of everything would only lead him to the conclusion that everything he was worried about would be useless, so Maru thought of this as an event that even God had not expected or perhaps had expected but did not care about. If there was a problem, there had to be an event that caused that problem. Just like how fallen leaves are the result of the tree running out of its life span or a strong gust of wind. If Han Maru’s cycle of life is the problem, and the culprit is Han Gaeul, then what caused that problem in the first place?

A few hypotheses brushed past his mind. Maru picked the most old-fashioned reason out of them all: she did not want his death.

God, who usually doesn’t pay any heed to their believers’ prayers, happened to overhear a woman’s prayer when they just happened to be emotional: please save the man dying in front of me. Unlike usual, God listened to that prayer instead of paying no heed as usual, and as a result, the man was given the chance to live again. The problem was that the man didn’t live once more; he lived more than enough times.

Maru scanned what he wrote on his notepad. It was a very old-fashioned story, but it also clearly explained the situation. He could also accept that her double, the rabbit, wanted death. After all, she was someone with a great sense of responsibility. She was the type of woman who would gladly accept death if it was the solution. She was someone who braved the dangers of being electrocuted in order to save their daughter in the previous life. What couldn’t she do?

It was a fact that the rabbit was acting independently just like the masked man with a clear ego. If the rabbit wanted Han Gaeul’s death, there would be many more problems in the future. There were many methods in this era that could make a person a guest of the grim reaper. There was no need to go as far as getting struck by lightning or some kind of natural disaster. Just a slight push would give her a ticket to the afterlife; of course, without a return ticket.

“If she can exert physical influence, there should be no need for her to pray so desperately.”

If what the rabbit wanted was death, and if the rabbit was a being that could exert real influence like the 1990 film *Ghost* or *Ghostbusters*, there was no need to beg him, who was bound by the laws of physics. Just making Gaeul strangle herself slightly could end everything after all. However, the rabbit desperately begged him to head to the light in the dream.

The rabbit cannot exert influence in the real world – Maru wrote on the notepad. It was a hypothesis that was close to the truth and one that he wanted to believe as the truth. He did think that the rabbit

may be able to exert real influence if certain conditions were met, but such assumptions didn't help at all. It is true that people can die from lightning strikes, but not many people refrain from going out because of such a fact. He had to exclude the events with slim possibilities and combine the more likely ones to devise a course of action.

"What if Gaeul's collapse was a destined event, and the rabbit only created a situation so that she was by herself at home?"

Just like how there was an observation that Han Maru never lived past the age of 45, Han Gaeul might have such special events that were repeated in the numerous lives. In their previous life as well, she threw herself at the phone charger on fire with a blanket in order to save their daughter. One misstep might have led to a terrible accident. If there is an observation that such an event occurs in her life at least once, the rabbit might know the essence of those observations. She might not be able to exert any physical influence, but she might be able to induce Gaeul to make dangerous decisions. If the rabbit tried to kill Gaeul in their previous lives, she would have given an order before the phone charger was set on fire: maybe it's a good idea to wash the dishes.

"From how I died first in the previous life as well, the rabbit probably also became able to speak in this life, just like the masked man."

The rabbit was Han Gaeul and simultaneously the woman in the white suit. This meant that the rabbit had observed Han Maru's cycle of lives before the masked man gained awareness. He could probably assume that she remembered his first death to his last death. If one's experience is what composited a human, then the rabbit was closer to the essence than the current living Gaeul. Though, that wasn't even funny.

He was suddenly reminded of the moment when he first met the woman in the suit. He wondered what she felt when she looked at him back then. He shook his head. It was something beyond his imagination. If hell existed, that would be it.

"Yoo Bokja."

Recalling back to the moment he came back to life, Maru reminded himself of the device that she came up with in order to fool him. She created an imaginary figure that didn't even exist so that he wouldn't be able to ignore the opportunity of a new life. In his previous life, he didn't have a neighboring elderly lady who picked up scrap papers for a living. He was unsure of it when the memories of his previous life were blurring, but he could be sure about it now. Above all, Yoo Bokja was someone else's name. It was the name of Gaeul's grandmother who she followed more than her mother when she was young.

If she wanted to create a situation to induce him to choose to live another life, it would have been fine even if she came up with a completely different name. Actually, such devices weren't even necessary. How many people would forgo the opportunity to live again? He was taken aback at first but was soon filled with gratitude and joy when the figure of Yoo Bokja was introduced.

"Perhaps it might have been a hint."

God blocked the mouth of the masked man to prevent him from speaking. She must have been in the same situation. The fact that she chose the name Yoo Bokja might have been her way of giving a hint within a tolerable level. Her SOS help signal finally shone through in this life. This might be the first and

last opportunity. It was highly likely that his memories were going to be erased once he died. After all, God was a merciless observer.

He sighed deeply as he pressed between his eyes. The conveyor belt of his thought factory seemed to have reached a limit. He needed to get some rest if he didn't want the factory to shut down. He closed his eyes in order to cool down his burning head. Just then, his phone, which he placed on the table, started ringing. He clutched his head with his right hand and put his phone against his ear with the left.

"Han Maru speaking."

-From how you picked up as soon as it rang, it seems like you didn't check the name. I thought you weren't going to pick up.

The conveyor belt that had stopped working made a mechanical sound before starting to roll again. The hypotheses, assumptions, and deductions were all cleared out and replaced by excuses and avoidance measures in order to get past this situation.

-Hello? The Han Maru I know doesn't stay quiet after picking up a call.

"Sorry."

-First up, thank you for being worried about me. It's not like I pushed myself, but I ended up collapsing. I'm alright now, so don't worry about me.

"That's good."

-It is. I'm asking just in case: do you have an idea as to why I called you?

"Not at all. Nothing comes to mind."

-Yes, you shouldn't. That's only natural.

"I'll also ask just in case: are you angry?"

-Me? Do you think I'm angry?

"No, I must have misspoke."

-No, you were right. Yes, I am angry. I am so angry that I want to drive over to where you are. I want to look at your face and scream at you. But regretfully, I don't know where you live. I found it frustrating that I don't know where you are.

"What is it?"

-What is it, you ask? Fine, I'll give you a hint. I had a call with director Park Hoon just now.

"And?"

-Nothing comes to mind?

Maru rubbed his eyebrows and sighed. Something did come to his mind the moment Park Hoon's name was mentioned, but he could not say it first.

"No."

-You really are.... Fine, alright. I'll hang up if you don't have anything to tell me.

After checking that the call had ended, Maru called Park Hoon. Park Hoon picked up as though he had been waiting for the call.

"Director. Did you talk to Gaeul about me? About the casting, I mean."

-It was in the past, and Gaeul became successful through it, so I thought that there wouldn't be a big problem even if I told her about it, but after listening to her voice and yours, it seems I was wrong, huh. I'm sorry. I thought you asked me not to mention it to her because I thought you were worried about her pride, but I must have been wrong.

"Not at all. I did make it sound like that, so it's not surprising for you to have thought that. This is my fault. I should have made things clear to you."

-Is there a problem between you two?

"I don't know either."

-What if I call Gaeul and tell her that it's a misunderstanding?

"From her personality, she'll nag you about it, so don't say anything. Sorry for calling you this late into the night."

-Tell me if there's a problem because of this. I'll try to make an excuse.

"Not at all. This is something I should take care of myself, so don't worry about it. Have a good night."

Maru smiled bitterly as he looked at his phone. If their relationship worsened as a result of this then he should be joyous since it was all according to his plan, but now that he found out that the rabbit wanted her death, he couldn't exactly let things be either.

For now, he gave her a call. The signal sound continued for a long time. A moment later, a voice could be heard. The number you have just called is either unavailable or....

It was one of her habits to choose to sleep when she became uncontrollably angry. Perhaps she had buried her face in a pillow and was waiting for sleep to overcome her. He took his finger off the call button before placing his phone on the dining table.

"You don't help me even once," he said as he looked out the window.

He turned on the TV and took out some beer from the fridge. It was about time he stopped thinking and got some rest. He watched a drama in a daze. Just then, his phone started ringing again. He lay on the sofa and stared at the phone ringing in a daze. His whole body had given up on working. He had no energy to wake up. A moment later, the phone became docile again.

He emptied the last bit of beer before changing the channel. He felt bitter thinking about what Gaeul must have felt when she made that call. He wondered what he should do once the sun rose. Give her a call and tell her the circumstances? Or just stay still? As he was pondering between the two unacceptable options, he turned his head around. Someone knocked on his door. He wondered if he heard wrong, but he heard thudding sounds again.

He placed the empty can of beer on the floor before walking to the door. In the brief period that he walked towards the door, there was a knock again. The person outside seemed to be very urgent. There was no way there was a package at this hour. Who is it? – he said as he opened the door. Immediately after that, he had an ominous feeling. However, it was too late, just like always.

“So you open the door without a hitch, huh?”

He scanned her, who was standing outside, from top to bottom. Her pants were patient clothes, while her top was a hoodie.

“Open. The. Door.”

It was an order, and Maru could only obey.

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“In life, there will come a time when you hesitate. Those moments will probably come quite a lot, and whenever they come, there is a choice to be made. You can also not choose and just run away or ignore them, but from your mother’s experience, those decisions you ran away from or ignored will be placed in front of your eyes again eventually. At that time, it will be much heavier and much more complex. Decision-making is a difficult thing. Because it is difficult, you have to do it. The majority of decisions can be resolved through pondering, but if you’re faced with a choice that you cannot decide on no matter how hard you think about it, then shake off all the worries you had until then. Clear your mind and ask yourself what you want in a state where you aren’t thinking about anything. Your circumstances, relationships, and rules – leave those aside and focus on what you truly want. No matter how difficult of a choice it is, you will be able to reduce it down to that. Though, of course, you can’t go against the law.”

Those were her mother’s words. Gaeul ruminated on those words as she lay on the hospital bed. A world-flipping headache struck her head, and a feeling of betrayal or perhaps scorn squirmed within her stomach. Her whole body heated up as though she had gotten a high fever, but the breath that escaped her mouth was surprisingly cold. Director Park Hoon’s words echoed in her mind again: the one that recommended you is a fellow named Han Maru.

Gaeul stood up from her bed and looked outside the window. Although it was past midnight, it was still pretty bright outside. What came to her mind as she looked at the lit up houses outside was that it wasn’t that late to make a visit. She ignored her surging emotions as well as her reason that was on a rampage and grabbed her phone. What is it that she wanted? There was no need to even think about it.

She found a friend who would give her the answer from her contacts list. She pressed the call button and waited.

-Yes?

“Let me ask you one thing.”

-Why do you sound so scary?

“Han Maru’s address. Do you know it?”

-Why do you want that all of a sudden?

Heewon was replying to her in a flustered voice. Usually, she would calmly explain the situation and ask for help. The reason she broke up with Maru, then the luck that befell her, as well as the fact that Han Maru was the cause of that fortune; she would have explained all of those – and perhaps get some consolation midway – and then finally get the address, but now that she had stopped thinking, there was no such thing as leisure within her. The ever forward-looking nature of racehorses was all that she was right now.

“Answer me. Do you know or not?”

-I don't.

“Then that's fine.”

-Wait, is the address all you need?

“Yes.”

-You aren't going to buy a knife and stab him or something, right? I don't want to become an assistive criminal for a murder.

“I'll see how it goes.”

-Haewon should know it. I'll give you a text.

“Thanks.”

-Go easy on him, whatever it is.

“Don't tell Maru I'm going.”

-That doesn't sound fair though. I should give him some time at least. Considering Han Maru's personality, he would probably not run away. Also, beating a person who's wearing protective equipment feels better than beating a defenseless one.

“Alright, then do what you want. I'm going to depart now.”

She put on the hoodie that she wore when she walked around the hospital before leaving. After telling the nurse that she was going to leave for a little, she got into her car and drove out of the hospital parking lot. While tapping her finger nervously with her hands placed on the wheel, she got a text. She inputted the address into the GPS navigation system and drove off. It wasn't that far.

She got out of the car and checked the apartment number before getting on the elevator without hesitation. She pressed the floor number before waiting. While the elevator started rising along with some vibrations, she woke up her brain that had been dormant until now. She had to think about her first line at least before talking to him.

She stood in front of the door and placed her finger on top of the bell. Although she had rushed here immediately after getting the call, she strangely could not exert any strength into her finger. This 1 cm was more difficult to traverse than the kilometers of progress she made until now.

Gaeul calmed her breathing. She wanted to act rationally. I'll first greet him, and then go inside and listen to what he has to say. He must have his excuses after all. What is the intention behind his

recommendation before they broke up as well as what is the reason that he hid the fact – she was determined to find that out.

She took her hand off the bell and knocked on the front door with her hands clenched into a fist. It was easier to bang on the door than to press the bell. She took a deep breath and banged on the door again. Her sensitive ears caught the sounds of someone grabbing the handle on the other side. She felt like he was behind this door. Let's not get angry, let's be cold-headed – she recalled what she prepared as a greeting

The door opened about halfway. She noticed the sound of the TV that escaped the door first, followed by his tired-looking face. Although it had only been a brief moment, Gaeul realized that he had stiffened up from being startled.

“So you open the door without a hitch, huh?”

Something that was different from what she had in mind escaped her lips instead. As she had expected, she felt angry the moment she looked at him. He was standing there in a daze while grabbing onto the door. He kept staring at her like a child who had lost his parents.

“Open. The. Door.”

She kindly told him his next course of action. He nodded and opened the door. Gaeul took off her slippers and walked inside. A shiba-inu with a wide, flat face popped out from the kitchen. It wagged its tail as though it had no intention of being wary of her at all.

“Are you raising it?”

“Yeah.”

“I thought the sense of responsibility to raise a pet was too much for you.”

“I had some leeway, so I ended up raising one.”

“The leeway that came after breaking up with me?”

She decided to scrap her plan of putting her words in a nice way. The moment she crossed the doorway, she decided to become a soldier. Not a general who just gives commands from far away from the battlefield, but a soldier who actually fiercely fights against enemies.

Maru rubbed his eyebrows. It seemed that his old habit had not disappeared. Whenever he was at a loss for words or was in deep thought, he always scratched his eyebrows instead of replying.

“This place looks good. You live in a nice place, huh.”

“I'm freeloading though.”

“You can even see the Han River. This place must be expensive.”

She lifted up the dog and put it in her arms before opening the veranda. The night air of September cooled down her heated head. She regained enough rationale to speak reasonably.

“From the way you look, I see that you've heard what this is about from director Park Hoon.”

“Uhm, Gaeul.”

“Shush. If you interrupt me now, even I don’t know what I’ll end up doing, so just listen. Heewon told me that knives were no good.”

“Knives are no good. Did Heewon tell you my address?”

“Haewon did. Don’t think about saying something to him. I forced it out of him.”

“I didn’t plan to.”

“That’s good.”

“Rather than that, how do you feel?”

“I haven’t even started and yet you’re trying to change the subject already.”

“That wasn’t my intention. But don’t you think you should drink a little if you want to have a talk? Of course, if you don’t want that, I’ll just kneel down right here and listen to you.”

Maru tried to get on his knees. She sighed. The heat that had risen to the top of her head climbed down to her throat level thanks to his actions as well as the night wind.

“What do you have that I can drink?”

She decided to take a step back in order to take two steps forward. She put down the dog. It hopped its way over to Maru as though it was overjoyed to have a guest over.

“An alcoholic barley drink, an alcoholic grape juice, alcoholic water, et cetera.”

“What about just water?”

“If you want, then sure.”

“I’ll have a beer then.”

Maru brought some canned beer. She accepted the beer and sat on the sofa. There were empty cans on top of the cabinet next to the sofa. It seemed that he had been drinking by himself.

“Should I kneel? Or should I sit next to you?”

“Which do you find easier?”

“Kneeling.”

“Then sit next to me.”

Maru sat down next to her. The sofa cushion sunk down according to his body weight, and her body became closer to his.

“Let’s confirm the facts first. Are director Park Hoon’s words true? Did you recommend me?”

“Rather than recommending you, it was more like introducing you. I only told him that a girl like you exists.”

“Really? Then one more thing. The director told me about it. He went there to cast you.”

He flinched just as he was about to bring the beer to his mouth. The fact that he visibly reacted when he was good at hiding his emotions meant that he was considerably flustered.

“You heard about that as well?”

“Yes, I have. Like what you said, I can understand that you introduced me. Back then, we were out of touch, but we were technically still going out. But you know? I just can’t wrap my head around how you rejected your cast. Not only that, you recommended – no, sorry, – introduced me.”

“The thing is.”

He opened his lips with a forced smile but was unable to continue his words. She asked the next question,

“You rejected the cast and returned to Daehak-ro, and I couldn’t hear any news about you. When we met after a long time, you told me this: let’s break up. Then you went to the military. I felt confused back then, but listening to this story now makes me double confused. You had an opportunity. You had the skills, so you would definitely have become successful if you grabbed that opportunity. So why didn’t you do it? Why did you go to the military like you were fleeing?”

She grabbed the beer with both of her hands. The coldness seeped into her palms.

“Things just happened.”

“Things happened? Don’t you think what I heard is too absurd to just put it as ‘things happened’?”

“Back then, I was immature. I didn’t know what I had to do.”

“The almighty Han Maru was immature and didn’t know what to do?”

She smiled and looked into his eyes. He always looked into the person’s eyes when he had a conversation. She had a glimpse at his world through his eyes, and the opposite must be true as well. Make eye contact when having a conversation. Right now, his eyes were camera lenses that couldn’t find focus. He was looking, but he was also not looking.

“Is it because of me?”

She took out the question that she wanted yet did not want to ask.

“It’s definitely not like that.”

Maru strongly denied it. It was a firm attitude never seen before from him, but she instantly recognized his anxiety and sadness.

She took her hands off the beer. She touched his cheek with a palm that had become numb from the chill.

“What are you so afraid of?”

“I....”

He tried to turn his head away as he blurred off. She shook her head. Don't avoid my eyes – she calmly muttered.

"This is not something I can say."

"Really?"

"I know what you want to say. But don't misunderstand. Things just happened to overlap. The reason I recommended you wasn't anything special. Your name just popped up in my mind."

"Mr. Han Maru. Why is it that your logic feels so weak today? Is it because it's a bad time? So then, why did you ask him to keep it a secret? Because it might hurt my pride?"

"Yes."

"No. In my opinion, that feels like a setup to break up as painfully as possible."

"It's not like that."

"It is me who kept a distance from you first. It was a foolish thing. I was swayed by the foolish words that I need to keep a distance from you in order to keep my pride. But it didn't take long for me to find out that the pride I managed to protect by avoiding you is merely a castle built on top of sand."

"You are a strong woman who doesn't get swayed by anyone."

"No, I'm not like that. Even now, I'm so uneasy that my hands are shaking like this."

She moved her hand slowly and pressed her index finger to his lips.

"Your actions, the events that happened before, and the expression you have on your face today; let me ask you one more thing."

"What about my right to stay silent?"

"You will have to answer me. Did you ever hate me?"

"The fact that I broke up with you is my answer."

"Tell me properly. Was there ever a time you didn't love me?"

"It's been three years. And it's been five years since we were apart. It's definitely not a short time."

"The more you make excuses like that, the more concrete my convictions become. If it's not, then just tell me so. Have you ever forgotten about me?"

"Han Gaeul."

"I haven't. Not even once. Not even for a moment."

Maru slowly turned his head away. She closed her lips and sighed softly. Just then, a piece of paper stuck in the corner of a family photo frame entered her eyes. It was a familiar autograph. Maru seemed to have found that autograph as well.

"I think there's evidence there that denies all your answers. What do you think?"

He closed his eyes as though he had given up and sighed. He seemed defenseless. She listened to her instincts. He needed punishment. The start was a kiss, and the end, was well, up to him.

Chapter 805. Sequence 7

(WARNING: NSFW)

Her limp, curved body hardened and straightened out as it became stirred. She gasped for breath with her mouth slightly open. His back, in her embrace, was wide. She stroked the minute muscles that started from his shoulder with her finger. Her hand strode down the cavity created down his spine, down to his waist. She pinched a bit of the skin whenever she felt a big thumping pain from her lower stomach.

She felt a pleasing sense of pressure between the bed and his body. He moved neither too fast nor too slow. Her body, which had scrunched up due to nervousness, started opening up. She pushed her arms between his armpits and hugged him. She felt at ease as though her body had been shaped in the first place to take this form.

Whenever he heaved a breath out and pushed against her, she had to hold back the moans that rose up from the depths of her body. It started off with pain, but as his eyes stroked her heart and his hand stroked her body, the sensation turned into something beyond simple pain and lewd.

His hands stroked her body without stopping. Sometimes, he conquered hills like a veteran hiker, and sometimes he became an expert rock climber and freely moved between the valleys. When his right hand touched her lower right rib, she was reminded of a bible verse; the verse about how Eve was created from Adam's rib. She intermingled with his body perfectly as though she had been a part of him originally. From some time onwards, she could no longer differentiate between the smell of his skin and the sound of his heart from her own. Wherever his body went, her body did the same. When he pushed, she was pushed, when he pulled, she was pulled.

She had this thought: this man must know her body better than anyone else. The sense of embarrassment was pushed out of her mind a long time ago. Her body honestly focused on the parts that he touched and reacted to his touches. Her passive attitude started changing. She locked her hands behind his back and slowly pulled. The lips that fell apart for a brief moment touched each other again and was followed by an exchange of breaths. His lips were slightly dry. When their lips pieced together, she licked his upper lip with her tongue. He, who was moving proactively, slowly turned around to the side. His chest touched her back. He hugged her from behind on the bed for a while to catch his breath before moving his hands again.

Gaeul looked at the mood light scattering faint orange light on top of the bedside table before closing her eyes. Maru's breath waving towards her from behind tickled her ears. Maru's hands were slowly stroking her thighs. His gestures were soft as though he was babying an infant who had just woken up. The threads of nervousness that had snapped apart became connected again and made her body sensitive. This was definitely not a time for resting. His slow and gentle hands left behind flowers of heat in their wake. It would put her at ease to look at his eyes, but he was behind her back. In a place where vision was blocked off, the sensitivity of her sense of touch increased severalfold. It didn't take that long for the ticklish sensation in her thighs to spread throughout her entire body. Her stable breath started becoming agitated again. She wanted to turn around, look into his eyes, assault his lips, and free herself

so that he could do whatever he wanted with her. The moment such thoughts entered her mind, the sense of embarrassment that had been pushed out pushed its way back in again. She felt like she wouldn't be able to look at his eyes right now. It was then that his hand crawled between her thighs. It was as though he knew everything.

A minute sense of shame as well as a hair-raising pleasure, came to her at once. Moans escaped through her sealed lips. Her thighs tensed up as though she was doing a full sprint. She twisted her body in an attempt to curl up her body, but his left arm did not let go of her. She locked her fingers together and tensed her toes. He put his body against her. The hands were merely the forerunners. He dug between her thighs and replaced his hands without any pain.

When he moved, a slight pain jolted through her lower body, but it did not feel unpleasant at all. When she thought about how the pain proved that she was connected with him, she even somewhat welcomed it. She felt a little embarrassed in this position where she couldn't see his face, but she had no complaints as she could feel his body warmth even more. She unlocked her hands and placed them on his thighs. The thighs were sturdy. The slightly twitching sensation in sync with his breath was even a little cute. She felt that she had gotten used to this now that she had gotten more leisure to think. She couldn't act embarrassed now, so she thought that she should try her best to make the most out of this time.

The orange mood lighting, the gray closet, the shirts and pants hung on the chair, the cologne on the makeup table, as well as the blinking electronic clock in the wooden case were reflected on her pupils. His breath became hotter, and her own body heated up along with it as well. She wanted to see his face. She wanted to know what kind of expression was on his face right now. Would his eyes be open or closed? Would he be struggling to exert his strength, or smiling like a veteran? Whichever it was, she wanted to kiss him. She wanted to tell him that she was so happy, so pleased with her own lips. She regained her center of gravity and turned her head around. The first thing she saw was hair. She tried to reach out backwards and touch his cheek. Just then, she realized that she couldn't see his face.

Gaeul flinched and opened her eyes. Light was seeping in through the curtain. She blankly stared up at the ceiling. She soon regained her senses.

"It was a dream."

However, her fatigued body as well as Maru's body odor told her that what happened last night was indeed real. She pulled the duvet up over her head. She couldn't believe that she was doing that in her dream. If Maru knew, he would tease her about it for days. Light seeped in through the duvet that covered her eyes. Under the brightly lit up duvet, she looked down at her own body. She was naked without a single piece of clothing. She had never been so thankful that she had been exercising to maintain her figure. She rolled her eyes up and down before touching between her thighs with her hands. The sensation of last night vividly came back to her. She soon started clutching her hair and screaming faintly. She just remembered that she would have to see Maru's face. The fact that she was about to see his face right now was overwhelmingly more embarrassing than when they had been in intimate contact. After thinking about what to say, she stopped struggling on the spot and looked next to her. Maru wasn't there.

"Han Maru?"

She covered her body with the duvet and sat up.

“Maru?”

She didn't get a reply. She looked at the clock on top of the drawers. It was 6:40 in the morning. She would usually never wake up even when it was past 11 on days without shoots, so it was pretty curious that she opened her eyes so early, but this wasn't the time to be concerned about her early awakening. She put on the shorts and t-shirt at the foot of the bed before leaving the room. There was no one in the chilly living room. She didn't realize this when he was here, but it looked pretty desolate. There wasn't that much furniture, and all the furniture that was there was all gray. She suddenly found it incredibly chilling that she was alone in this big space.

She opened the door to the bathroom, wishing that Maru was there. She checked the dressing room, wishing that he was there smiling at her. He was not here.

“He didn't say a single thing.”

Perhaps he left early in the morning because of a shoot. She was well aware that there were no distinctions between night and day for actors. She sat on the sofa. She looked at the black screen of the TV without turning it on. The sunlight entered the living room, bringing about a warm color, but it still looked rather bitter in her eyes. The shiba-inu with a limping leg walked out. She hugged the dog. The dog struggled in her arms before becoming docile.

“I shouldn't feel disappointed in a person who has left to work, right? I'm not a kid. Right?”

She tickled the dog's head. It narrowed its eyes and panted as though it felt good. She played with the dog for a while before placing it down. The dog's body was warm but it was nothing compared to the heat from Maru's body. She looked around the living room before standing up from the sofa. Ever since she became conscious of the fact that she was in another person's house, she couldn't stay still.

She returned to the room and grabbed her phone. She pressed the home button in order to call Maru, but the power didn't turn on. Only then did she realize that there was only 5% battery left when she ran out from the hospital. There were no landline phones in sight either. Not only that, the phone charger was incompatible as well. There was no way of contacting him in this technological era. For the first time, she didn't like her phone's brand.

Gaeul came out to the kitchen with a memo and a pen placed on top of the drawers. She sat down at the table and stared at the yellow-colored memo. Surprisingly, she couldn't think of what to write. In the first memo, she wrote 'Greetings' before crumpling it and putting it in her pocket. In the second memo, she only put a black dot. 'Thank you for having me over' sounded absurd, 'Call me' sounded somewhat iffy, and she didn't like 'where are you?' because it made her feel like a kid.

After a long contemplation, she wrote down 'I really love you'. She found it pitiful that her vocabulary had been reduced to such a state. She put the memo on the fridge and took out the patient clothes that she had put inside the laundry basket. Just then, she could hear the electronic door lock unlock before the door opened. Gaeul blinked several times as she looked at the door with the clothes in her arms.

“You're leaving?”

“Didn't you go to work?”

"I don't have any work today. Even if there was, I would have postponed it. You're here after all."

Maru entered the room as he wiped his sweat with the towel hanging on the shoe rack. It seemed that he went out for a morning exercise. She stared at him as he passed by her and grabbed the water bottle on top of the table. She liked how he drank water. She liked how he smiled at her.

"You were too passionate last night," he said with a smile.

She threw the clothes in her arms at him. Maru snatched the clothes lightly and immediately laid them out neatly on the table before folding them up.

"I'm quite good at housework."

"Your mouth is really a source of trouble."

Maru shrugged before looking at the refrigerator. He seemed to have found the memo on it and reached out. Gaeul shouted 'wait' and tried to snatch the memo from his hands.

"I really love you."

He read the memo out loud in an embarrassing voice. She blocked her ears. She wanted to find a hole to hole herself up in.

"I just wrote it."

"I'm just reading it too. I really love you."

"Shut up, give it to me!"

"But it's meant for me. I'll keep it as the family heirloom. I really love you."

Gaeul approached him and reached out for the memo. The memo that she thought she would not be able to reach had entered her hands way too easily. Good – the moment she let her guard down, he let go of the memo and put an arm around her waist.

"Wh-what are you doing?"

"Round two?"

"You're really...."

His lips covered hers. She was not able to utter the words that came up to her throat. Her eyes closed subconsciously. The heat from last night and the tingling jolt that her body remembered became vivid again.

"I'll cook you something once I get washed. Wait a bit," he said as he took his arm off her waist.

She licked her lips before nodding. She hated herself for being disarmed with just a kiss, but she soon justified herself, telling herself that it couldn't be helped.

She sat at the table and listened. She could hear water being sprayed out of the showerhead. Following that, she could hear a familiar hum. She swung her feet back and forth and hummed along, feeling that the song was extremely familiar.

Chapter 807. Sequence 7

-I was really surprised because you weren't there at the hospital, you know?

"Sorry, mom. I had something urgent I had to do, so I left for a bit."

-A bit is for a whole night?

"You know that your daughter's capable, right?"

-It's because I know that that I'm just giving you a call. Other moms would have nagged you about it for a whole day.

"Right. That's why I like my mom."

-How do you feel?

"Better than ever."

-Have you eaten breakfast?

"Yes. I had a great one. How about you?"

-Just a sandwich.

"Is that enough?"

-It wasn't, so I'm about to eat more. I'm going to go see you tomorrow, are you free?

"I have a shoot tomorrow. I'm okay if it's the day after that."

-I have a field study on that day, so I can't make it.

"A famous writer needs to go do field studies?"

-I can't exactly write about the world while sitting down, can I? How about the weekend? Let's go on a date. It's been such a long time since we went to the market.

Just as Gaeul was about to say okay, she grabbed her phone with her other hand and apologized.

"I have an appointment."

-I wonder who the house girl got an appointment with. Is it Seol? Or Chaerim?

"Well, I wonder who."

-If it's a man, then introduce him to me. I want to have a look at his face too.

"I will, but you'll probably be startled if you see him, you know?"

-Unless it's Won Bin or Go Soo, I won't be surprised.

"Your standards are way too high, mom."

-If you know that, then bring home a splendid husband material. I'm hanging up then. The food is here.

“Enjoy your meal.”

Gaeul hung up and took out the side dish containers in the shopping bag. She felt reassured after seeing her refrigerator being filled with dishes. She felt like she would be able to recall this morning whenever she took a little bit out to eat. The cozy scenery, the sound of the bubbling pot, the faint smell of mint from the duvet – the string of thoughts dragged out and reached last night. She shook her head. The heat and the moans were still vivid. As her cheeks became flushed, the corners of her lips raised. Just as she was about to close the door, she took out a blue container before doing so.

She sat on the sofa and opened the container. She put a piece of sweetened almond in her mouth and chewed on it. A crunchy sound tickled her ears. From how he was good at making basic side dishes, perhaps she should make him a full-time housewife if they lived together. When she heard from other people how ‘men who can cook well’ looked sexy, she couldn’t understand them, but when she looked at his back in the morning, she subconsciously nodded. The back figure of a man holding a ladle was indeed sexy.

She giggled and nibbled on the almonds. Just then, she saw a white rabbit sitting on the empty sofa. She gave the rabbit a glance before focusing on the TV.

“So, you went there in the end.”

“I shouldn’t have?”

“I’ve been telling you since last night that you shouldn’t go. That you can’t go.”

“I didn’t hear you though.”

“That’s because you didn’t want to listen to me.”

She put down the container and looked straight at the rabbit. The rabbit she always had to close her eyes to see started popping up in reality every now and then. The citizen of the delusional world had a dissatisfactory expression on her face. Her whiskers were twitching, and her ears were raised up as though she was angry.

“Can’t you just congratulate me? I finally got to meet him.”

“I told you several times that it’s not the right time yet.”

“You said that five years ago; that I should go find him once I’m proud of myself.”

“You held back well until now.”

“That’s why I’m going to stop holding back.”

“You finally found a spot for yourself. You’re a rising star. You should know how dangerous your position is, don’t you? It only takes a moment for an actress to fall into the abyss because of a wrong image. Top-tier actresses, maybe they can endure it somewhat. They have fans as well as staff who are waiting for them. But you aren’t at that level yet, are you?”

“You’ve been telling me the same thing both five years ago and now.”

“I’m saying all this for your sake.”

She smiled. The rabbit always said the right things. She clearly divided things into what she had to do and what she should not do. Following her advice resulted in constant applause and a successful career. Not once did listening to the rabbit bring about a bad result. The rule for success, this was what the rabbit meant to her.

“I know. I know how much you think about me and about how much you cherish me. At first, I thought that you were a personality created by my delusion, but I found out something through talking to you. You are from outside of my thoughts. I don’t believe in gods or destinies or whatever, but I do believe that you exist; because you are in front of me. For some reason, you cherish me and help me. Ever since I met you, my acting improved day by day, and I was able to stand here. I’m really thankful for that. It’s thanks to you that I am where I am today.”

“I only wish for one thing: your happiness.”

“I know that you’re not lying. I can feel it. For some reason, I can tell when I look into your eyes: what you’re thinking and what kind of feelings you have. It’s like you’re someone I know really well. Sometimes, I feel like I am looking in the mirror. Just like I’m looking at my own self.”

The rabbit did not say anything. Gaeul brushed her hair that drooped down next to her eyes behind her ears. She knew that this day was going to come eventually: a day when she was going to go against the rabbit.

When it came to work, there was never any friction between her and the rabbit. Even when there were things she was suspicious about, the rabbit made her understand the situation through insight that felt as though she was from the future. However, there was one thing that was an exception: Maru.

When it came to him, the rabbit always said ‘no’ without listening to the circumstances; she said that meeting him was absolutely no good and that calling him was something hurtful. She told her that they would meet eventually and that she should just wait for now. No, she didn’t just tell her to wait, she forced her to just like a CEO of a company with authority over human resources giving orders to a new employee. Six years ago, the rabbit’s words sounded plausible. She believed that the rabbit was right in saying that there were many things to give up in order to chase him. When he announced the breakup, the rabbit even told her that it was a good thing. She said that Maru must have understood that they were keeping a distance in order to improve themselves and said that Maru was a bad person. You should forget about him; there must be someone better; you’re a splendid woman after all. She even felt consoled by those words. Such words were necessary in order to forget about the pain that ripped her heart. It was a year after they broke up that she collected herself. She realized that he was still there in a corner of her heart. She wanted to meet him. She wanted to go find him. It was the rabbit that prevented her from making that decision. She said that her acting career would be damaged if she went to him right now.

She was hesitant, but she felt that it wouldn’t matter if her popularity was something that would disappear by meeting him just once. As long as she heard what she couldn’t hear that day, it would be okay to give up many things.

“Would Maru be happy to see you right now? Don’t you think he’ll have an even harder time? I heard that there are accidents in the military caused by people who recently broke up. In severe cases, there are even people who commit suicide.”

That made her afraid. When she said that she was going to cancel her visit, the rabbit told her that she did well and that it was better to focus on work. For the first time back then, she felt something beyond suspicion; she felt something closer to malice. Perhaps the rabbit was using success as an excuse to not let her meet Maru instead of telling her that she shouldn't be meeting Maru in order to become successful. She didn't show it on the surface, but she started filtering the rabbit's words from that day onwards. She listened to the things related to work, but whenever the rabbit went on about private matters, she started ignoring her. Residue started piling up in her heart. She felt that she was going to fight with the rabbit someday over this, and that happened to be today.

"Do you hate that I met Maru that much?"

"It's not like I hate it. This isn't something you should approach emotionally but as a business. I tell you this all the time, but for a young actress, having a man brings more losses than benefits."

"Alright, then I choose losses."

"What do you mean?"

"I became sure about it after I met him. I like working as an actress. I love this job. But I like Maru a little more. If the price of being with him is a hit to my career, then I think that's a cheap price to pay."

"So it comes down to that after all."

"It's me who wants to ask. Why are you so against me meeting Maru? I thought that perhaps you hate Maru, but that wasn't it. I can tell when I look at you, just like how you know me, but I couldn't tell no matter how much I thought about it. Above all, there's a contradiction in your words. You always talked about love and romance when it came to men other than Maru. It was like you wanted me to date them. Back then, I felt suspicious, but I am sure now after looking at you. It's not that meeting a man is a problem, it's meeting Maru that's a problem."

"Think however you want. But don't forget that I'm telling you all this for your sake."

"I won't. I'll always be thankful. I'll listen to your words deeply. But when it comes to Maru, I will no longer listen to you. I am going to meet him."

"Did you know? Excessive love sometimes brings destruction."

"Don't you think that's okay if you're with the person you love?"

The rabbit's whiskers twitched. She looked startled. Gaeul even pitied her for trying to persuade her otherwise. She reached her hands out. She wrapped the rabbit with her hands.

"Don't worry. Everything will go well. Even if it doesn't, I will never blame you for it. You're my closest friend and a strict teacher."

"Regrets are late no matter when it comes."

"It's fine even if I regret it."

"You're really stubborn."

"That's what's good and bad, about me."

The rabbit nodded in understanding. She seemed to have given up. Gaeul was curious about the reason she tried to prevent her from meeting Maru, but she didn't plan to ask. It was all in the past after all.

"We can still be together in the future, right?"

"If you want, I will still keep helping you. But remember this: You must always be cautious with your decisions. And also, it's not right to go outside common knowledge."

"That's a little too obvious."

"You will have to keep that obvious thing in mind. Whenever it is, and regardless of the circumstances."

The rabbit glanced at the side dish container.

"Almonds?"

"Yeah. I want to give you one, but you can't eat it, can you?"

"I do like them, but my body is like this, so I can't eat them. But almonds, huh. I see, it's coming closer."

What's coming closer – she was about to ask when she got a phone call. It was Maru.

-Uhm, it just hit me after I sent you off, but.

"Mhm? What is it?"

-Are you okay with almonds? I thought you could eat them but then I remembered that they would make you ticklish, so you tend to avoid them.

"Right. Why did I forget about that? That's strange."

-Did you eat a lot?

"Yeah. But I'm okay. I ate some in the morning, so I should have been having symptoms by now. Maybe my constitution changed as I grew up?"

-Then okay. But just in case, don't eat too much, okay?

"How kind. Did you call just for that?"

-Yeah.

"Alright. I was eating some just now, but I guess I should stop."

Just as she closed the lid, she somehow recalled chocolate almonds. Following that, a scene where a child she had never seen before climbed up a chair and reached out to the cupboard flashed in her mind.

"Chocolate almonds."

-What?

"No, nothing."

She stood up with the container. She then hung up, telling Maru that they should call later. The scene that flashed in her mind became faint in an instant. It was a strange thing. Was that scene from a movie?

“So this time, it’s next time as well. Maybe we’ll be able to finish it next time?”

The rabbit left those words before disappearing. She ruminated on those incomprehensible words before shrugging. That fellow was rather unpredictable.

Chapter 808. Sequence 8

“A dead patient will not come back to life. Crying for the dead body will not change anything. If you have time to do that, it’d be better to read one more page, watch one more video footage, or practice one more time so that you can save the patient on the table next time. Charity and devotion. Yes, those are the right words. However, I can be sure of this. A patient would want a capable doctor, not an upright one.”

Heewon curled up his fingers placed on the book. The page of the book produced a low ripping noise as it was pulled out. Yoonseo, who stood in front of him, made a gentle expression and approached Heewon before placing her hands on top of Heewon’s.

“You did your best. It was a TA^[1] in the middle of the night, and there were fifteen patients. There are things you just can’t do anything about. We are interns. and we did everything we could. The fact that you couldn’t save him is not your responsibility.”

“Yes, you’re right. What’s important is that there’s no one to listen to my excuses. If I saved him, if I looked more carefully, he might have lived. If he lived, I would be able to apologize for being clumsy to him.”

Heewon collapsed. He grabbed the edge of the table and cried while gagging.

“Okay. Those were good emotions just now.”

At the director’s sign, Heewon, who looked like he was about to bury his face on the ground, just drooped down on the spot. Yoonseo chuckled and patted him on his back. The atmosphere of the set, which had become taut due to the two main character’s passionate acting, became loose in an instant. The space that was filled with the voices and breaths of the two people was taken over by the voices of the staff as well as the noises produced by various equipment.

Maru took off the gown stained in blood. It had been about five hours since they shot the ER which had turned urgent because of a large-scale traffic accident. The scenes where the main actors were required to show their emotions were done in a mere 40 minutes. 4 hours were spent shooting the crowd scene with many people. The shoot dragged out because many people were involved and that consequently made the movement just that complex. Ambulance stretchers endlessly streamed into the ER like a train, patients were groaning in pain, emergency agents were urgently briefing the situation, the family who had come in a heartbeat after hearing the news were crying, as well as the medical jargon from the doctors to top all that off. When the camera moved according to the rail, the actors started acting according to that movement. It was nearly a miracle that they managed to finish the cut in just four hours.

“Han Maru.”

Heewon approached him. The stylist and the makeup artist behind him gave him strong signals with their eyes. Please make this man docile – they seemed to say. Maru nodded towards the two staff members desperately looking at him before grabbing Heewon by the shoulder.

“I don’t know what this is about, but you should get your makeup fixed first. I think you’re going to be in the next scene.”

“I have something I want to ask.”

“I will answer you, so leave your face and body to the ones behind you for now.”

After pushing Heewon, he put down the gown he had taken off and gave it to the outfit management staff. She seemed out of it as she had to clean up all the patient clothes that the background actors left behind.

“Should I put this here?”

“Yes, thank you.”

“You must have a hard time.”

“It’s the usual stuff.”

On days when there was a crowd scene with many different outfits, there would always be a person greeting the visitors of the outfit team with an exhausted face. Most of the time, it was the lowest-ranking member or the one just above that. Wherever it was, it didn’t change the fact that the bottom of the rung were the first ones to die.

“It’s over!” Hyungseok shouted as he put down the gown that he had folded.

His face was filled with a smile. He might be happy that the shoot had just finished, but what constituted more to that was probably the fact that he was given his first line. Maru could still remember him shouting ‘I want jjajang, jjam-ppong, and tangsuyuk’ towards the camera as he ticked his fingers before turning around and putting on a blissful expression.

“I wonder if I’ll get a commercial from a Chinese-style restaurant.”

“That’s a great talent for delusions you have.”

“You never know what will happen. There are many people who make a living out of posting videos on the internet. This is a drama we’re talking about, and not only that, it’s public TV. Who knows? Someone who runs a Chinese-style restaurant around my area might recognize me and put my face on the menu. The pride of Yooam-dong: Yoon Hyungseok.”

“I can’t believe you have the celebrity complex already. I recommend you visit a psychologist as soon as possible.”

He returned to the scene after chatting with Hyungseok. He was just about to go home after saying goodbye to the director.

Just then,

“Hey, Han Maru!”

Heewon, who he had intentionally forgotten about, rushed over to him, all neatened up with a cool-looking hairstyle and a black shirt.

“You’re an actor alright. You have a great fit.”

“Why are you complimenting me? It’s making me feel uneasy. I’m not sure about anyone else, but if you say it, I feel iffy, you know?”

“Well, you know why. Look behind you.”

Heewon turned around. Maru tried to escape during that short moment, but Heewon caught up quickly.

“Am I a loan shark to you? Why are you running away from me?”

“Because it’s obvious what you’re going to ask.”

“How do you know what I’m going to ask?”

“Han Gaeul.”

“Correct!”

“See?”

“Tell me about it. Considering Gaeul’s personality, she should have gone to see you. What happened after that? It’s been three days already. Isn’t it about time you tell me?”

Maru wondered why this guy had so much interest in this matter when he was a lazy, passive dude. It just went to show how worried he was, but telling him everything that happened would be quite funny since this concerned a matter between a man and a woman as well as something that happened during the night.

“Fine. I won’t ask what happened that night. Just tell me this.”

“What?”

Heewon lowered his voice after looking around.

“You two are back together, right?”

“Do you want to know that so badly?”

“I do. Above all, I have the duty to check if any of my very few colleagues are doing well.”

“Since when did you get that duty?”

“It’s to stave off my boredom. Also, your expression tells me that things went well. Don’t you think you should acknowledge my contribution?”

“You only told her my address though.”

“All great things in the world start off with trivial things. It’s not me but my brother who knows your address, but let’s not mind the trivial details.”

It seemed that this sloth had made up his mind today. Maru stroked his eyebrows and spoke,

“Fine, it went well. Okay?”

Heewon nodded and applauded.

“This time, don’t break up and do well. Don’t make the people watching you suffer. You aren’t kids. It’s so childish.”

“I somehow feel really depressed hearing that from you.”

He told Heewon good luck with his work before going over to Jayeon.

“Thank you for your work.”

“You’re leaving?”

“I am. It’s not like I have anything to do here.”

“Do you want to be my conversation partner then?”

“Do I get paid for it?”

“No.”

“Then I’ll just leave. I should get washed up and sleep. I feel tired after standing up for the whole day.”

“You’re clearly overreacting as you’re so young. And sorry to disappoint you, but I think going home will come a little later.”

“Is there an additional scene I have to shoot?”

“No, but there’s someone who wants to talk to you.”

Maru followed Jayeon’s finger. Yoonseo greeted him with a nod and a faint smile. Maru also nodded back.

“Miss Yoonseo, you mean?”

“Yeah.”

“Why?”

“I don’t know either. She said she wanted to ask you something related to acting, but I don’t know what people really think on the inside. Go on. Don’t make our main actress wait.”

He said okay before approaching Yoonseo. She had also taken off the doctor’s gown and changed into a one-piece dress. It seemed that she was preparing for the dating scene outside the hospital which was going to happen next.

“I heard you had business with me.”

“Yes. Were you going home?”

“I was. I finished my part after all.”

“Sorry for holding you back.”

“It’s fine as long as it doesn’t take a long time.”

Maru waited for her to speak.

“It’s not anything amazing. I just wanted to thank you. I was able to gain a hint for today’s act after watching the movie you recommended to me.”

“You don’t have to thank me. Just tell senior Joohyun that you were deeply impressed by the movie when you meet her in the future.”

“You know senior Ahn Joohyun?”

“Somewhat. Senior Joohyun is really good when it comes to using minute changes in facial expression to create an atmosphere, so if you ever find yourself lacking, you should watch her other films for reference. I’m sure it’ll be as good of a study as Spring Calendar.”

“I will. I’ve watched all the recent dramas that she was featured in, but I’ve never thought about watching her old pieces. Spring Calendar was especially shocking. I even forgot that I had to learn from her and became immersed in it.”

“The synergy created by an amazing director and a good actress can be beyond imagination sometimes.”

Maru could see Hyungseok stomping his feet in the distance. His body was screaming ‘what are you doing with Yoonseo without me, who’s her fan?’ Things would get messy if he called him here, so he had to wrap things up.

“If you don’t have anything more to say, I’ll take my leave now.”

“Sorry for holding you back.”

He bowed before turning around.

Just then,

“Mr. Maru.”

“Yes?”

“It’s somewhat of a stretch to call it a repayment, but may I buy you a meal later?”

“Being treated to a meal is a luxury when the only thing I did is tell you the title of a movie. Just give me an autograph later so that I can give it to a fan who likes you.”

Yoonseo smiled and accepted. Maru walked over to Hyungseok, who quickly gestured to him to come.

“What the hell? What did you two do? What did you two talk about?”

“This bro went to her to get an autograph.”

“Really?”

"I thought you were a Yoonseo fan."

"If she's pretty, I'll be a fan. So, what about the autograph? I was holding back from asking for one because we were in a shoot."

"She'll give one to me later."

"I have a splendid friend alright. But what about a meal instead of an autograph? Drinking is even better."

"Do you think you'd drink with someone like you if you were Yoonseo?"

"No, I would find it bothersome and just ignore it."

"Well, there you have it. Let's just go home."

Maru put his arm around Hyungseok's shoulders.

* * *

"Can I ask what you talked about?" Jayeon asked as she poked Yoonseo with her elbow.

She wondered what they talked about after Yoonseo went as far as to ask her to call him out separately.

"It wasn't anything much. I was just recommended some reference material for acting. I was just going to thank him."

"If it was like that, you should have just gone to him directly without coming to me."

"I planned to, but I found it a little hard to talk to that person. I could talk to him easily when we were with other people too. That's why I asked you. I'm strange, aren't I?"

"Quite a bit. Do you have feelings for him?"

"Feelings? Oh no. This is no time to be thinking about that either."

"But you're at that age where you should be in love."

"My agency will flip upside down if they find out. The clause forbidding me from having a relationship is gone now, but I'm still known as an idol, so I can't have a boyfriend."

"You have it hard."

"It's hard, but it's just as worth it."

"So, did you thank him? As someone who has been in this industry longer than you were, I can tell you that strange rumors might start circulating if you receive something and don't do anything about it, you know?"

"I know that. That's why I even told him I would treat him to a meal, but he rejected me instantly."

"That must have scratched your pride quite a bit, huh?"

Yoonseo hesitated before speaking,

“Actually, it was pretty good. Honestly, I just said it out of formality. I almost ended up thanking him for rejecting me.”

“He’s a quick-witted one after all. He might have realized that you didn’t feel good about it.”

“Really?”

“He’s not ordinary, that kid. Try having a deep conversation with him later. He’s a really decent guy to have as a friend. You know how stingy I am with compliments, right?”

Jayeon checked the time before speaking again,

“Let’s get ready. We should go home before the sun rises.”

“I want to do that too.”

“If so, then bring out your best. I’ll give you okay signs as soon as possible.”

The marathon known as a drama started. At first, they might have it easy, but as the goal nears, they would have to resolve themselves to become semi-corpses. They needed to hold back on laughing and chatting time in order to prevent the disaster of shooting that day’s episode in the morning, so they had to get themselves together.

“Let’s begin.”

It was time to push on again.

[1] Traffic accident

Chapter 809. Sequence 8

“How about we drink some soju over the weekend?”

“As much as I want to drink with you, I have a prior engagement.”

“What engagement? Is it a woman? If it is, let me in too.”

“It’s not a place you can butt in.”

“Don’t tell me it’s Yoonseo? You aren’t going to a place like that without me, are you?”

Maru pushed Hyungseok, who was sitting on the passenger seat, with his arm. This fellow was quite consistent in how he spouted nonsense. Hyungseok got his bag before getting out of the car.

“Call me up if your engagement goes bust. I’ll be waiting.”

“Hey, you seem like you aren’t going out as much ever since you started taking this job seriously, huh? I don’t think you’re going to nightclubs either.”

“You can only play around for so long. I have played ever since I got discharged. I thought about it, but it looks like I’m the type of guy who would feel less tired the more I work. When I was running a business, I would have given anything to sleep for two more hours, but now that I actually live a leisurely life without any work, life isn’t as interesting. I want to work instead of playing around. I want to shoot throughout the night too.”

Hyungseok closed the door along with the words 'see you next time.' After returning home, Maru didn't go to the bathroom and sat down on the sofa and made a phone call instead.

"Are you okay with taking a call right now?"

-Yeah. Sounds like work ended early today from how you're calling me?

"I just came back after finishing."

-Me too. I thought today's shoot was going to be long, but it ended unexpectedly early. I think it's thanks to the director being stricter than usual.

"Your first episode airs next Wednesday, doesn't it?"

-Yeah. Yours is in two weeks, right?

"From how there isn't any mention of extension of special episodes, we'll probably start airing in two weeks. So you're going to watch the first episode with the team?"

-Probably. There's already an appointment too. Why, wanna come?

"Do you think someone like me has a place there? Not only that, although I'm a minor actor, I am supposed to be in a competing medical drama for the same time slot."

-I think it should be fine since there's no one who would recognize you?

"Wow, you can hurt someone so nonchalantly."

-Who told you to give up on the drama and go to the military?

"There you go again. I should stop talking about this."

Maru took out a can of beer from the refrigerator. Calling her after the shoot became a part of his normal life. It had only been three days since they got back together, but everything seemed natural as though they had been doing this for a very long time. It was true that he was calling her because he wanted to hear her voice, but he also pressed the call button out of a sense of duty because he wanted to check that she was safe and sound. Although he had hypothesized that the rabbit cannot exert physical influence, there was nothing wrong with being cautious.

-What are you drinking?

"Beer. It's a habit of mine."

-Don't you think you should drink less?

"It's just one can, and it's a small one too. This much will actually help boost my health."

-Says who?

"The news?"

-Are you sure?

"Probably."

-I don't want my future husband to be an alcoholic though.

"That future husband wants me to tell you that he's strong with alcohol and that you don't need to worry."

He could hear her laugh over the phone. Wait – she said before putting down her phone. When she returned, he could hear the faint sound of a can opening over the phone.

-I should drink some too.

"You can't. It hasn't even been that long since you got discharged from the hospital."

-You don't sound persuasive at all. You drink every day.

She exclaimed, saying that it was good.

-Actually, it's coke, not beer. It's zero-cal too. Even then, I would regret it if I drank all of it, so I should leave some for tomorrow.

"So it's a battle of weight huh. But are you really going to come to my house over the weekend?"

-Of course. I'm going to call some people over and play around to my heart's content. If I go outside, I would have to be concerned about other people, and renting a party room seems like a bother. Your house was pretty big. Some food on the island table, and a can of beer in one hand. It makes me happy just by thinking about it.

"So you got a plan already, huh. Who are you calling?"

-Well, if you ask me that, no one really comes to mind. It's tomorrow too.

He waited for her words as he put the beer against his mouth. She was probably jumping around like a little child prior to a field trip. Perhaps she had planned everything out except for the list of invitations. When it came to playing, she was pretty thorough.

-Since we're at it, should we go invite someone?

"Go? At this hour?"

-Yeah. Do you have time right now?

Maru looked at the clock. It was just past 9 p.m. For actors, it wasn't a big deal since they would often have their days and nights switched around, but for people who were working or focusing on their studies, it was time to rest.

"Don't you think it's quite rude to visit at this hour?"

-Don't worry. The store should still be open.

"The store?"

-I'll go over to your house. Wait a bit.

The call ended. Maru waited as he sipped on the rest of the beer. Not even 30 minutes later, he could hear a knock on the door. When he opened the door, he saw her, wearing a baggy t-shirt, pajama pants, and a cap.

“You’re supposed to be an actress, so don’t you think you need to think about the fan’s eyes?”

“If I do this, no one recognizes me.”

“I guess that’s true.”

“Why? Do I look ugly?”

“It’s definitely not something I would want to show others. Such a defenseless side of you.”

Maru hugged her and patted her back. Her life, his life, the repeated lives – he put those things aside for now and focused on feeling her warmth.

“It’s good,” she said.

Maru also replied ‘yeah’ in a small voice.

“Let’s go now. I’ll give you a ride.”

“Where are we going?”

“You’ll see when we go there. It’s someone you know too.”

He got in her car. The black mid-sized vehicle went on the road. She kept repeating that he should wait to see who it was before parking her car on the side of the high street of Banpo-dong. Her destination seemed to be a dessert café on the other side of the road.

“Are there many people inside?”

“I don’t see any.”

“Really?”

“Who’s there?”

“You’ll see once we get there.”

Maru got out of the car. She walked with her hands locked above her head and didn’t seem flustered even when a couple approached her from the front. She walked amongst the crowd with confidence that people wouldn’t recognize her. There was not a single person who looked back at her among the people who walked past. He found it puzzling. How could they not recognize her when she was so pretty?

They entered the café. A sweet scent that drowned the thick scent of coffee filled the store.

“Sorry, but we’re closed for the day,” said a woman wearing oven mitts.

The moment Maru heard that voice, he squinted and checked the face of the woman. A familiar set of facial features could be seen below the white cooking hat that pressed down on her hair so that it didn’t drape down. It was Chaerim.

“Unni, it’s me.”

“What, it was you? I didn’t recognize you because your eyes were covered by the cap.”

“It’s a pretty good disguise, isn’t it?”

“Yeah, I didn’t recognize you at all. Who’s the one next to you?”

“Unni, don’t you recognize him?”

She pointed at Maru with an exaggerated gesture as though she was a magician introducing the beauty next to her. He smiled awkwardly and took a step forward. Chaerim, who tilted her head, eventually widened her eyes. The eyes that contained surprise changed into puzzlement and ultimately into an unrefined rage.

“That’s the guy you’re meeting?”

“Yep.”

“He’s the green frog on a white horse?”

“Yep.”

“You need to talk with me. And you over there! You stay right where you are.”

Maybe it was a good thing that he wasn’t booted out of the store? Maru watched as Chaerim took Gaeul’s hands and went to the corner of the store. He could predict what they were talking about. Are you crazy?; why are you dating him again?; what do you like so much about the guy who dumped you?; he felt his neck straining from the occasional high-pitched, sharp voice. He even felt that it would be better if she said that straight to his face instead.

A long sigh followed. Chaerim brought Gaeul back like she was dragging a lost child to the lost child center.

“Hey, did you really get back together?”

“I told you, yes,” she replied.

Chaerin widened her eyes. Her already big eyes became even bigger.

“Han Gaeul, I didn’t ask you.”

Gaeul would not lose out to anyone when it comes to audacity, but it seemed that she wasn’t able to win against Chaerim’s frosty gaze. Maru gulped when the eyes of the two women landed on him. He felt like he was being given a pressure interview. One was urging him to speak, and the other was saying that she didn’t want to listen to it. He heaved a sigh before speaking,

“I don’t plan to let her go now.”

“Really?”

“Yes.”

“Can I trust you on that?”

“You can trust me on this.”

Chaerim twitched her lips before laughing in vain. That was her expression of this absurd situation as well as her way of showing that she was doing her best to understand.

“It’s been a long time,” Maru said.

He was worried whether she would actually reply, but fortunately, Chaerim reached out her hand.

“I swore I would hit you when I saw you again.”

“You can if you want.”

“Then can you clench your teeth?”

From how her small but solid-looking fist looked tense, she seemed pretty serious about it. If Gaeul didn’t intervene midway and told her to stop, she would probably have punched him for real.

“Unni.”

“Okay, fine. I really can’t do anything about you, can I?”

Chaerim took off the cooking hat and smiled.

“It’s been a long time, Han Maru.”

“I’ve been doing well other than the fact that your current and ex-girlfriend over there came crying to me all the time. Anyway, you definitely did change after you went to the military. You look even more vicious than before.”

“It’s better than looking docile.”

“That way of speaking hasn’t changed though.”

Chaerim locked the door. She also flipped the sign.

“Sit down for now. I need to finish up.”

“I’ll help.”

Gaeul followed Chaerim behind the counter. Maru docilely sat at a table. He even locked his hands together and neatly placed them on his knees. He felt like he had to.

“Hey, don’t stay still and mop the floor or something.”

“Of course, of course.”

Maru quickly got up and grabbed a mop. He mopped with the mindset that he would not leave a speck of dust behind. After a while, Chaerim took off her apron and came from behind the counter. It seemed that she had finished.

“Well then. Let’s have a listen, shall we? Just what happened between the two of you that made you two get back together after not contacting each other even once over these five years.”

She also added that she would shove him in the heated oven if it was nothing surprising. It gave Maru the chills since it didn't sound like a joke at all. He looked at Gaeul once before starting to speak while thinking that he should speak slowly so that the oven had enough time to cool.

Chapter 810. Sequence 8

"I wanted to tell you earlier than anyone else."

"That's why I'm first?"

Gaeul nodded. Chaerim squinted before smiling. She didn't think that Chaerim's anger died down. The fact that she smiled probably meant that she understood; she understood that there was no point in pressuring the foolish junior who had appeared with the man who had dumped her once.

"I get it. I want to know why you broke up and why you got together, and nitpick about a lot of things, but I'll just stop here. To say one thing though, if I ever hear that you two are breaking up or whatnot again, don't ever think about seeing me again. I'm serious."

"That won't happen."

"Does that mean that you're going to go all the way? To marriage even?"

"If possible."

She wasn't lying. If they were going to date again, they would have to think about their relationship beyond just lovers. Marriage, which Maru jokingly spoke about when they were young, had gotten close to reality.

"Maru, what about you?" Chaerim asked.

Maru replied that he was going to do whatever the bride wanted to do. It was quite embarrassing to hear the word 'bride' from him, but she didn't hate it.

"Looks like both of you are serious about it. Right, you got together after being apart for so long, so you should get married. But still, it still puzzles me. I did realize that you got a man, but I never realized that it would be Han Maru. You two are tenacious alright."

"I didn't know that things would be like this until a few days ago. Maru kept avoiding me."

"Oh my word, he avoided you?"

"Yep."

"Hey, Han Maru. Don't you play around with my little junior. I won't forgive you."

She locked arms with Chaerim and glared at Maru. Now that she got a reliable ally, she could give Maru a good nagging. He, who always boasted a slippery eel-like smooth talking ability when there were just the two of them, docilely admitted his sins. This was why having someone on her side was important.

"Unni, do you have some time tomorrow?"

"Tomorrow? I don't have any special appointments other than coming to the store and having a look. Why do you ask?"

“We’re going to hold a cocktail party, and I was hoping you’d come. We’re going to have one at Maru’s house.”

“I’ll go. There’s no need to hold back when it’s drinking. But who else is coming?”

“For now, you’re the only one.”

“I thought you said it was tomorrow?”

“If things don’t work out, we can just drink with the three of us. You don’t like things being noisy, right?”

“That’s true. Han Maru, are you good at drinking?”

Maru just said ‘moderately.’ Gaeul was thinking differently as she had heard about him from Heewon. Before Maru went to the military, they emptied a whole day to drink, and apparently, Maru was calmly drinking while everyone else just collapsed. A strong drinker would apparently be an understatement, so Maru’s alcohol capacity was probably beyond imagination.

“A friend of mine told me that this guy’s a god at drinking. He won’t get drunk no matter how much he drinks.”

“That’s good. I’ll be fine for up to two bottles, so let’s drink all the way until the end tomorrow.”

She grabbed Chaerim’s hand before letting go.

“I’ll call you tomorrow.”

“Alright. Tell me how many people are coming so that I can bring some desserts.”

“Okay.”

Gaeul undid the lock on the front door and left the café. Maru came out a little late as he had to receive a smack on the back.

“It’s good to see you together. You two really suit each other.”

Chaerim waved at them, telling them to have a safe trip back before going back to the café. They got back to the car with the walnut pie that she gave them.

“She hasn’t changed, has she?”

“She’s the same as ever. She’s full of confidence and she doesn’t hold back. Though, I found out for the first time today that she has a strong hand. Seems like she quit all her media activities, huh?”

“I don’t think she intended to quit completely. I also plan to help her out if she says she wants to go back.”

“Tell me about it when she does. I don’t have much influence, but I’ll try looking into it as well. Rather, you two were still in touch, huh. Good for you.”

“I borrowed her shoulders a lot. She gave me a lot of consolation when I broke up with you. That’s why I wanted to tell her first. I startled you by bringing you here without telling you, didn’t I?”

Maru glanced at the café once and smiled faintly.

“A little.”

“Actually, I wanted to tell you, but I also wanted to see you a little taken aback. It’s childish revenge on my part. Not that I’m in the position to take revenge.”

“I’m thankful that you only went this far. But who else do we call? Just the three of us sounds good too.”

“Don’t you have anyone else to call?”

He pondered a little as though no one came to mind immediately before bringing up a name.

“How about Heewon? And Haewon too.”

“Right. We can call those two. But I wonder if they can make it.”

“They don’t have a shoot tomorrow, so they should be able to make it. The problem is, how do we lure out that sloth from his house?”

“We’ll first ask him, and if he says no, we can just have Haewon drag him over.”

“I guess Haewon’s the answer, huh.”

She folded three fingers down. Chaerim, Heewon, and Haewon. Although Chaerim wasn’t acquainted with the brothers, they were all good people, so there shouldn’t be a problem getting along.

“Oh, there’s one more person.”

She took out her phone. The last time she called her, that girl said that she didn’t have anything on Saturday. She probed her memories and pressed the call button.

-Yes, seonbae.

“Are you okay with taking a call right now?”

-Yes. I just finished my part-time work.

“Are there a lot of customers?”

-It’s Friday night, so yeah, there’s quite a lot. But it’s fine since there aren’t any unreasonable guests. How about you, seonbae? Are you in a shoot right now?

“No, I also finished.”

-The first episode is next Wednesday, right? I’ll make sure to watch it.

“Thanks.”

-But why did you call me? If it’s food, shall I go over to your house right now? The jokbal^[1] we ate last week was good.

“The jokbal was definitely good. But I didn’t call you for that today. There’s something I wanted to tell you. Also, I wanted to invite you.”

-Invite me?

“To explain that first, we’re going to be holding a cocktail party tomorrow with some people we know. We’ll be drinking and eating the food we bring. Do you have an appointment tomorrow?”

-I’m going to eat out with my family tomorrow. Sorry.

“No, you don’t have to be. It’s me who called suddenly. Let’s leave the invitation aside for now.”

She cleared her throat before speaking,

“I got back together.”

-Sorry?

“With Maru.”

There wasn’t a response for a long time. Did she hang up? Gaeul checked the phone. It was still connected. Just as she was about to ask what was happening, she heard a faint breathing sound. The trembling breathing eventually turned into a crying sound.

-Seonbae, really?

“Yeah.”

-That’s good. Congratulations.

“Are you crying right now?”

-No. No, I mean, yes. I’m crying in the middle of the street right now. People are staring at me, but I’m going to cry anyway.

“Why are you the one crying?”

Her heart tightened. This girl had been just as worried as Chaerim-unni. It was thanks to this girl calling her first and asking if she was okay with a gentle voice that allowed her to win against the empty feelings and focus on work. She felt sorry for the girl, but when the girl congratulated her, her eyes soon turned red. Maru quietly gave her some tissues. She wiped the corners of her eyes.

“Don’t cry.”

-Seonbae, I’m glad. I’m, really, really glad.

“Are you going to keep crying? I feel like crying if you keep crying too.”

-Okay, wait a sec.

Gaeul could hear deep breathing over the phone. She imagined how the girl would be taking a deep breath in the middle of the street and it made her laugh.

-I’m okay now.

“Sheesh, you’re too quick to cry.”

-It’s fine to cry at times like this. It’s a good thing. But how did you two get back together? Did Maru-seonbae call you back?

"I put dibs on him first this time. He kept running away, so I grabbed him and tied him up."

-It always bothered me when I met you. I wondered if you couldn't forget about him. I also felt a guilty conscience whenever I did.

"I always told you that it's not your fault, yet you're at it again. Anyway, everything's going well now."

-Congratulations, seonbae. Congratulations on getting back together.

"Thanks. Since we're at it, I'll hand you over."

-Eh? To whom?

Gaeul told her to wait before giving Maru her phone. Maru looked at her with an expression that asked who it was on the other side of the phone.

"Go on. I heard you were cruel and didn't even talk to her once until now. It's an extension of my revenge."

Maru received the phone and cautiously put it against his ear. Hello? - he said. The moment he said 'hello' once again, his expression turned weird. He looked at her with a difficult expression before eventually regaining his smile. They had a conversation for a while and then it turned into an awkward silence before he spoke about what happened in a low voice until he eventually returned the phone to her.

"Looks like she's doing well."

She nodded as she picked up on the call.

"You were surprised, weren't you?"

-Seonbae, you almost startled me witless. You're so bad.

"I wanted to report to you too."

-That was the first time I heard Maru-seonbae panic. I was panicking too, but not as much as him, it seems.

"I was watching from the side, and his expression was very interesting to look at."

-I feel so refreshed right now. I feel like a decade, no, a century's worth of indigestion was flushed down all at once. I finished crying. I'm going to have a good sleep tonight.

"You should. Oh right, what happened to the audition you took last time?"

-I haven't heard back. I don't know if I failed or not. I'm just going to forget about it if they don't call me back in a week.

"I'm sure it will go well."

This girl knew how to control her emotions. She would become a splendid actress as long as she could refine herself a little more.

-Uhm, seonbae.

“Yeah?”

-I'll go tomorrow.

“But you said you had an appointment?”

-I'll tell Bitna and mom that we should eat out next time. Such a good thing happened, so I can't miss out. Eating out together as a family is important, but I want to see you and Maru-seonbae tomorrow. I want to see for myself that you two are together.

“I'll be thankful if you do. Let's have a blast tomorrow.”

-Okay.

“Okay, Yuna. I'll call you back tomorrow. We're gathering at Maru's house, so we might go pick you up. Have a good rest at home. Don't suddenly burst out crying on your way.”

-I said I finished crying. Have a good date, seonbae.

She hung up the call. What should have been a burden for Yuna was also resolved. Gaeul felt pity for her when she thought about how Yuna should have been worrying for the past five years.

“It wasn't that awkward considering that I haven't said hi in five years.”

“You get how rough you were when you cut off contact, right? You didn't contact anyone else, not just me. When I look back at it now, I don't think you told the news to anyone who knows me.”

“Back then, I wanted to be thorough.”

“Still, you went too far. If you see Yuna tomorrow, apologize to her first. She's had a hard time until now. She was worried that we broke up because of her.”

“I did tell her that we didn't, but I guess she couldn't help herself from thinking that, huh.”

“She's a good girl after all.”

She started up the car. It would be pretty fun to hang out with the six of them. They might call for more people depending on the situation, but she decided to invite just them for now.

“Let's go home and eat this together. I'm not sure about anything else, but Chaerim-unni is good at making walnut pies.”

“What about after that?”

“Shall we watch a movie together?”

“And after that?”

“I'm not going to do anything.”

“Then I guess I should go to sleep too then.”

She smiled and poked his cheek.

[1] Pig's foot

