

## Once Again 841

### Chapter 841. Sequence 11

He used a spoon to have a taste of the spicy stew. If it was for his tastes, he would have to add more soy sauce, but he just turned off the stove like that. This was more in line with Gaeul's tastes after all. He received a message saying that she was on her way after the shoot. He thought that he would only be able to see her around 1 a.m. It seemed that her shoot had ended quite early. He watched TV on the sofa before looking at the clock on the wall. It was 11:43 p.m.

"I'm here."

Gaeul opened the door and came in. She hadn't even removed her makeup. After barely taking off her trainers, she came into the living room with shopping bags in both of her hands.

"What are those?"

"I was visiting a clothes shop that just opened today. This is a hat I got as a souvenir, and this is wine and beef jerky that we're going to eat."

"They give you beef and jerky at a clothes shop?"

"No, I bought these myself to give as a present. I bought some more while I was at it. But hey, I'm so tired."

Gaeul put her arms out. She seemed to want him to carry her. Maru brought her to the bathroom while she was whining.

"Alright, get washed up first. I'll get the food ready."

"Did you cook spicy stew?"

"I did, so get washed up. Be thorough when removing your makeup."

While Gaeul got washed, he set up the dining table. He brought the portable table from the veranda and opened it in the middle of his living room before putting some newspaper on it. He then placed a portable stove, followed by a pot, before turning the stove on. By the time the spicy stew was on the verge of boiling again, Gaeul left the bathroom.

"What a good smell."

She sat down in front of the table with a towel wrapped around her head. She picked up her spoon and had a taste of the steaming hot stew. From how her lips curved upwards, it seemed to fit her tastes.

"Maru, you'll be a perfect housewife."

Gaeul brought two wine glasses from the kitchen. She removed the cork of the wine that she bought as a gift and poured some into the glasses. Spicy stew and wine. They weren't really a great pair, but Maru didn't care since the one drinking with him was good. He drank a sip before ruminating on the taste before swallowing it.

"It's quite sweet."

He wanted to give a detailed description of the taste, even if he couldn't be as good as a wine sommelier, but it was difficult after all. Although he tried focusing on the taste because she was the one who wanted to drink it, he couldn't do what he couldn't do after all.

"You honestly don't get why people drink wine, do you?" Gaeul asked as she waved her wine glass in the air.

Maru nodded. That was because the sweetness of cheap wine was his impression of most wines. While the one he drank just now wasn't unpleasantly sweet, his tongue was used to soju and caused a rejection to sweet liquor.

"It's not bad, but I don't think I'll drink it that often."

"But since you're drinking it anyway, try being in the mood."

Maru used his thumb and index finger to hold the glass by the neck while straightening out the other three. He raised the glass so that the semi-filled glass overlapped with her face and spoke,

"Here's to looking at you, Mademoiselle. Is that what you want?"

"You were really cocky just now."

"I thought you wanted me to be in the mood."

"There's a limit to being cheesy."

She raised her glass as well. After toasting lightly, he drank a sip again. While they were talking, the spicy stew started boiling. After tasting the wine and the spicy stew alternately, she eventually said that it was no good and brought some soju from the fridge.

"It's weird to eat something spicy with something sweet."

"How about the glass?"

Gaeul emptied the wine in her glass in one go. She then raised it above her head and flicked it against her head before looking at him, expecting him to do the same. Maru also emptied his glass and flicked it against his head. Transparent soju replaced the wine glass that originally had the red grapevine in it.

"The pairing of the liquor and the food is important too, I guess."

Those were Gaeul's words right after she ate a piece of fish from the stew and drank some soju. Maru agreed wholeheartedly. That bitterness of soju and the spiciness of the stew went well together.

They talked about praising the pairing of spicy stew and soju before Maru asked about what happened today,

"How was the shoot?"

"Today? I just shot a kiss scene."

She made a sneaky smile while eating some fish with some celery.

"And a deep one at that."

“Kang Giwoo has it real fortunate today.”

“You jealous?”

“Of course I’m jealous.”

“Even though it’s work?”

“I’m only going as far as being jealous because it’s work.”

“I don’t think I’m going to be jealous even if you shoot a kiss scene, though.”

Gaeul teased him while pouting a little. Maru grabbed her lips that were protruding out.

“This is the mouth uttering nonsense, huh.”

Gaeul pulled her head back and smiled.

“What did you do today?”

“I had a very busy day today. First, I did some cleaning.”

“I don’t know who will wed you later, but whoever it is, she won’t have to worry about household cleaning at least. Why don’t you run a cleaning company once? Han Maru Cleaning corp. Making your dirty house shine again,” Gaeul said as she lifted Woofie, who was passing by.

The dog seemed startled and looked around with her eyes wide open, but she soon wagged her tail in relief as though she realized that the owner of the hands that picked her up was Gaeul.

“I’ll try if I don’t have anything to do in my later years. Anyway, today, I cleaned the kitchen and the bathroom before heading to the market.”

“Mr. Han Maru. What made you go to the market?”

Woofie’s front paw became a microphone. Maru grabbed the paw and replied,

“My superior wanted to drink spicy stew, so I went grocery shopping. She has a picky taste and notices if I cook her pre-made food, so I picked the ingredients myself and cooked it myself too.”

“Reporter Woofie here says that superior doesn’t have a picky palate.”

“That’s not true. I made seasoned seaweed last time and I got an earful about it being too salty. I put a lot of effort into that too.”

“Mr. Han Maru, your voice has become incredibly low right now. Are you mad by any chance?”

“As a housewife, my heart is torn whenever I hear my superior say that the food does not taste good. It’s beyond the level of being ‘mad.’”

Gaeul turned the dog around before looking at the dog.

“Reporter Woofie, I think this is my fault. Can you apologize in my stead?”

Gaeul waved the dog’s front paw up and down while lowering her head. How many men would not fall in love with her while looking at that? Maru chuckled and told her to put the dog down. The dog kept

giving him hints that she was uncomfortable for a while now. As the owner, he couldn't just ignore his dog's pleas.

"I know. You don't season the food that much because I like my food on the bland side. Thanks every time."

"I'm grateful that you acknowledge it. My sister just grumbles at me after eating. What's even more serious is that she can only cook two things with confidence."

"What are those two?"

"One is ramyun."

"Ramyun is a splendid dish. Do you know how hard it is to cook it properly?"

Gaeul stood on Bada's side. For a brief moment, he could picture a certain woman scolding her husband while standing on her sister-in-law's side as well as the image of a husband crying that there is no one on his side.

"Alright, let's consider ramyun cooking. The second thing she's confident in cooking is microwaved rice."

"The timing is really important with microwaved rice, you know? A single second can change the taste."

"What am I supposed to say to that? Geez, this is sad."

Gaeul laughed out loud. It wasn't even that funny though. He thought that he was missing something and observed her closely. After laughing her heart out, she calmed her breath and asked again,

"Right, what's Bada doing these days?"

"College. She's in various circles or whatnot too. I'm worried about what she'll do after graduation already. Watching her makes my head hurt."

"You should play around while you're still a student. Now that I think about it, I haven't graduated yet either. I haven't been to school for the past three years too. I guess I can't really complain even if I get expelled."

"You were just that busy after all."

"I know it's too late to talk about it at this point in time, but Maru, don't you regret not going to college? It's not like I went to college properly either, but just being in Chung-a university's theater department helped me out a lot. Even the seniors who are known to be scary on sets treat me kindly after knowing that I'm from the same college as them. There are many producers who are graduates of Chung-a university, so it helped me out quite a lot too."

"It's already in the past. Back then, I chose not to go because I thought that was for the best. I have no regrets."

Gaeul spun the wine glass around.

“Sometimes, it makes me think. What if you went to Chung-a university with me back then? We wouldn’t be needlessly apart from each other, we would be able to create more memories, and we would be able to share more love.”

“But the result is that we’re still together in this place. I’m okay with that.”

“Yeah, I guess the present is what’s important. There’s a delicious spicy stew in front of me and the adorable Woofie right now.”

“How about me?”

Gaeul put her hand forward. Maru grabbed her hand and locked his fingers with her. It may be small, but it was a firm hand.

“You will be next to me in the future too, not just now. Hey, that was a little cheesy. I must be drunk.”

She laughed silently and let go of her hand. They had gone through two bottles of soju already. She drank more than her usual capacity. They shouldn’t have drunk in wine glasses.

“You okay?”

“I’m fine, I’m fine. Isn’t that right, Woofie?”

Gaeul picked up the dog lying next to her again. He should have realized when she was grinning while holding the dog’s paw. He finally realized what he was missing.

“You should get to sleep. You’re drunk.”

“Really? I don’t have any plans for tomorrow.”

Tomorrow – she was definitely drunk when she said that word with a huge grin on her face. She would probably fall right down if he poked her from the side. He rescued Woofie from her arms and put the table away. She immediately lay down on the floor, curled up. This was one of her habits when she got drunk. Even in his previous life, she would lie down once she got drunk. When it was bad, she would grab onto anything next to her and not let go.

“Miss Han Gaeul, you should brush your teeth and go to sleep.”

“I can’t move.”

“Yes, you can.”

“Give me a piggyback.”

“Aren’t you giving me too many orders today?”

When he crouched down in order to piggyback her, she put her arms around his neck as though she had been waiting – from the front that is. Maru ended up having to lie down while being face-to-face. He had briefly forgotten that Gaeul’s physical strength was better than most unathletic men.

“Let’s stay like this for a while.”

Her voice soon faded out and her breathing turned rhythmical. What should he do? The rational answer was to get her washed and send her to bed, but the emotional answer was the better answer right now. He supported her head before pushing his arm below her. When he tapped on Gaeul's back, who hugged him tighter, her breathing became a little more relaxed. Woofie looked around and came over before lying down around her head.

"This is enough."

Maru brushed up her draping hair before giving a kiss on her forehead. Good food, a home he can relax in, the cute dog – though she bites from time to time –, and above all, the woman that was sleeping like a child. He might get punished if he wished for more. Actually, it might be okay since he was already being punished anyway.

The thought that he had to bring her to bed became faint. Maru eventually closed his eyes as well.

### **Chapter 842. Sequence 11**

It was an endless street with trees along the sides. There were no cars, the wind was blowing silently, trees were planted at regular intervals, and the pavement was flawless without a single crack anywhere that it was to the point that it was unpleasantly so. She tried numbering her steps. One, two, three... Even after a hundred, a thousand, and ten thousand, the scenery did not change. The faces of the ones coming towards her also started being repeated. A boy with cotton candy, a man dragging a bike, a granny dragging a hand wagon filled with cardboard, a man and a woman who seemed to be a couple, as well as a woman shouting at her phone.

At one point, Gaeul realized that everyone else was walking in the opposite direction of her. People were only walking towards her; no one was going the same way as her. She walked forward through the wave of people, praying that something would change, hoping that there was a flaw in this fixed scenery.

She wanted to turn around and walk in the same direction as everyone else, but the moment she turned around, the scenery was reversed. Wherever she turned, people always walked towards her from the other side. No one walked next to her. Even if she tried to grab the arm of a passerby, she would pass right through them like smoke. When she tried to talk to anyone, none of them replied.

She became alone in this crowd. A sense of freezing solitude followed suit. She stood still and looked at the people passing by. Their expressions were varied: smiling, crying, and angry. Gaeul suddenly felt that she didn't exist in this world. She felt like she was flung outside the world.

"You said you'd do anything. Didn't you expect this much?" the boy with the cotton candy said after he suddenly stopped.

His eyes looked to be rebuking her. Gaeul couldn't understand. Didn't expect what? Starting with the boy, people started criticizing her: Bear the weight of your decision; It is impossible to return; This is punishment.

"What did I do wrong?" she asked the people.

When she did, the people staring at her started walking past her again as though nothing had happened. The unchanging scenery began once again. She wondered how many times she had to repeat this in the

future. She wanted to sit down on the spot. Those gazes were too much for her to bear. Maybe she would get swept away by those people if she stood still. Maybe she would be able to join those people and laugh and get angry just like normal. No matter how much time passed, those people just brushed past her. The only thing she gained was the knowledge that the world was unchanging and that she would always stay on the spot.

Eventually, she was no longer able to discern the faces of the people brushing past her, and the scenery also turned blurry. She was being isolated from the world and being ejected from it. The sensation of being ejected from the sensation of solitude was truly horrific.

“It’s okay.”

The blurring world regained its original form. She could start hearing the voices of the people walking past her. The strangely flawless pavement had cracks, the trees that all looked all the same as though they were copied and pasted started possessing character, and cars started driving on the road again. The people that were walking in just one direction like worker ants started walking in all sorts of different directions. The hamster wheel-like world was engulfed in brilliant chaos.

Gaeul looked at the man standing next to her. The man was pitch black. He held the world. He brought the world. Gaeul grabbed his hand and walked forward. The people who walked past her like ghosts before started recognizing her and made way for her with a smile.

“Who are you?”

The moment she threw out that question, Gaeul opened her eyes. It took quite a long time for her spirit to return to her body from floating between reality and her dream. In front of her eyes was Maru, who was breathing slowly. Only then did she realize that she was using his arm as a pillow. Swallowing down what was in her mouth, she stood up. It was 4 a.m. Someone was shouting outside. It seemed that there was trouble with parking.

She felt dazed. She felt like she just had an incredibly sad dream, but the only thing she could remember was the question she asked at the very end: Who are you?

“You woke up?”

Maru opened his eyes. He groaned as he was about to sit up while pushing himself against the floor.

“Your arm is numb, isn’t it?”

“No.”

“Yes, it is. It must have been hours. Give me your arm.”

She started carefully massaging Maru’s arm. At first, he trembled, but he soon smiled in satisfaction as the numbness went away.

“I was drunk, wasn’t I?”

“A little. How’s your head? Aren’t you dizzy?”

“Usually, I would have a horrible headache if I pass out after drinking, but right now, I’m strangely refreshed. Maybe it’s thanks to your arm pillow.”

“If that’s how it is, then I guess it was worth the effort.”

When her senses completely woke up from sleep, the cold assaulted her. It was to be expected since she had been lying down on the cold floor for hours even though it wasn’t mid-summer. When she started rubbing her own arms, Maru gave her a vest. They got a matching pair of these vests to wear at home.

“You should go and get some more sleep. It’s only 4 o’clock.”

“I don’t think I can sleep now.”

“Then let’s get something warm to drink.”

Maru put some water in the kettle. Gaeul sat at the dining table and watched his back. As the mood lights were the only thing on in the living room, he looked like he was wearing dark clothes.

“What are you staring at?” Maru asked as he put down a mug in front of her.

It was fragrant barley tea.

“I thought I’d seen it a lot.”

“What do you mean?”

Maru looked around. Instead of replying ‘you,’ Gaeul brought the mug to her mouth. Maybe she was still half-asleep. How would he react if she said ‘you look familiar’ to a person who she had been with for the entire day? Maru would probably tell her to go to sleep.

“It’s 10 past 4, and you don’t want to sleep. What now?”

“I don’t know.”

“It’ll be tiring if you don’t get enough sleep. Why don’t you go to bed and close your eyes after you drink that? You might feel okay now, but you’ll feel dazed in the morning.”

“Maybe.”

Although she lacked sleep ever since she started working, she didn’t want to close her eyes right now. She felt as though something rather repulsive would assault her if she did. When she drank the tea while fidgeting with her toes, he brought a duvet from the room.

“Come here. You can’t let your body cool.”

She placed her mug on the table in front of the sofa and sat down. Maru opened the duvet and covered her. Her chilly body became warm soon.

“I feel like I’m having a lot of dreams recently. I don’t remember what they’re about though. I never dreamt anything when I was young either.”

Maybe Maru was tired. Gaeul looked at Maru, who put his arm around her shoulder and pulled her closer. She could feel his body heat from the touch.



“You don’t have to concern yourself with dreams. You don’t have to worry about anything.”

She didn’t say what kind of dream she had, but Maru consoled her as though he knew everything. Gaeul leaned her head on his shoulder. She felt like she had returned home after a long trip and was letting the bed take care of her body as she became drunk on the relief of having returned home.

“Do you want to come over and say hi to my mom?” she asked in a soft voice.

“If you want.”

“You’ll get scolded. Mom was really disappointed too.”

“I should be. I did something wrong.”

“But now that I think about it, it was mostly my fault.”

“Then I guess we should get scolded together. I’ll give her my right cheek, so you give her your left.”

“Yeah. You said your mother and father are in Pohang, right?”

“Yeah. My father is managing that place more than before, so they found a residence there.”

“We should visit them.”

“Take your time.”

His hand that stroked her hair was so pleasing.

“Do you think you’re getting sleepy now?”

“Just a little more.”

“I wonder if my shoulder can last until then.”

“Try holding on for a little more.”

She curled herself up and leaned against him. She never acted this spoiled to anyone ever since her father passed away, yet she always wanted to rely on him if he was next to her. His embrace reminded her of a warm spring day. Even without doing anything, she felt satisfied as though she had everything in this world.

“What did mother-in-law like again?”

“It’s been a long time since I last heard you say that.”

“I told you. We’re going to get married. I’m not joking.”

She looked into his eyes.

“Actually, when you first brought that up, I had a feeling that things would come to this. I knew that it was a joke, and I knew that it was an event far into the future, but I still had a strange feeling that we would be tied together like this.”

Maru kissed her lightly on the forehead.

“Stop chatting and go to sleep. You have a precious body, so you should get into tip-top condition.”

He started tapping on her shoulder at regular intervals. It was a magical rhythm that made her fall asleep. It took away her feelings of not wanting to sleep and made her vision go hazy. She started yawning, and her eyelids felt heavy.

“Should we go to bed if you’re uncomfortable?” she asked, worried that his shoulder might hurt and that he might not get enough sleep looking after her.

Maru shook his head.

“It feels like we’re camping, so it’s good. Don’t worry about me and get some sleep.”

“Wake me up if it hurts.”

“If it’s your weight that hurts me, then that I guess is a joy too.”

“That line was rather embarrassing.”

“Less than what you said last night probably.”

Gaeul raised her head.

“What did I say last night?”

“You don’t remember?”

“I don’t.”

“Then you should forget about it.”

“Tell me quickly. What did I say?”

“Something that will make your hands and feet shrivel up. Should I say it back to you word for word? You might end up kicking the duvet in shame.”

“It’s that bad?”

“Do you want me to say it?”

“Forget it. If it’s not in my memories, then it’s not an embarrassing history.”

“If you say that, it makes me want to tell you.”

“Don’t.”

Maru chuckled before placing his chin on her head.

“I’ll keep it a secret, so let’s go to sleep. The sun is going to rise at this rate.”

“Because you said that, I don’t feel drowsy anymore.”

“It’s my fault?”

“Probably?”

Maru yawned before sticking close to her. Gaeul pulled her legs together and placed them on top of the sofa. Purple light was seeping through the curtains. It was a quiet, cozy, and warm time. She wished that this night would last a long time.

It was after she stared at the blackened TV screen for a while. She could hear that Maru's breathing sound had become soft. When she turned around, she saw that Maru had fallen asleep. Gaeul pulled his arm around her shoulder so that he didn't fall. As long as he held her, she would not have a bad dream. The drowsiness that she had forgotten about overwhelmed her again. Her consciousness left her starting from her toes. The last thing she felt before she fell asleep was a strong grip around her shoulder.

### **Chapter 843. Sequence 12**

Yoo Jayeon pressed the bell and waited for a bit. The sensitivity of the woman curling inside this place was even worse than an exam student, so she would hide in a corner like a snail going inside its shell if she touched her. After waiting for about five minutes, the door opened slowly. Eunbin greeted her in pajamas with a pair of really tired eyes.

"Come in."

"Did you get some sleep?"

"No, I didn't get any sleep because of a horrible stomach ache."

"Did you check the viewing rates again?"

"I couldn't help it. That's the first thing I see when I open the internet. We lost this time as well. The production was really good, so it seems like my writing is terrible."

"When are you going to stop depreciating yourself? Also, the drama is ultimately created by both of us, so it means that the production is terrible too."

Jayeon pushed away the underwear strewn across the floor as she headed to the kitchen. The pizza box she saw when she came here last week was still placed under the dining table. It was fortunate that Eunbin washed the dishes in time though. If there was a pile of greasy plates in the sink then she might have gone back out without a second thought.

"Good thing I called. I came here just in case since your voice didn't sound that good, and you were like this after all. I told you that you should stop eating convenience store lunch boxes and start eating proper food."

"How can a writer with terrible viewing rates eat proper food? I should just go and die."

"You're saying that, but you are going to eat it if I cook you food, right?"

"The viewing rates might be bad, but I don't want to die of starvation."

"I'll get you some food, so clean up your house a little. Don't you feel sorry for this poor little thing?"

The cat came around to her feet and rubbed her face all over her legs. She looked as though she was saying 'my caretaker is half crazy' with her eyes. Jayeon opened the window and even the front door. It

made her feel tragic that she had to clean another person's house in the middle of the day, but she still moved busily in order to take care of the glass-like will of the writer who held the destiny of the drama.

She finished the cleaning by tossing out the food waste that she didn't even want to imagine how long it had been there. It was rather fortunate that it was dirty only to the point that it was cleanable. It seemed that Eunbin hadn't completely given up on being human. Though, with more time, it would have become a pigsty for sure.

"I do respect you as a pro for being so harsh on yourself, but you're clearly taking things way too far. If you let go of your pen because you get sick, then it'll be us who gets in trouble."

"Okay."

The side dishes that she made for her husband disappeared into Eunbin's mouth. The woman, who was slow to act like she had lived her entire life, changed dramatically once she picked up a spoon and started eating away like a wrestler. It was good that Jayeon had brought a whole load of side dishes. Had she brought a handful of each, Eunbin might have finished them in one sitting.

"They're delicious."

"It's good that you find them delicious."

Eunbin seemed to have gained some energy as she did the dishes and brewed some coffee for Jayeon, though it was quite late.

"I told you, unni. All you have to do is just stop checking the viewing rates. If it's bad, you fall into this state, and even if it's good, you start worrying about how it might fall. Why do you do something that makes you stressed out no matter what you do?"

"Jayeon."

"What?"

"Do you check the viewing rates or not if a list goes up in the production department?"

"I do."

"Do you always feel good?"

"No."

"Then why do you do it?"

"Because it's work."

"Then am I playing around?"

She didn't have anything to retort to that. After all that was done and said, both of them lived lives that were dictated by viewing rates. They may talk big by saying that they were putting life into the drama or making art, but their emotions were bound to be swayed by viewing rates after all.

"The gap is even bigger than last week."

“But it’s still a single-digit percentage point difference. Even Doctor’s Office hasn’t gone past twenty percent. It’s a number that we can catch up to. The ads are selling well too.”

“Just because the ads are doing well doesn’t mean that I would get paid for my manuscripts or that the viewing rates will get better.”

“At least it increases my reputation so stop frowning. You were so energetic when you were eating.”

“Why don’t you try reaching my age?”

“If someone heard that, they might think we’re ten years apart or something. You’re thirty-five, and I’m thirty-three. We practically lived at the same time yet you’re always bragging about your age.”

“You’ll soon realize that those two years is an incredibly long time.”

“If that’s how you want to do things, I can’t help but bring up marriage.”

Eunbin, who was sipping on her coffee while resting her chin, suddenly started sniffing and looked down. It seemed that she had lost her will to fight.

“Fine, you have it good, getting married like that. I’m thirty-five but never brought a man into my house even once.”

“But you meet a lot outside.”

“Men I meet because of work aren’t men. They’re just characters. What a sad life is this? I’m sure I’ll become an old hag while typing away on the keyboard of a laptop with a cat in my arms. I should just get ready for my later years after saving up my manuscript fees.”

Eunbin buried her face in the table. She hadn’t changed at all since before. She was feeble by nature, but she was nearly national athlete-level when it came to being harsh on herself, so she would nearly self-destruct once she started working. As a result of that, she would become powerless and forget about everything but her manuscript.

“How many people do you think work as the writer of a mini-series at thirty-five? You know that there aren’t many skilled writers your age.”

Jayeon had to bring back her will to live before she became so depressed that it broke through the ground. After all, she didn’t come all the way here with side dishes in hand just to rebuke her. When she teased her and then flattered her discreetly, Eunbin would always regain her energy. As she was a writer that became Jayeon’s first friend after entering the TV station, she knew her personality quite well.

“What good is that? This is how my life will end.”

‘Young writer’ and ‘skilled writer’ were two terms that were emergency pills that always resuscitated Eunbin, who was drowning in viewing rates. Even when she was in despair about the lack of results, she would always come back to herself with a laugh when those two terms were brought up, but for some reason, it didn’t work today. There were still shadows on her face.

“Did something happen?” This time, she asked as a close friend, not as a producer to a writer.

“The fire lit in my heart simply won’t die out.”

“Hey, you’ve gotten strange since you’ve been living with texts for a long time. Just what happened?”

Eunbin refused to talk, sealing her lips like the gates of a warring castle. If it was someone else, Jayeon would’ve thought about coaxing them to talk, but she just watched without doing anything as it was Eunbin. This unni, who kept sighing while looking into the distance, was never able to hold herself back from talking. She would get into verbal arguments with paper, which couldn’t say a single word. Usually, writers who had to fight themselves were split into one of two types: those who refused to talk as they had gotten close to solitude and those who struggled to not break the silence as soon as they had the opportunity. Eunbin was clearly the latter. Although she was holding on with a face that looked like she was resolved to not talk, she would probably exhaust herself and speak soon.

“Actually, the thing is....”

Indeed, she didn’t betray her expectations. Jayeon just went along with her words so that she could continue talking. From now on, those lips would utter everything, including secrets that she shouldn’t talk about.

After listening for a while, one of Jayeon’s eyes twitched. She spoke,

“Kang Giwoo is lingering in front of your eyes? You think you’re lovesick?”

“Yeah.”

“Unni, you should act more like your age.”

“I thought you’d say that. I’m an idiot for telling you.”

“There’s no one who doesn’t know that Kang Giwoo acts kind to everyone. He literally does that to every single person.”

“Then why do you think he called in the evening to ask me out to dinner? Don’t you think that he has the hots for me? What’s the possibility that he likes me?”

“Unni, are you serious?”

“Do you think I am? I was just saying. But it’s true that his handsome face is lingering in front of my eyes. The reason I can still breathe despite the fact that the pressure from the viewing rates is making me sick is thanks to his handsome face.”

“Unni, you like anyone who looks handsome, don’t you?”

“I’ll be fine as long as it’s a man.”

“You really are sick, alright. But what do you mean by that? Kang Giwoo recommended an actor?”

“It wasn’t a strong recommendation. He just told me that I should make more use of an actor in passing. I didn’t think much of it when I was there, but when I watched the previous episodes of Doctors after I got home, I felt like he was right.”

“Which actor was that?”

“Bigfoot. Uh, what was his name again? I do remember his first name because it was rather peculiar, but I can’t remember his surname. Anyway, the actor known as Maru.”

“Han Maru.”

“Right, Han Maru. Since we’re talking about it, how is he? I didn’t see him during the read-through since he was just a minor actor. I think he’s pretty good when I see him acting the character I created, but that character is pretty one-dimensional, so I also think that anyone else could do that much. What kind of actor is he in the eyes of the director?”

Jayeon replied without a shred of hesitation,

“If I had the rights to casting then I would definitely give him a big role.”

Eunbin put down her mug and spoke,

“How long have we known each other?”

“You and me? If you count the time you were a writer for an entertainment program and I was a new recruit, then about nine years.”

“We’ve known each other for that long, but I’ve never seen you say that about someone with so much confidence. Is he someone you know personally?”

“He’s the main actor of my debut piece.”

“The boy from ‘Pojang-macha’? That’s him?”

“Yep.”

“How long ago was that? Six years?”

“About that much. Unni, you told me over the phone back then that the boy was good.”

“I did. So that’s him. Then you should’ve told me about it. If it was your recommendation, I would have thought about casting him too.”

“He suddenly disappeared to the military when he had to be going up. After he came out, he did see some popularity in Daehak-ro for about a year but honestly speaking, he was a little too unstable for me to use him. I do believe in his qualities, but leading a whole drama is a different story after all. That’s why I gave him a minor role to test him out, and he really was good after all. He has that spice to him. Even though his lines are short and his scenes are shorter than that, the set completely changes with him in the mix. I also found out that he is a long-time friend of Heewon too.”

“Kang Giwoo talked about him and now Lee Heewon? Isn’t he a jewel that’s too good to waste?”

“Maybe.”

“Looks like I should consider this properly.”

“What do you mean?”

“Creating a side story for that character. What do you think is the biggest problem with Doctors as the producer of it?”

“If I were to be honest, it’d be that there aren’t many elements to get attached to. I’m not saying that your story is terrible. It’s just that the topic is lighter compared to ‘Doctor’s Office’, and the progress is quite slow, so it just needs more time for the interactions between characters to come to life. I believe in the power of the characters you created. That’s why I don’t say anything during our script meeting.”

“It’s nothing new, but thanks for trusting me.”

“I’m trusting you because you’re doing well. If you were bad then I would be ruthless.”

“I know that. Anyway, like what you said, the fact that the progress is slow means that it’s not closely knitted together and there’s room to insert something in there. If we reduce shooting locations a little, it’s possible to put another character on the side.”

“Do you think that will help with the progression of the drama?”

“I’m not sure yet. But you said he’s an actor you can trust in, didn’t you? If there are good ingredients, you just can’t help but want to cook. If I do it and it does decently, then I can always add more.”

“And take him out if it’s no good?”

“The forums will decide that. Though, it’s all ultimately up to me.”

“Think about it, and tell me once you decide.”

There was no reason to hold her back when she was motivating herself to work.

“Before that, can I see him?”

“You mean Maru?”

“Yeah. Since I’m going to insert him anyway, I should tailor it to him. I should meet him and see what he’s like.”

“Should I call him here then?”

“Doesn’t he have a schedule?”

“He’s probably playing with his dog at home, I think?”

Jayeon picked up her phone.

#### **Chapter 844. Sequence 12**

Beads of sweat formed on his forehead. It had been two hours since he started acting out the free topic of ‘anger.’ Maru picked up his phone which he placed in front of the TV and checked the video he had just taken. A man, who was ripping his neck out while crying without a sound, got on the ground and started shivering. He had expressed exhaustion after pouring all of his rage out, but he didn’t like the expression. Just like how there would always be moisture after pouring out all the water from a bowl, even if he was exhausted of his anger after all those actions, there would definitely be residue left behind. The act itself was pretty decent, but he wasn’t able to give that lingering sensation of rage right



at the last bit. It would have been better if he showed that there were kindlings of rage within that ash and that it could come back at any moment.

Even as he washed his face, he was moving his facial muscles minutely. The more skilled an actor was, the better they used their minute muscles like how they would move their big muscles. Even if there was rage kindling within the ashes, it was no good if he couldn't express it. The viewers read the muscular changes that are visible on the surface; they could not see through the emotions underneath it. Although many said that emotions could be conveyed through the eyes, that also was a combined impression of the facial muscles, the lips, as well as the general outline of the face itself. If people were just given a pair of eyes and were asked what their emotions were, not many people would be able to correctly guess what they would be.

He placed his phone in front of the TV again and stretched himself from his toes to his eyebrows. He ordered every single muscle that he could use to move to its maximum right under their limits. Just as he was about to start free-acting again after getting his emotions ready, his phone, which he had slanted against the TV, started vibrating and fell over.

"Yes, producer."

The caller was Yoo Jayeon.

-Are you busy?

"No."

-Are you at home?

"Yes."

-Then can you come out for a bit?

"To where?"

-In Seoul. There's someone who wants to meet you.

Nothing flashed in his mind after hearing her follow with the name 'Lee Eunbin' but he was sure that he had heard that name somewhere. Jayeon added that she was the writer of 'Doctors.' Only then did he remember the name that was embedded on the first page of his script.

"What would the writer want with me?"

-It's for nothing special. She just wants to know what kind of person you are. If you aren't too busy, I hope you can come over.

"Both the producer and the writer want me to come, so I don't really have a choice, do I? I'll get washed and go right away. Please message me the address."

-Bring your script when you come.

He got an address through text. It wasn't too far. He took a shower, put on his clothes, and left his house. He wondered what Jayeon meant by asking him to bring his script. While he was thinking about it, his car arrived at the destination. It was a newly built apartment complex.

"It's Han Maru."

The moment he pressed the bell and said his name, the door opened. Jayeon told him to come in while holding a black cat.

"Is this your house, director?"

"No, it's the writer's."

He saw a woman waving her hand at the island dining table. She was writer Lee Eunbin, who showed up during the public rehearsal for Doctors. Maru knew her face through the internet.

"Hello."

He said his greetings first while predicting the intentions these two had when calling him here. Eunbin motioned for him to sit down. She looked pretty different from how she looked on the internet. It was probably because of those dark spots beneath the eyes. It seemed that she was really tired.

"Sorry for calling you all of a sudden. I had her call you because I wanted to see you at least once."

"It's okay. I'm semi-unemployed anyway. If you had notified me beforehand, I would have brought some presents. I'm sorry that I'm empty-handed."

"It doesn't matter."

Maru placed the script he brought on the table and sat down on a chair. The two women sat opposite him and were staring at him. He felt like he was at an interview.

"If I may ask, why was I called here?"

"It's quite rude to probe you out when we called you while you were resting, so let me get straight to the point. I want to try giving a change to the character."

"Character?"

"Yes. Your character, Mr. Han Maru," Eunbin said as she pointed at the script.

"Oh, is it okay if I drop the honorifics? This would be fine if it was just the two of us, but Jayeon is here, so I think we need to sort things."

"It's okay to talk to me with ease, writer."

"Writer sounds too distant. Just call me noonim. Though, if you don't like that, you can call me writer. Anyway, I'll talk to you comfortably from now on. Is that okay?"

"Yes, noonim."

Maru quickly changed his way of address. Someone who he would benefit from getting close to reached out to him first. There was no need to hold back here. Eunbin seemed to have taken a liking to the address of 'noonim' as she clapped with a bright smile.

"You're a really refreshing guy alright. I need to meet a refreshing guy like this too."

"Talk about guys later, and get to the point."

Jayeon apologized in her stead, saying that that was just her personality. Maru responded, saying that it was okay.

“The reason I called you here today is to make a decision. That is, whether to create a story for the character Bigfoot or not.”

“Uhm, wasn’t next week supposed to be my last shoot?”

He was notified by the director that he would stop appearing around episode seven. Side characters disappearing during the progress of the plot was something that always happened.

“I originally planned to take you out, but I heard from Jayeon that you and Heewon’s chemistry is so good. I felt it while I watched the reruns, and indeed, the two of you seemed to have no distance between each other. But you didn’t give off much of an impression since it was so short.”

“When you say you’re creating a story, does that mean that you’re bringing the character back?”

“I haven’t decided on it yet; that’s why I called you here. These days, dramas are all about following the trend and feedback. It would be for the best if I can keep writing without feedback and still gain popularity but that has the disadvantage that things would be ruined for good once it falls, right? The trend these days is to maintain my pride as a writer but also pick and choose from other people’s best stories and use them in the plot. But it’s a different story when it comes to characters. A plot can be created just through text, but for a character, the role of the actor is very important. In my personal opinion, if you need one hundred parts to create a character, the writer can only supply about thirty: the character’s personality, history, and his actions. Those are important, but the one who expresses that is the actor after all. I feel somewhat sorry for saying this as someone who works in the industry, but there are actors who shine even in shitty dramas, right? That means that the actor can make up for the character that the writer has horribly created.”

Of course, if the plot goes crazy, the character would too – Eunbin added as she redid her hairband. Maru wholly agreed to the fact that an actor could make up for the deficiency of a character. From how there were actors who were given good opinions even as the whole piece fell apart, that definitely seemed true. If the writer’s fingertips decided the success and failure of the drama entirely, then directions and ranking actors would be completely unnecessary. However, the market definitely differentiated superstar producers and actors from the rest.

“Can I have a look at your script?” Eunbin asked while placing her hand on the script that Maru brought.

Maru nodded. Eunbin rested her chin on her hands and flipped the first page.

“You take quite a lot of notes, even though the character barely has any lines.”

“It’s a force of habit. I’m only at ease if the page is filled.”

“I understand you there. There’s nothing scarier than an empty background. This is the script for episode 7, so the one for the first episode must be even more pitch-black than this, huh.”

“I wrote stuff like crazy.”

“In your opinion, what kind of character is this Bigfoot?”

“It’s somewhat embarrassing to say this in front of the creator herself, but to me, I saw him as someone who enjoys everything he puts effort into. To put it in a bad way, he’s the kind of guy who would be willing to work for free.”

“Really? Why did you think that?”

“There’s a part where he’s portrayed as being really frugal, right? I didn’t have much else to work with, so I tried fleshing out that personality of his. He was raised in a good way despite being in a not-so-well-off household, and he thanks his family for having supported him with the expensive tuition of medical school. It might be a cliché character, but I thought there was nothing better than that for a sidekick. He became frugal because he’s always chased by money, but his innate nature is the type to laugh at the worst conditions given to him. That was my idea of the character. He wouldn’t be able to open his own clinic, so he would either have to become a professor or a paid doctor. To do that, he must have a lot of connections. Since he’s being shown as someone trying to get close to all sorts of doctors, I thought it was in line with his character.”

“Now that makes me feel sorry. Bigfoot was created in order to smooth out the conversation between interns, so I didn’t give him such details. Just like you said, he’s a shameless, frugal guy, but I didn’t think about the specifics at all.”

“That’s natural since it’s inefficient to get hung up over a character that doesn’t influence the overall plot that much.”

Eunbin went through the script once again.

“It makes me rather proud if I see actors who get attached to the characters. It’s especially the case if they have caught the things that I haven’t thought about. I was wondering what kind of person you are, and I really do think that it’s a good thing that I met you. Even though I’m a writer and work away from the set, it’ll definitely put me at ease to know that someone I can work well with is working with me.”

Eunbin smiled and returned the script.

“If it’s about acting skills, I’m sure you must have been checked multiple times on set, and above all, Jayeon can guarantee for you, so I guess I don’t need to worry. Do you have any plans on appearing more after episode seven?”

“I don’t think there’s an actor who can refuse that offer.”

Eunbin looked at Jayeon. She hinted that she had come to a resolution of sorts. Jayeon spoke as she placed her arms on the table,

“I don’t think there’s a need to worry about your pay since you get paid by the episode. I’ll have to see the script for myself, but you’re going to have to match your schedule with ours if you get a scene. Are you okay with time?”

“I’ll be okay until November at least. Even if it goes past that, I only have one thing, so there shouldn’t be a big problem.”

Director Park Joongjin didn’t give him a specific date, but he did say that the production would start by the end of November, so the shoot would probably come quite a bit after that. Though, nothing was set

in stone since he hadn't signed the contract yet. From the looks of it though, he seemed to have been cast.

"We can just reschedule at that time, so it doesn't really matter. Even if the shoot becomes longer, it won't take two days."

"You're putting me on TV, so I'll have to make time to come even if I don't."

"You can work so well, so why did you go to the military and upset many people back then?"

"Back then, I thought that going to the military early was the best choice. Isn't it quite an advantage, though? I don't think there are many actors who finished their military service."

"Like hell it's an advantage. Unni, this is just how this guy is."

Eunbin, who was watching, suddenly told them to wait before sitting in front of her laptop. She typed away for about ten minutes. Maru and Jayeon looked at her quietly. They even held back their breaths as much as possible in fear of disrupting her focus.

"I think we can go with this."

Eunbin returned to the dining table while muttering to herself. This woman didn't look ordinary either. She probably wasn't like many others from how Jayeon was close to her.

"Now that I think about it, you're the first man who came to my house. We can't stay still like this!"

Eunbin suddenly went into a fuss and opened the refrigerator. Maru could get a glimpse of the soju bottles filling up the door.

"Do you drink?" Eunbin asked while holding a bottle by the neck.

"Somewhat."

"You could call it fate that you came here, so let's have a drink. Jayeon, you too. Don't you tell me that you need to go back home. You'll be a really bad woman if you leave behind a lonely old woman by herself. You know that, right?"

Eunbin put down soju glasses while smiling. She looked like she wouldn't send anyone home unless they needed to attend a funeral or something. It was 2 p.m. Drinking during the day, huh.

"Then allow me to receive a glass."

Naturally, he had no plans to refuse.

#### **Chapter 845. Sequence 12**

"Sounds like the writer took a good note of you. So, how does your role change?"

"Nothing's set in stone yet. It seems like she has some things in her mind, but I'll have to get the script to be sure."

Gaeul put her chopsticks down and patted Maru on the shoulders as though he had done a good job.

“You don’t know what will happen. You might become famous if you receive good responses through the drama and make your name known through the movie. Who knows, you might even become more famous than me, you know?”

“That sounds good just thinking about it.”

Maru ate a spoonful of rice and thought back to the events that occurred yesterday. What was supposed to be a light drinking occasion ended up lasting quite a long time, and he was only able to leave writer Eunbin’s house after 9 p.m. As the participants were a writer, a producer, and an actor, the topic of conversation was naturally about dramas, and they discussed – more like argued – until the very last moment. As Jayeon and Eunbin had different preferences, he tried siding with both of them and ended up getting an earful about how he had no opinion. When he was asked what kind of genre he preferred, he replied romance, only to hear the extremely market-friendly answer that his face wasn’t up to par. When Jayeon said that he would play the role of a murderer really well, Eunbin burst out into laughter in agreement. As much as he wanted to retort, he did feel that coercive calls were much more suited to the reflection of his face that he saw through a hand mirror than performing serenades. Since that was the case, he imitated a famous murderer from a movie. Both of them burst out into laughter.

“What kind of person is writer Lee Eunbin? As for producer Jayeon, I’ve seen her quite often while working with producer Park Hoon, but I’ve never seen the writer. According to aunt Hanmi, she’s someone who writes the most humane stories among her juniors.”

“Humane stories, huh. I can’t judge because I only met her once, but I can definitely say that she’s peculiar.”

“Well, you can see that from how she wants to use actor Han Maru, can’t you?”

“Is that supposed to be a compliment or an insult?”

They put away the dishes and went to the sofa. Finishing up for the day while eating some snacks on the sofa became one of their routines. They finished up what they couldn’t finish talking about over dinner and confessed if they found anything disappointing about each other. The jerky that Gaeul bought fulfilled its purpose very well, quite a contrast to the wine that was being aged. The wine was going to be used for cooking in a while.

“These days, Giwoo wouldn’t talk to me. Usually, he would bring up something to talk about if we make eye contact.”

“So, do you feel disappointed about that?”

“Rather than disappointed, it makes me feel cautious. It makes me wonder if he realized that I’m viewing him with suspicion. It makes me feel sorry too. I know that I have nothing to be sorry about if what you said he did is true, but that’s just how I feel. We’re working together too.”

“Don’t give him too many hints about how you’re observing him. Also, according to what I know about Kang Giwoo’s personality, he would have asked directly without avoiding you – if you have anything to talk to him about.”

“You said you aren’t friends, but I feel like you know him more than me,” Gaeul said with a smile.

“Well, you don’t remember the birthday of a close friend, but you do have to remember your redemption date for your loan.”

“So you’re in a debt relationship with Giwoo?”

“You can call it that.”

“Who’s the one in debt?”

“I wonder.”

When he replied vaguely, she pouted as though it was no fun for her. Maru brought half a cookie in front of her mouth in order to appease her.

“Nothing happened with Lee Miyoon after that?”

Gaeul said that she got into a big fight with Lee Miyoon not too long ago. She said that she would usually gloss over it softly, but she snapped out that day because she heard something she couldn’t endure. Maru wanted to know what provoked her but didn’t ask as it didn’t look like she had any intentions of answering him.

“Fortunately, nothing. I thought she’d come over again and again and nag me, but she doesn’t come over these days. Whether she’s busy or got fed up with me, I don’t know, but it’s good for me since I was a little worried.”

“I’m sure you’ll be able to take care of yourself even if I don’t tell you to, but still, don’t get involved with that woman too much, whether it’s in a good way or in a bad way.”

“I don’t think I’ll ever coexist happily with her. Though, it might make me regret it later.”

“If you do want to fight her properly, then call me.”

“Why, you’ll fight with me?”

“No, I’ll have to call the ambulance. If you two get into a proper fight, that old hag will start bleeding, so I’ll have to have the ambulance on standby.”

“Hey, I’m not such a violent woman, you know?”

As soon as she said those words, a lightly clenched fist flew into Maru’s flank. Her words and actions were totally opposite to each other. When Maru pointed at his flank that just received a hit and looked at her with a ‘what’s this then?’ face, Gaeul just shrugged and stood up with the plate and the mugs.

“Watch out. She’s a more dangerous woman than you think. I can tell you to judge Kang Giwoo for yourself but not her. Honestly speaking, I wish you would relent a little in front of that woman. I’m not saying that you have to do as I say, but there would be nothing better if you two had an indifferent relationship. But, I know that Han Gaeul isn’t the type of woman who would do that, so the only thing I can do is to warn you.”

Gaeul, who was walking over to the kitchen, turned her head around and nodded heavily. As she worked in the same industry, she probably heard a rumor or two about Lee Miyoon as well.

“I’ll watch out.”

“Tell me if something happens.”

“Okay.”

Clack clack – Maru could hear her wash the dishes. He remembered back to Lee Miyoon’s eyes that looked down on her target. According to his experience, people with those kinds of eyes would never let go once they bit down on the neck of their prey. Unless it was a situation where she would see blood, she would leap without hesitation once she realized that she would be able to bully her target one-sidedly. From how she let go of Gaeul for the past five years, it seemed like she didn’t have any interest, but from the way she still picked a fight with her from time to time, it seemed like she must have finished her preparations to stomp her. It was at times like these that he found his ability rather disappointing. After all, there was no way for him to find out what ‘Lee Miyoon’ was thinking about ‘Han Gaeul.’ It would’ve been better if she bared her fangs at him. That woman was the type of person to desperately try to catch both rabbits if there were two in front of her, instead of giving up on the smaller one. So pissing her off from the side probably wouldn’t do him good either.

“Aren’t you sleeping?”

Gaeul was staring at him from in front of the door. Maru shrugged off his thoughts and stood up from the sofa.

“I will.”

\* \* \*

“Allow me to borrow Mr. Han Maru.”

He did think that this man in front of him wanted something from him when he visited out of the blue, but he didn’t know that it would be Han Maru that he wanted. Junmin placed the teacup down just as he was about to take a sip.

“You seem to come to me to borrow a person every time you come, director Park. Last time, it was Miso, and this time, it’s Maru.”

“I’ve already checked his own will to participate. If it’s about payment, I am willing to pay up whatever you decide. Or is this not feasible?”

“I’m in fact rather grateful to you for using that runaway child. But from what I heard, you’ve apparently turned down an offer to be a director. If you’re going to use Maru, I think I should know what you’re shooting at least, don’t you think?”

“I heard that all rumors in the film industry end up in president Lee Junmin’s ears, and you already even know about how I turned down that offer. I’m planning to take a break from earning money and shoot as a hobby. I have a fat bank account, so it’s about time I wasted it.”

“That sounds like to me that director Park Joongjin is planning to put his mind to working on a piece. Am I correct?”



Joongjin nodded crookedly. He looked like he was going with the mood, even though he didn't like it. If he wasn't the president of an agency that had the actor he wanted, that guy would've turned around and left already.

"That is the case."

"If it's like that, then I can send him to you without a guarantee. You're the almighty director Park after all."

"Please don't say something that's not even on your mind. Write a suitable contract with decent pay instead."

"Alright, that boy doesn't have anything special, so he's pretty cheap."

"Then let's end that matter there."

Joongjin pressed down on his knees and stood up. Just as he turned around while undoing the top button of the flowery shirt he wore all four seasons, he stopped in front of a photo on the wall. Junmin smiled bitterly. It was a pretty old photo. It was the photo of Jung Haejoo and the troupe members. He and Joongjin were in it as well.

"That's a photo I didn't see the last time I was here. I believe there was a photo of a pup before the layout of the office changed."

"I see you still have a good memory. I was browsing through some old records and found that photo, so I hung it up."

"That's a good photo of Haejoo."

"Indeed."

"Can I ask you one thing?"

Junmin took out a photocopy of the photo on the wall from his drawers. He even framed it beforehand. Back when he created this, he couldn't understand why he was making such a thing, but it seemed like it was for this moment. When he pushed the frame towards him, Joongjin accepted the frame looking rather surprised.

"You scared me there. If you knew that this was going to happen and prepared this beforehand, I would have to believe you even if you say you can see the future."

"It's not like that. I too don't know why I made this. But looking at your expression, I think I know why I made it."

After staring at the photo for a long while, Joongjin said 'thank you' in a really small voice. That was something that Joongjin rarely said even as a formality, but that just now felt like it came from the bottom of his heart.

"I can't really call it compensation, but I'll shoot a great piece with Mr. Han Maru."

"If you do, then I'd be grateful."

Joongjin lowered his head and left the room. Junmin, who watched as he left, subconsciously called him to stop him.

“Haejoo’s grave. I saw that you visited her this year too.”

Joongjin turned around. He looked incredibly curious about his intentions on bringing up that topic now. There was a hint of hatred as well. Junmin thought that the two males who loved the same woman simultaneously would never reconcile and never even think about doing such a thing, but after seeing Joongjin smiling sadly and warmly after taking that photo, he felt like a fool for being on the edge. Joongjin seemed to have felt the same as his expression soon turned into a powerless smile.

“What do you think Haejoo would’ve said if she saw us like this?”

“I wonder. What do you think, director Park?”

“She’ll probably not notice anything and would then grab both our hands and say that we should go eat. She’s a woman who made me marvel at her while she was acting, but she was bad at taking hints.”

“I think so too.”

Junmin looked at the photo on the wall. Many things had changed. One woman died, one man chased after the mirage and ended up creating a firm nest for himself, while the other man left after forsaking everything as though he was fed up before he eventually returned. Nothing remained the same, but there was one thing that hadn’t changed from the scenery in the photo.

“We really took that photo far away from each other, huh.”

“I went to the corner because I didn’t want to stand next to you, president Lee.”

“I’m the same.”

Junmin looked at Joongjin who stood next to him. He still looked distant, but he felt like the distance had shrunk a little. Whether it was due to time or his heart had been weathered away, or whether he had matured, he didn’t know.

“If you have time next week, why don’t we go meet Haejoo together? I was planning on weeding that place since I haven’t done it this year.”

Joongjin did not reply. He only responded after a long while when head manager Kang notified them that there was a guest.

“Very well. I’ll go with you. I think it’s about time we finish talking about the things we have always delayed about.”

“We’re too old to keep delaying things like immature kids.”

Joongjin smiled and spoke,

“I’m younger than you, president Lee.”

“After fifty, everyone’s just getting old, so let’s just say that we’re in similar situations.”

“Fifty, huh. Thinking about my age, it does make me realize that I’ve hated you for quite a long time. By this point in time, it wouldn’t be strange to marry another woman and have a child.”

“We’re old enough to see grandchildren.”

“Both you and I have it tough because our hearts were taken away by an incredible woman.”

Joongjin looked down at his flower-patterned shirt and undid all the buttons and took it off. He looked like he didn’t need it anymore.

“See you next time.”

Junmin saw him off.

### **Chapter 846. Sequence 12**

“Man, I wanna go to a shoot.”

“Then go to a shooting set.”

“I can only go if someone’s calling for me.”

“Then go somewhere else. Anywhere but here.”

“I don’t have anywhere to go. I’ve stopped going to nightclubs and bars, and the girls I’ve been in contact with are no longer contacting me after I ditched them a couple times. When I loitered around the warehouse of the friend who’s still running the clothes business, he told me that we should work together if I didn’t have anything to do, but I didn’t like that either. I was wandering around without anything to do, and I ended up here.”

Hyungseok tickled Woofie’s chin, who was lying down right next to him. He was a good guy who bought stuff for Woofie ever since their first meeting, and he had brought a load of things again today. Dog chew, a cushion, and even a ball for dogs to play around with which was apparently from Germany and incredibly hard to buy.

“Should I just live here? I can look after Woofie.”

“That was the most terrible thing I’ve heard all year. It’s been a long time since I got goosebumps on my arms,” Maru said, showing his arm.

He really had gotten goosebumps.

“Can’t you think of our friendship and tell me that we should live together even if it is a joke?”

“I’ve lived for quite a long time, and I know that words can sometimes jinx things.”

“You haven’t lived that long.”

“Well, longer than you at least.”

“What are you saying? We were born in the same year. Rather than that, how’s romantic business going?”

"I think it'll go well as long as you stay quiet. I'm asking just in case; you didn't tell anyone about it, right?"

"I'm not sure about anything else, but I have tight lips. Don't worry."

When he got Maru an autograph from Han Gaeul, he never knew in his dream that the two would start dating. Only after he found out that Maru had been dating her right up to his enlistment did he understand the sudden progress in their relationship.

"When is Miss Gaeul coming?"

"Why do you ask?"

"Because I want to see her?"

"What are you going to do by seeing her?"

"Getting an opportunity to talk to a star isn't that common. I thought I was dreaming last time when we had a meal together. A meal with a celebrity huh."

"If you have time to loiter around then let's go do some work."

"Work?"

"You can't keep using up the money you've earned, right? You should do a short-term part-time job or something. You goin' or not?"

"I am going. The owner of the house is leaving, so I can't stay. But hey, your dialect sounds terrible."

"I'm practicing."

He left, following Maru. When he asked where they were going, Maru opened the door to his car and pointed at it. He got in the car without saying much. He experienced for himself that following Maru's instructions usually ended benefitting him.

"That's Miss Gaeul's voice."

Han Gaeul's voice could be heard from the radio. From what she said, it seemed that the radio DJ was on leave and she was filling in. Maru raised the volume. Listening to the consultation corner, he looked outside the window and saw a TV station. It was YBS.

"Is there a shoot for Doctors today?"

"No."

"Then why are we here?"

"I said we're here for a part-time job. You know, the thing you did many times."

The thing he did many times, huh. He saw a row of large coaches when he got out of the car in the car park and went to the front of the building. Maru walked without hesitation towards the bustling crowd that was carrying various equipment.

"You're here."

A man in his forties, who had a pair of sunglasses around his neck, welcomed Maru. Hyungseok stood next to him in a stiff manner. When he was just glancing around because he didn't know who it was, a person who was passing by with a box called him 'director.' Hyungseok immediately neaten his hair and stood upright.

"Who's the one next to you?"

"He's called Yoon Hyungseok; he'll be working with me today. He appeared as a minor character in Doctors too."

"Really? If you're the one who brought him here, then I guess I don't have to worry about it. I'll get to use a good actor for cheap after all. Get on coach 1; it should depart soon. I'll tell the leader about you, so don't worry about that."

"Thank you."

"Don't thank me. Rather than that, it's such a pity that I have to use you like this. I'll get my own series once my wife's series ends, so you have to keep your promise at that time, okay? Telling me that you're occupied with something else won't work on me anymore."

"I'm doing part-time jobs right now because I don't have any work to do, so there's no way I'll have work in the foreseeable future. As long as you call me, I'll immediately heed your call and go shoot."

"Who do you think it was that betrayed me after saying the same thing five years ago? Anyway, stay where I can see you, and don't go anywhere I can't. I can't have you catching the eyes of another producer and become busy."

As soon as the man Hyungseok presumed was the director left, he grabbed Maru and asked what was on his mind,

"Director? Is this a drama? Or a documentary? Or is it an entertainment program?"

"He's producer Park Hoon from YBS's drama department. He's also producer Yoo Jayeon's husband."

Hyungseok clicked his fingers. He had heard the name during the get-together. It was the name that producer Jayeon called while holding onto her phone while drunk.

"You promised to work with him?"

"If there's an opportunity, yes."

"There are quite a lot of people looking for you, huh. Don't abandon me, and take me with you all the time, okay?"

"I'll see how you do."

After getting on the bus, Hyungseok looked up producer Park Hoon. His name was mentioned as the producer of 'Flaming Lady.'

"Didn't Miss Gaeul say something about how you rejected the offer for Flaming Lady when she was drunk?"

“You remember weird stuff. I thought you didn’t remember anything because you were drunk.”

“I do remember some things. But that director is pretty amazing. People don’t usually offer new actors jobs, do they? Moreover, that new actor ended up rejecting without knowing what was good for him. He’s practically a saint for telling you that he wants to work with you again.”

“I’m just that good at acting after all.”

“You sounded really cocky just now. What’s even worse is that I actually have to admit it. Maru, take me with you even if you become famous.”

He grabbed Maru’s hand and shook it back and forth.

\* \* \*

“Why did you bring me here?” Hyungseok wondered as he wiped the sweat from his forehead.

It was October. The air was filled with the smell of autumn, yet he was sweating buckets. That was the result of wearing a heavy piece of armor and a thick layer of cloth to protect his skin underneath. Just this morning, he put on a cardigan because it was pretty chilly, too.

“I thought you told me to bring you around when we got on the bus.”

“I never knew that it would be like this. Didn’t I tell you before that I almost passed out after playing a minor character in a historical drama? I never knew I’d be doing this again. Not only that, I’m even wearing armor.”

“When else do you think you’d get to be a general. Just hold it in and keep going. Hey, the beard looks nice on you too.”

Maru said that with a grin. Hyungseok drank out of a water bottle. This was his second bottle already. He put down the empty bottle and picked up a long sheathe. He could still vividly remember the staff telling him to treat it carefully as it was very easy to damage. He should have realized it back then. It was already too late by the time he accepted the sword and was dragged to the cosmetics van. A beard covered in adhesives was attached to his chin, and he was given some fake scars as well. He liked his look when he checked through the phone camera, but after spending three hours in that state under the blazing sun, he wanted to rip everything off, makeup or whatever. What was fortunate was that the sun was setting.

“But don’t people usually depart early in the morning when shooting a historical drama?”

“I’m sure they must have their circumstances. It did feel rushed too.”

After adjusting his helmet, Maru asked if he looked okay. Hyungseok nodded and raised his thumb.

“The lack of a refined look from your face makes you suited to that kind of makeup. Maru, I feel like you’ll really do well playing a butcher.”

“Am I not more like a thug than a butcher?”

“It’d be awesome if you spray rice wine once and start waving your sword everywhere.”

They waited inside the tent while talking about trivial stuff. After about 10 minutes, other minor characters who had their makeup fixed entered the tent. People who were refugees until just moments ago had turned into armored generals.

“Maru, good to see you here again.”

“Hyung, you look good in that too.”

The minor actors recognized Maru and approached him. Hyungseok felt this the moment he arrived at the set: Maru was rather close to the minor actors. Not to mention people he had got to know before, he even greeted the people he had seen for the first time. He also seemed rather familiar with the leader who was in charge of controlling the background actors. Hyungseok saw him go to the place where background actors were gathered and talk to them first. It didn't even take ten minutes for Maru to approach them and blend in with them. The guy that called him hyung just now was someone Maru met for the first time today as well.

Thinking back, Maru was rather close to the minor actors and background actors during the shoot of 'Doctors' as well. He talked to them and listened to their stories seriously. There weren't many actors who took interest in extras like Maru did, not among the people he knew at least.

“It gets cold at night, so let's finish things off the first time,” Maru said to the others.

“It's not about us not making mistakes. It's about the actors not causing NGs.”

“He's right. Just before, I had to stand in one spot for an hour because a certain someone kept causing an NG. Geez, I think I would do better than that.”

Maru just asked for understanding from the grumbling man, saying that it might have been out of nervousness.

“As I said before, this director hates people standing in a daze. Different directors have different styles, so there are directors who don't really care about the acting of the actors in the background, but this director will catch everything, so he'll cut things off if you relax just because you're outside the frame. So watch yourselves. You know how tiring it gets when the leader gets naggy.”

“I hate the leader nagging me more than the director doing it.”

“I'll get myself together just like you said.”

Hyungseok thought that Maru would do well as a director from how he explained everything. He felt this both when they were shooting a short film and when they were shooting the drama: having Maru around made acting a lot easier. When someone made a mistake, he would be the first one to suggest changes before the director did, and he was absolutely on point every single time. When Hyungseok was stuttering because he didn't know what was wrong, he felt like he found his path forward whenever he heard Maru's words. It also felt as though he gained more confidence if they acted together. He was pretty helpful in many ways.

“Still, this is way too tiring.”

Hyungseok lifted his shoulder armor slightly before letting go. He was sweating even though the sun was setting. Also, from what he heard, he was supposed to be running while wearing this. Hyungseok desperately prayed that the chasing scene of young generals was short.

### **Chapter 847. Sequence 12**

“Here’s your lunch box.”

“Thanks.”

“But man, is it really okay for the weather to be this hot in the Fall? The smell of sweat won’t leave me.”

“Try staying like that for a little longer. You’ll be shivering soon enough. At that time, you’ll thank yourself for wearing such thick clothes. It’s much better than standing in front of the castle gates wearing only a piece of cloth in the middle of the night.”

“That’s true.”

Maru picked up his chopsticks and opened the lunch box. The jeyuk-bokkeum was seasoned too hard and the rice was dry, but since hunger was the best spice, he had no problem eating. He drank the miso soup without a single chunk of anything in it. Warmth returned to his body which had been cooling down from the night wind.

“I saw that the director was asking you to eat together.”

“This place is much more relaxing for me.”

He handed over a bottle of water to Mr. Choi, who asked for some water. The way they sat in a circle as they ate made them look like total beggars. Their faces were greasy from all the running, and their clothes were full of dirt because they had to fall over several times. A young guy looked next to him and giggled. Regardless of who it was, everyone told each other that they needed to wash up a little.

“The atmosphere at my last shooting set was frosty, so I’m glad that it’s much better today. It was so stifling with everyone staring down at their phones.”

“You say that, but you were dazing out until Maru talked to you.”

“Ahjussi, when did I daze out? I just had something to think about.”

“Little boy, you can’t lie in front of me. Hey, didn’t you see him dazing out a while back?”

“I did; he had his mouth wide open.”

“You guys are so harsh.”

Regardless of age, everyone enjoyed their talk. Maru liked this kind of scenery. This was the reason he went to visit the background actors and minor actors on sets. There were people who were simply doing this job for money, but quite a lot of them had the dream of becoming actors in a corner of their hearts. The fact that they shared a common dream brought vitality to their conversations. Listening to their words made him feel like the things that were being weathered away without him knowing were being polished again. Passion, effort, challenge – things like that. He thought back to how elder Moonjoong talked a lot with the background actors. He was probably influenced by that without knowing it.



“Maru, come here for a sec,” Park Hoon called from in the distance.

Maru put down the empty lunch box and walked over with fast steps.

“Can you play a dying role once?”

“By being stabbed?”

“No, by an arrow. You have to say a serious line in front of the castle gates and get hit by an arrow.”

“If I can get my face to show up in the drama, then I’d be grateful.”

“The line goes like this.”

After clearing his throat, Park Hoon puffed out his chest and shouted,

“You mongrels! I, Lee Junggyun, am here! Take my head this instant!”

His voice was so loud that the people around him flinched and stared at him. Park Hoon raised his index finger and poked his own chest before frowning and staggering.

“Something like that.”

“The name is Lee Junggyun?”

“Yeah. He achieves great feats during chaos, but he was branded a rebel after failing in politics, and instead of fleeing, he goes to the castle and chooses to commit suicide.”

“What a prideful man.”

“Try showing that prideful side of him. The assistant director should have told the makeup team about it, so you can go there.”

When Park Hoon grabbed his walkie-talkie and told everyone to prepare, Maru could hear the voice of the assistant director, “the shoot is beginning soon.”

“What did he say?” Hyungseok asked as he came over.

“He wanted me to die in a prideful manner.”

“What the heck does that mean?”

“Well, something like that. I’ll be away for a bit, so take care of yourself.”

“I’ve done this part-time job several times. I can take care of myself, so you just do your best with that dying role.”

Maru walked past the coach that the actors were resting in and arrived at the makeup van. Just as Park Hoon said, they had been notified beforehand, so he was able to sit down on a chair and get makeup done on him the moment he arrived. His hair was tied into a ball above his head, and he changed his costume to a makeshift military uniform. He also had a mustache put on him. After that, he moved to the castle gates. On top of the castle was a row of soldiers holding torches. He could see Park Hoon and the actors doing a rehearsal in front of the firmly shut gates.

“Come here.”

Park Hoon waved at him. As senior actors were gathered where he was, he ran over.

“He’s the one who’ll die.”

“Hello, everyone. I’m Han Maru.”

The actors who were well-known for doing historical dramas looked at the director’s face once before encouraging him.

“Looks like you’re up to stuff if director Park is introducing you to us, huh.”

“Senior, you should take note of him. He’s quite an item.”

“Quite an item? If you put it that way then I should introduce myself too.”

Maru looked at the actor who reached his hand out. He was Jung Goosik who played villain roles in not just historical dramas but urban dramas as well. Maru also referred to his acting quite a lot when he was studying historical dramas. The mid-baritone vocal tone as well as his precise pronunciations was a textbook acting style that by just imitating him, could allow anyone to do decently. Maru introduced himself once again as they shook hands.

“Hello there. I don’t know if you know me; I’m Jung Goosik,” said Goosik.

“I learned a lot by looking at your acting, senior.”

“Really? Then you should pay up if you received lessons.”

“I’ll buy you coffee later.”

“I like vending machine coffee better than Starbucks.”

“I’d love to treat you to the high-class, 400-won coffee.”

“This fella knows his stuff. Oh, I just ended up not using polite speech, but may I continue?”

“If you didn’t, I would be at a loss instead.”

Goosik laughed before waving his hand up and down.

“Hey, where do you belong to? Or are you by yourself, seeing as how you’re young?”

“Senior, he’s in a solid one.”

Park Hoon interrupted and said that Maru belonged to JA.

“Oh, you were one of Junmin-hyung’s boys. I believe Taeho is there too.”

“Yes, that is the case.”

“Looks like you really are quite an item, to borrow director Park’s words, eh? That hyung doesn’t take just anyone under his wing. That fellow I saw last time, uh, Yoo Sooil, that was it. He was quite good too.”

Goosik tapped him on the shoulders and wished him luck.

“Please stand by,” the assistant director shouted.

Goosik went to the top of the castle gates. It was he who shot the arrow. Maru looked at the jimmy jib moving along the castle walls. Goosik grandly said his line in between the lights that shone upon him from both sides. Maru could hear his voice clearly as though he was using a microphone.

Maru waited under the castle walls until Goosik’s act ended. When Goosik drew his bowstring, the camera setup changed.

“For now, we’ll start with the shouting. Then, we’ll have you spit blood and go to the next cut.”

After listening to Park Hoon’s explanation, Maru stood in front of the castle walls. Behind him were dozens of people standing in a semicircle. He made eye contact with the minor actors there. Some raised their fist above their heads; it seemed to be a gesture to urge him on.

Goosik was staring down at him from the top of the castle gates. Although he couldn’t see too clearly because of the dark, he felt like Goosik was smiling. He was one cheerful person.

“On standby. Three, two, one.”

Cue!

\* \* \*

“You mongrels! I, Lee Junggyun, am here! Take my head this instant! Now!”

His voice was very crisp and clear. Jung Goosik looked at the junior shouting below. One of the reasons why young juniors had a hard time doing historical dramas was the unique speech of historical dramas that was different from the modern language. If it was a simple change of vocabulary, then it wouldn’t be a problem for actors, since their job was to look at scripts all day, but the problem was that the minute ups and downs in words were different from the modern tongue. At first glance, people would think that they would be able to do it after listening to it once, and the young actors could indeed say a word or two properly as they had learned acting, but when it came to long sentences, especially when they had to strain their stomach when saying it, the difficulty would become increasingly high and they weren’t able to cope. The listeners would find it awkward as well. The reason why young actors who were known for their decent acting skills didn’t flow into the historical drama scene was one, it was pretty hard and exhausting, but in most cases, it was the second reason: they weren’t able to digest the acting itself.

“Look at this guy.”

You have to bring out the tastefulness without exaggerating – that was one of many pieces of advice that Goosik managed to come up with after experiencing many historical dramas. As most historical speeches required a baritone-level voice, there were many occasions where the actor forced himself to squeeze out their voice, and in most of those cases, it sounded worse than a rooster being strangled when heard through the audio playback. Young fellows especially had a hard time finding their acting tone, but the fellow down there was already aware of what he should do to make his voice most charming, in a historical speech tone to boot.

His acting was good enough that they might as well go to the next cut immediately, but the director seemed dissatisfied and gave some directions himself. Seeing that, Goosik could immediately understand what kind of expectations the director had in this junior named Maru. If that young man didn't show promise, he wouldn't have thrown away an act on this level and requested him to do it again. Although many people said that the industry was like thin ice and that the shooting set ran on money, it didn't change the fact that many people still looked out for the good ones. Actors knew best that acting was hard, so it was in their nature to give a piece of advice if they saw a hardworking person.

Goosik took out his phone and captured the young fellow shouting hard enough that his veins could be seen on his neck. At first, he was just going to take a photo, but he left behind a video as well. He could feel the energy from the screen as well. He liked actors like this one. One that screamed 'I'm good' just by watching.

"You mongrels! I, Lee Junggyun, am here! Take my head this instant! Now! Now!"

Goosik felt more and more fond of this young man the more he watched him scrape his voice from the bottom of his abdomen and spit it out in the forward direction. His voice didn't scatter in the air powerlessly, and it clearly reached the top of the castle walls. He shouted at the general who stepped forward to maintain his last bit of pride.

"Your courage is admirable, so I shall spare you this once."

The young man, who looked like he was ready to give up his life at any moment, suddenly said, "thank you, milord," with a big grin on his face. When he watched the people around him laugh, another actor scolded him to stop his ridiculous improvisations.

"Why? He picked that up well."

Goosik stroked his chin as he looked at Maru who was getting ready to be shot. From how he responded to his random words without being flustered, he seemed to have the reflexes as well. He could tell why director Park introduced him. He was amicable and was good at acting to boot.

"We'll do that again!"

Goosik crossed his arms and watched the young fellow's act.

## **Chapter 848. Sequence 12**

He could feel the sweat on the back of his neck. He barely got an okay sign, but the director did not give him any time to rest. As shooting throughout the night was usually paid by the hour, it seemed that the director was planning on using him to the fullest unless he fell over due to exhaustion. He quenched his thirst with the bottle of water that Hyungseok tossed at him and cleared his throat. The vocal exercises he did every morning brought him satisfactory results. He once again felt that while effort might be useless, it never betrayed him.

"Hold the arrow with your hand and once the shoot starts, pull it out and throw it to the side. We don't want the fact that it doesn't have an arrowhead to be caught on the camera. But don't block the camera with your hand either. That would look unnatural," Park Hoon said while giving him an arrow without an arrowhead.

He placed it on his left chest and practiced pulling it out several times. He had learned about how to do this when he was in the action school, so he soon got a passing score.

“That’s how you do it. Also, put some of this in your mouth.”

The staff member standing next to Park Hoon gave him some fake blood. When he put it in his mouth, he could taste something akin to hot chocolate. The staff member smiled at him, saying that it was safe to drink.

“Don’t spurt it out; leak it out instead. This is actually anatomically wrong, but it’s a cliché for dramas. You know what it’s like, right?”

Maru nodded. It was a scene he had seen several times in dramas and movies. It was a device that told the audience that the character was dying. He tried leaking some of the fake blood from his mouth.

“You can leak a little more than that. Swallow whatever’s left in your mouth. It’s not too good if you spill too much.”

He drank the fake blood in his mouth before putting some more in. The director and the staff returned to their positions. Above his head came the boom mic. After checking the lights installed on each side, he stood in his designated position.

The director, who had been checking through the monitor in the distance, gave a signal. Along with the assistant director’s shout, the shoot began. Maru did not act hastily. There was no need to react in real-time like he was on stage for a play. The editing would solve minor problems even if he started a little late. The moment he felt the words he was rolling in his mouth were ready to go out, he pulled out the arrow that he was holding against his left chest. He twisted it forcefully and pulled it out like pulling out a deeply rooted tree before throwing it on the ground. He didn’t forget to spill out some of the blood in his mouth.

He could feel the fake blood flow down his chin and drip onto the ground. He was told that he couldn’t be excessive, so he swallowed the rest. The sudden movement of his adam’s apple would make his act lose detail, so he pulled his chin inward as though he was swallowing his frustration before opening his eyes as wide as possible so that the movement of his adam’s apple would look natural.

“Disgusting bastards.”

What the director requested him to do was fall over after saying that line. Apparently, that process was entirely up to him. While he could do it the classic way and bend one knee to fall to the side slowly, he felt that holding on until the end would look better in order to express his unrelenting will. He tensed his eyes so much that they started to hurt before leaning his body forward. He had put padding and cloth over his knees before the shoot began so that it would only hurt just a little even if they collided with the frozen ground. If a rock he missed before broke his knee, then that was just his luck.

Both of his knees touched the ground with a thud. It actually hurt less than he expected. Inwardly feeling satisfied, he continued acting. He twisted his head and slowly fell over forward. He was tensing his waist and thighs, so it wasn’t that dangerous even though he was falling forward. If he failed at adjusting his speed and was about to kiss the ground, he could just use his hands.

His torso touched the ground. At the last moment, his feet were raised off the ground, adding more speed, which made his chin ache quite a bit, but it was still bearable. When he stayed dead still in order to finish this in one cue, the director gave the cut sign.

“Shall we do that once again?”

Maru raised his head while still lying down to look at the director who came over.

“And I was just thinking that I did pretty good.”

“What? You don’t want to do that again?”

“This actually hurts quite a lot. I hit my chin in the end too.”

“What, you’re injured?”

Park Hoon, who was smiling, suddenly turned serious and crouched down. He barely managed to tell him that it wasn’t anything serious when he was asked where he was hurt and if he needed treatment.

“Boy, you know what freaks me out the most during a shoot? It’s when a person gets injured. Damage to props can be made up for with money, but that can’t be done when it comes to people getting injured. Are you really okay? If that shook your skull, you should definitely go to the hospital.”

“It’s not that bad. I just got a scratch over here.”

He put his hand on his chin as he said those words, and it pricked quite a lot. When he took his finger off, he saw some blood. He realized instantly that it wasn’t fake blood.

“Looks like I overdid that.”

“No, I think I asked too much from you. It was a joke when I said we should do that again. Well done. Go get your chin disinfected and treated. If it leaves behind a scar, that would be such a loss to you. Moreover, since you belong to JA, I can’t handle the aftermath.”

Park Hoon returned to smiling again as though he was relieved that it wasn’t a big problem. Maru grabbed the director’s hand and stood up. Some members of the staff had also come around to watch.

“For now, wipe your chin with some water. We can’t have bacteria entering your cut.”

He followed the woman who did makeup on him into a coach. The woman took out some ointment and an adhesive bandage and told him to jut his chin out.

“I’ll do it. It’s not a big cut.”

“It’s on your chin, so leave it to me. It’s not like you can see it anyways. Raise your chin a little.”

He didn’t say no to that since she was willing. Just as she said, he didn’t have the ability to see his cut when it was on his chin.

“You are Han Maru, right?”

“Yes, do you know me?”

“I do. I watched all of your plays in Daehak-ro. You can call me an avid fan of sorts.”

“Really? Thank you.”

“Can you turn around this way?”

The woman applied the ointment before putting on the adhesive bandage.

“I don’t think it’ll leave behind a scar, but go to the hospital just in case. The face is the life of an actor after all.”

“If I have a cut or two, I won’t have to put on makeup if I play a delinquent role later, so it’s fine.”

“Men tend to say all sorts of weird stuff when they’re told to go to the hospital. Don’t regret it later and just go. There are cases where people don’t pass an audition because a scar throws them off.”

“Is that about you?”

“Was it obvious?”

“It just felt like it.”

The woman put away the first-aid kit and took out her phone.

“Can I take a photo?”

“With me?”

“Yes. When you were doing plays, you disappeared like a ghost after the photo time even when I wanted a photo. Wait a second, that makes me angry. Why were you in such a hurry? Do you know how disappointed I was when I tried to take a photo with you every single time?”

“Sorry about that. I wasn’t really in a state where I could look at my surroundings. I went back to the waiting room as soon as the play was finished.”

“It’s somewhat funny for me to say this, but you should look out for your fans a little more. There are more than you expect.”

“I’ll bear that in mind.”

He made a V with his fingers and took a photo with her. When he was doing plays back in Blue Sky, he was crazy for acting. He felt like he would collapse otherwise. When the other members of the troupe told him that he should take photos with the fans from time to time, he would go out briefly and take some photos, but otherwise, he went back to the waiting room and caught his breath. He had a hard time winning against the sense of vanity that overwhelmed him after a play.

“You aren’t going to ignore us in the future, right?”

“Yes. I’ve opened my eyes a little. Just tell me whenever you need it. I’ll give you an autograph or take a photo with you or whatever.”

“Then since we’re at it, can you give me an autograph as well? My friends are your fans too. We’re in the fan café too, and we’re pretty active.”

“My fan café?”

The woman nodded vigorously.

“The café’s founder is two years younger than me, and apparently, she has been your fan since high school.”

He knew who the fan café’s founder was. She was a friend of Bada. Although he had never seen her in person, Bada showed him her face on her graduation album.

“If I ever do something like a fan meetup, I’ll definitely invite all of you.”

“You have to keep your word. I’m going to post these on the café.”

“I’m not sure about anything else, but I’m good at keeping promises.”

The woman left first, wishing him luck with his future endeavors. Maru felt rather unreal because this was the first time he came across a fan. What came to his mind was that he actually had a fan after all. He felt grateful and asked for her name, but the woman refused, saying that a fan and an actor should stay distant. She even gave him advice that fandoms weren’t always helpful and that he should be more cautious. She seemed to be quite experienced in the fandom scene.

“Hey, I thought you were really dying after being hit by an arrow. We all exclaimed when you fell down, didn’t we?”

Hyungseok made a fuss the moment he went back. The background actors next to him also raised their thumbs, saying that he was the best.

“I wasn’t that good.”

“Yes, you were. We know best as third persons. That’s just how acting works. Also, hey, just take a compliment for what it is. I noticed this when I was in the military: the first thing you do is doubt when you receive a compliment. You make people awkward.”

“It just became a force of habit. I’ve seen too many people grinding their blades behind their back while smiling in the front.”

“But seriously, you didn’t happen to belong to some dangerous organization, right? Though, it does make me think that you might be able to pass off as part of one if you put on a dry face.”

“I’ve lived quite an upright life in this life, but who knows? I might have done something dangerous in my previous life.”

He had repeated many lives. Day worker, bus driver, actor, homeless man... there was the possibility that he belonged to a shady organization in a life that even the masked man did not remember. Though, it seemed unlikely seeing as how Gaeul was always next to him. However, it wasn’t like people could predict what was coming in life.

The reason he was able to naturally play the role of things he had never experienced might be due to the traces of life he lived that were engraved in his soul, not because of practice. The reason that he repeatedly lived more lives as an actor was probably because he was able to effectively use his piled up experiences of emotional expression.



“My junior.”

Jung Goosik appeared out of nowhere and put his arm around Maru’s shoulder.

“You fell over quite loudly back then. Aren’t you hurt?”

“I’m okay. It was just a small scratch.”

“You should watch out. It’s good that you’re willing to set your soul ablaze for acting, but you should look at the long run. There are many young ones who end up ruining themselves because they can’t hold back their recklessness while they’re young. But still, that was really good just now. It’s not easy for a young person to use their whole body like that.”

Goosik slapped him on the back before turning around. His slaps were actually quite spicy. While reaching out to his back that still ached, he watched at Goosik, who was walking over to the director.

“That man is the man who appears in dramas as villainous roles quite often, isn’t he?”

“He’s senior Jung Goosik.”

“So he’s senior Jung Goosik. I want to do well and catch his eyes too.”

“Should I tell the director that there’s someone here who’s ready to jump off the castle wall?”

“Hey, don’t you think I’m too young to die?”

Hyungseok turned a corner alongside the other background actors while crossing his arms, saying that he was cold. Maru stroked the adhesive bandage on his chin and looked at the scene. The shoot seemed to be in its last stages as he could see some of the staff packing up. Not long later, he could hear ‘thank you for your work’ from around the scene.

“Well then, those going to Seoul, please get on coach 6. For the ones who have a shoot tomorrow as well, we got you a place to sleep, so you can go there.”

Maru said his goodbyes to the background actors who still had further shoots and got in coach 6 with Hyungseok.

## **Chapter 849. Sequence 12**

“We can’t always tell you hopeful words. We’ll end up scarring the patient’s family if we give empty promises like ‘we’ll definitely save someone’. That’s why we always use the phrase ‘we’ll do our best’. Our best – you might think that it sounds irresponsible. You might think that we’re just asking you to not hold us responsible since we did our best and were just unlucky. But what I can tell you for sure is that we don’t say that we’ll do our best so easily. There are many doctors who have sacrificed what’s important to them for what they consider to be the best thing. That’s why they’re doctors, and that’s what makes them doctors.”

“Can I really trust him? Can I really trust that doctor?”

“You can.”

Gaeul hugged the tearful girl. She patted the girl who was wiping her eyes. She felt like crying herself, but she managed to hold herself back. Only if she showed a calm side would the child calm down after all.

“Cut. That was good.”

Along with the cut signal, Gaeul let go of the child she was tightly holding in her arms.

“Sorry about that. I hugged you too tightly, didn’t I?”

“Not at all, senior. I was out of it as well because I was so touched. Also, I think I stained your gown with my snot.”

“I can just wipe it off.”

This junior, who was just entering middle school, really looked like a doll as she was a former child model. She looked cute, and her peach fuzz was so soft that it made her want to pinch her cheek. The first time she saw the little girl was four days ago on the set, and she took a liking to her from the get-go. Not only was she very docile, she was skilled as well. When the camera was rolling, she was a pitiful and anxious girl who was about to lose her parents, but when it was turned off, she walked around with a bright smile on her face.

“Look at you two. You two are practically sisters who have been separated for years. I knew that Gaeul was good, but Nayoon, you’re pretty good too.”

“Not at all. It was just senior who led me so well.”

“Look at you, you speak so pretty too.”

When the director applauded, Nayoon smiled in embarrassment. The producer was known to encourage the staff and the actors a lot, but when it came to Nayoon, he was practically doting. Though, when it came to her, other people would also start off by complimenting her with a big grin on their faces.

Gaeul, who was having her makeup fixed, told her stylist to wait a moment. She saw Nayoon staring at her. This happened a few times before as well. She looked as though she had something to say, but when she asked what was up, Nayoon would shake her head, saying that it was nothing. It didn’t seem all that serious, so she didn’t pry too much into it.

“You don’t have anything to say today either?” Gaeul asked.

Nayoon nodded with a shy smile on her face.

“I wonder who you take after to be so cute.”

She pinched her cheek slightly before letting go. She had round eyes and thick lips that looked like it would take ages to apply lip balm on. Just then, she got the feeling that she had seen her face quite a lot before. When she observed her in detail, Nayoon waited in expectation. Just as she was about to remember someone that resembled her, a pleasant voice greeted Nayoon.

“Hello, Nayoon?”

It was Giwoo. Gaeul focused on the corner of her vision to have a look at Nayoony's lips. It was two days ago that she found out about 'this'. It occurred when these two people, who had their signature smiles, were greeting each other. Nayoony would slightly turn her face to the side and put on an uncomfortable smile. She wondered what it would be like now. The moment Giwoo walked past her after greeting her, Nayoony sighed slightly. It was the kind of sigh that people made when the tension left their body all at once.

Gaeul quickly looked away and pretended as if she didn't see it. The reaction was so minute that she would not have noticed if she didn't chance upon it two days ago. Was she doing that because she liked Giwoo so much? For that to be true though, her expression was too dark. Her face was stiff from tension without a hint of excitement in it.

"Uhm, Nayoony."

"Yes?"

"No, it's nothing. Let's do our best with the next scene too."

She wanted to ask what made her so uneasy, but she felt like that would put Nayoony in a tough spot. There was also the possibility that she was wrong. This little girl had a calm demeanor contrary to her young age, so she would send a signal for help if she needed it.

It became lunchtime. The director clapped and left the set. Food trucks and coffee trucks prepared by Kang Giwoo's fan club were on standby. 'Please take care of our Giwoo.', 'Kang Giwoo, Doctor's Office will be a big hit.', 'Viewing rate of Doctor's office will hit 30%.' and such signs could be seen on those trucks.

"How many times has it been now? We get to eat a lot thanks to our dear actor Kang. Thanks for the food, actor Kang."

"Yes, senior. Please enjoy."

"Senior Giwoo, thank you for the food."

"Please eat to your heart's content."

Starting with the senior actor, everyone received a neatly packaged lunch box and a cup of coffee. Gaeul also got a box and a fruit juice before sitting on the bench in front of the set. The sun was quite warm today. It would be quite a waste to not eat outside on a day like this. Mijoo and Chanwoo left, saying that they were going to eat outside. She took a photo and sent it to Maru, saying that she was eating. She soon got a reply. He sent a photo of him wearing a suit alongside Hyungseok. It seemed like he was doing all the background actor part-time jobs at YBS. According to him, it was better than loitering around at home or something.

Around the time she finished about half the food, Nayoony walked over.

"Did you enjoy your lunch?"

"Yes, I did. How about you, senior?"

"Me too."

She looked at Nayoon with a straw in her mouth. She still looked like she had something to say but was hesitating to say it. Did she want Gaeul to ask first?

"I just can't hold it in anymore. I have to know today. You have something to say to me, don't you?"

Nayoon spoke as she smiled shyly.

"Senior, you don't know who I am, do you?"

What could that mean? Gaeul tilted her head.

"You're Kim Nayoon."

"Yes, that's true."

"Have we met before? If that's the case, I'm so sorry. I really have a terrible memory, and I have a hard time remembering people."

"It's not like that. It's natural for you to not recognize me. I asked just in case."

Nayoon scratched her head.

"My real name is Kim Bitna, does that remind you of anything?"

"Kim Bitna?"

The moment she heard that name, Yuna's face overlapped on top of Nayoon's. She did think that she had seen her somewhere and it turned out to be like this.

"Are you Yuna's sister?"

"Yes."

"Oh my god, why didn't you tell me?"

"I was just a little embarrassed. I heard about you from my sister. Of course, I like you quite a lot too."

"I only saw photos of you when you were young from Yuna. Moreover, the name Bitna left such a deep impression in my mind that I never realized you could be Yuna's sister. So that's why Yuna told me to look forward to it whenever she talked about you. Yuna talked about you a lot too, about how you're still quite active these days."

Gaeul grabbed Nayoon's hand and had her sit next to her.

"Now that I know, I feel like you two resemble each other even more. So Nayoon is just a stage name?"

"Yes. I was going to use my real name, but mom said it sounded too old-fashioned."

"What's wrong with it? It's a pretty name."

"I also thought that it wasn't a big problem, but the president of the agency also said that there were a few actresses with that name and didn't do well, so we changed it."

"I guess there is that jinx. Then what should I call you?"

“Whatever you find comfortable, senior.”

“Then can I call you Bitna? I always called you Bitna while talking to Yuna, so I’m kinda used to saying that.”

“That’s good for me too. Everyone close to me calls me Bitna.”

“Alright, then call me unni. Senior sounds way too distant. Oh, right. You said you were going to come over with Yuna before but didn’t come, didn’t you? Do you know how dejected I was back then?”

“Sorry about that. I was too embarrassed when I thought I would meet you, senior. I also had work too.”

“Unni.”

When she emphasized that, Bitna nodded and replied, “unni,” in a small voice. She really looked like a doll from how she hesitated a little before finally speaking. When she came to, Gaeul found herself hugging the girl.

“I saw you now, so definitely come over with Yuna, okay?”

“Yes.”

“Is there anything you find difficult while shooting? I don’t have a great influence or anything, but I’ll help you with what I can.”

“It’s fine since everyone treats me nicely. I’m really happy to be working with good people.”

“Who do you take after to say such pretty words and act so mature? Bitna, do you want to be my sister? Or a daughter is fine too.”

Gaeul poked her on the cheek. Yuna often brought her up during their conversation. She mentioned that Bitna kept working and was preparing a drama as well, but she didn’t know that they would meet like this.

“Bitna, I’m sure you must become famous in no time. You’re good at acting and you’re pretty.”

“Not at all. There are many people better than me, especially at the acting school.”

“That might be the case, but you’re the best among the child actors I’ve seen. I almost ended up crying while acting with you just now. I could feel your emotions and... you see that my eyes are still red?”

“You’re much better than me, though. Thanks to you, I was able to act quite comfortably. I wouldn’t have been able to do that with other people.”

Bitna was so humble. She seemed much better than most adults. Bitna, who was speaking with a smile, suddenly turned her head around slightly. It was a change that she could catch because she was right in front of her.

“What is it?” Gaeul asked, maintaining a smile on her face so that Bitna didn’t panic.

Bitna blinked once before speaking,

“Uhm.”

“Tell me. I have tight lips. I will never tell anyone else about it if it's a secret.”

After a moment of hesitation, Bitna started speaking,

“The thing is, for some reason, I have a hard time talking to senior Kang Giwoo.”

“You find Giwoo difficult?”

“Yes.”

“Can I ask why?”

Bitna hesitated again. Was it hard for her to say? Gaeul looked around and made eye contact with Giwoo, who was talking to a staff member. Maybe Bitna was finding it hard to speak because they were in a place where Giwoo could see. She grabbed Bitna’s hand and walked to the back of the set.

“Unni, you’re close to senior Kang Giwoo, aren’t you?”

That seemed to be the reason for her hesitation. Gaeul believed that she had to be honest here.

“Honestly, I don’t really know nowadays, whether I’m close to him or not. So can you tell me?”

“The way senior Kang Giwoo smiles is scary. I don’t know why. This is the first time it has happened. I know that he’s a good person, but for some reason, I want to stay away from him.”

“You’re scared but you don’t know the reason, huh.”

Gaeul knelt down slightly to look at Bitna at eye-level. It had only been four days since she first saw her, but she had heard a lot about her from Yuna until now, especially about her personality. If Yuna was right about her sister, Bitna was definitely not someone who would hate other people without a reason, much less talk about it to other people.

“It’s natural for you not to believe me yet, Bitna. I feel like there’s something more to it than that, but I won’t urge you to tell me that right now. But once you judge that you can trust me, tell me at that time. Even if it’s not me, you should ask for help from someone you can trust.”

She might be wrong about this, but she said those words anyway. That put her at ease after all. She even wished for Bitna to say that she didn’t have a reason at all.

“Sorry, unni.”

She accepted. This meant that she knew something. Gaeul grabbed Bitna’s shoulders.

“Yes, it’s good to be cautious. I won’t tell anyone about what happened here, so don’t worry.”

Gaeul reached out to Bitna. Bitna grabbed her tighter than before.

## **Chapter 850. Sequence 12**

He found it strange. Why would she avoid her eyes? She was young, so she might feel shy when looking someone in the eyes, but from the minute tremors in the corner of her eyes, there seemed to be a different reason. Giwoo had seen numerous people avoiding his eyes like that. The executives that lowered their eyes in fear after being found out by his grandfather while pulling tricks looked like that.

He wondered if he should ignore it, or if he should probe her out. It hadn't reached the point of wanting to ask her everything, but it did tug at his mind. Everyone was looking at him with goodwill, but she stood out as she looked at him with wariness.

"Gaeul."

Just as he was about to approach Bitna, who was by herself in the distance, he saw Gaeul, who appeared with coffee in hand. He put away his doubt about the brat and talked to Gaeul first. It was a trivial problem like a sore on his tongue, so he didn't need to resolve it immediately.

"What is it?"

"I don't think I've heard your answer to the question I asked yesterday."

"Yesterday?"

"If you're going to tell me that you forgot about it, then give me some time. I'll go to the bathroom and wipe my tears for a bit."

"I haven't forgotten. I just didn't get to talk to you about it because I was so caught up with the shoot. I'm grateful that you invited me, but I don't think I can make it after all."

"You have something to do that day?"

"I have a prior engagement. I think about this a lot recently, but I think I've gotten quite busy. Though, I'm still no match for you."

"That's such a pity. It is a good opportunity to taste some good wine."

"Yeah, it is. Let's go together next time."

"Alright."

Gaeul walked by while waving her script in the air. Giwoo relaxed the smile on his face and looked at her back. Did she hear something from Han Maru? Or did she actually have an appointment that day? If she heard about his past from Han Maru, she would probably hold him in contempt and avoid him, but there was nothing like that. She smiled back and responded just like before. For the past few days, he had watched her from a distance, but it didn't look like she had a change of heart. If she heard something from Han Maru, she should have shown a reaction.

Thinking back, it was unlikely that Han Maru would tell his woman about the past and to 'be careful of Kang Giwoo.' Not only was there no evidence, it would also look shameful for him to just snitch like that. There was a possibility that Han Gaeul might become suspicious of him or even get fed up with him if he tried to taint the reputation of an actor in his prime, so he must have not mentioned it. Giwoo didn't know how close the two were, but they shouldn't have revealed everything to each other. After all, he was like that too.

He thought about it several times over, but the conclusion he reached was that Han Gaeul knew nothing after all. Even if she did, he could just feign ignorance and tell her that no such thing happened. If she came out strong about it, he could just borrow the power of law. After all, the reputation and relationships he had maintained for a long time would bury the flaws of his past. A near-nameless actor

dating Han Gaeul versus an actor at his peak of popularity. It was obvious who the masses would side with.

Seeing Gaeul treat him like usual felt like a burden had been lifted off him. The brat's strange attitude didn't matter anymore.

"Mr. Seongho, I heard you are getting married. Congratulations. Please tell me the date. I might not be able to attend, but I can always send you congratulatory gifts.

"Miss Yoonah, the restaurant you recommended to me last time was really good. Thank you. I was able to have a good time with my parents thanks to you. I'm not saying this is compensation, but here are tickets to a musical. You said you fought with your boyfriend before, right? Try to make up with him with these. It's a romantic comedy, so I'm sure you two will get back together again.

"Jongsoo, doing a part-time job is hard, isn't it? But try to hold on for just a little more. I overheard the lighting director say the new recruit was skilled and that he wants to keep working with him; that's about you. The director might be a little strict, but he definitely leads his people in the right direction, so try your best. I'll try to talk about you too when I can."

He crossed off the names on the list in his head as he spoke to people. It was rather annoying to have to walk around the set with his ears open, but it was something he couldn't afford to do without. It was what allowed the current 'Kang Giwoo' to exist, after all. The important thing to do in order to achieve superiority in a relationship was to give material gifts and remember trivial things. As long as they were human, no one would hate what is given to them for free. The important thing here was to not act haughty about giving the gift, it was to express that they 'deserve' those gifts discreetly. While it might sound crude, it was quite effective. Ten compliments and one gift were enough to turn goodwill into friendship.

The more sturdy his reputation became, the farther Giwoo felt his path in front of him unfolded. There was not long left until he left the halo of his grandfather and would be able to stand on his own. He would be acknowledged as long as he achieved complete independence through his career as an actor.

Giwoo finished his relationship management by congratulating someone's birthday and looked around to find Gaeul. He had been thinking this for the past few days while observing her: Han Gaeul was a decent woman the more he watched her. Giwoo even briefly imagined a future where he would call her his wife. He didn't feel ashamed about it, so she passed the criteria. Women were better if they were obedient, but someone unrelenting like Han Gaeul wasn't bad either. If her personality disturbed him, he could always fix it down the line. Giwoo knew just how he should handle women like that.

"I wonder what I should do."

It was a possessive desire he had not felt in a long time, and what's more, towards a woman. The fact that she was Han Maru's woman was also a factor that he quite liked. He genuinely looked forward to what kind of expression Maru would put on if he was deprived of the thing that he thought was his.

"Giwoo, you know who Seonah is, right? She wants to meet you once. It's not a serious meeting; she just wants to talk to you in private. Don't overthink things, and give me some face here," said a senior as he approached him.



Giwoo really held him in contempt after seeing him tap his shoulders like they were real friends when Giwoo only acted close to him a couple times. He wanted to grab his drooping ears and tell him to know his place, but he put on a kind smile instead.

“I’ll meet her if it’s your request, senior. But my schedule is jam-packed right now. Also, as far as I am aware, Miss Seonah is busy too nowadays.”

“The two of you can sort that out, just please meet her once. If it was anyone else, I would have rejected without batting an eyelid, but I thought that the two of you suited each other. You two are a match made in heaven.”

The senior gave him her number. Giwoo saved the number for now. A decently pretty woman wanted to meet him, so he could make some time for that, about a day or so. If she was someone who acted prim, then he would just split ways after having a meal with her, and if she was someone who played around, then he would take her to the hotel and relieve himself once. If she was an idiotic woman who was aiming for the mistress of YM, then he would toy with her before throwing her away. Having a lowly peasant join the royal family was unacceptable unless he liked her or something.

He scoffed at the senior who turned around feeling smug, before turning around to where Gaeul was again. She had been reading her script until just moments ago, but he couldn’t see her anymore. Giwoo clicked his tongue subconsciously. He had a strong feeling that he wasn’t able to do something worth his time because of something trivial.

“Han Gaeul.”

Giwoo clicked his tongue and started walking.

\* \* \*

“Thank you for your work.”

Gaeul, who finished her worth of shoot today, immediately looked for Bitna. Bitna had also finished her shoot just now. It was 9 p.m. The director never failed to upkeep labor laws regarding minors.

“Did you finish too, unni?”

“My scenes were towards the beginning today, so I got off early. But I won’t be able to do this as much in the future. The shoot will last later and later into the night the closer it reaches the finish.”

“It must be hard.”

“It’s fine since it’s enjoyable. Bitna, are you taking the bus home?”

“No, mom said she’ll pick me up.”

“Right now?”

Just as Bitna was about to say something, she put her hand in her pocket. Her phone was vibrating. Please give me a second – she said before putting her phone against her ear. According to Yuna, she was apparently this polite from the time she was in elementary school. Imagining a little kid being all polite made her smile subconsciously.

"It looks like I'll have to take the bus. Mom said she has something to do."

"Really? Your house is near Banpo, right? If you're living with Yuna."

"Yes."

"Then I'll give you a ride."

"No, it's fine. It doesn't take that long by bus."

"It also doesn't take long if you ride my car. I also have to go to Banpo anyway."

"It's really okay though."

Gaeul reached her hand out to Bitna. Bitna smiled shyly and fidgeted until she eventually grabbed her hand.

"Thanks for listening to my request. I'm someone who will have it no other way once I get stubborn."

"I was just worried that I might be bothering you."

"I'm giving a cute little sister a ride, so why would it be a bother at all? Oh, I'll ask you this: did you say you were going to take the bus because you wanted to go back by yourself?"

"No, it's not like that. I just thought that you must be tired and that driving me home will make you even more tired."

Gaeul shook the hand in hers vigorously.

"It's not tiring at all, so let me give you a ride. Oh, right. Aren't you hungry? You didn't eat that much for dinner, so you must be, right?"

"A little."

"Then let's buy some sandwiches on our way back."

She told her manager Chanwoo and her stylist Mijoo to go back home first before getting her car out of the parking lot. She picked up Bitna who was waiting at the entrance and drove towards Banpo-dong. They visited a shop midway and bought some sandwiches. She bought one for Maru as well.

"This is yours, Bitna, and this is mine."

"Thank you."

"Enjoy your food. And here, take this drink too."

They talked about various things while eating the sandwich. As for the thing about Giwoo, she intentionally did not bring that topic up. Bitna would speak about it if she deemed necessary. If she didn't, then they wouldn't talk about it.

Just as they were about to get up after finishing the sandwich, Gaeul found Bitna staring at the sandwich she ordered as takeout.

"What, do you want more?"

“No, I’m full. But are you going to eat that too?”

“I have a big appetite, but it’s hard for me to finish this one too. I’m buying it for someone else.”

Bitna nodded in understanding. She got in the car and put the paper bag with the sandwich in the back seat.

“Put on your seatbelt.”

“Yes, I just did.”

“Then let’s go.”

Yuna’s house was registered on her GPS navigation program. She inputted the address and pressed the gas pedal. Bitna was on her phone, and she seemed to be texting someone.

“I just told mom that I’m going home in someone’s car.”

“Right. You shouldn’t make your mother worried. When I was your age, I went everywhere without telling my mom, so I was scolded a lot.”

“My sister was like that too.”

“Yuna is quite similar to me. We have similar preferences too.”

From now on, she could say that they had similar tastes with a smile. It was such a happy thing that the fact that they liked the same man could become a good memory.

“Unni, I think you got a call.”

She heard some vibrations from the back seat. She recalled that she put her wallet and her phone in the paper bag while buying the sandwich.

“Bitna, I’m sorry, but can you take it out for me? I can’t let go of the wheel right now.”

“Okay, I will.”

Bitna turned around and took out the phone. Just as she was handing the phone to her, Bitna stared at the name on the screen. Then, she seemed to have recalled that it was not polite of her to do so and turned her head away in a cute manner.

“Sorry. The caller has the same name as someone I know.”

“Really? Who is it?”

“It says Han Maru.”

She got caught by a traffic light. Gaeul pressed the brakes and looked at Bitna. The Han Maru that Bitna knew of and the Han Maru that was calling was probably the same person. She recalled what happened a long time ago. Yuna asked her to introduce her to Maru, saying that her sister wanted to meet him. Later, though, she found out that Bitna wanting to meet him was just an excuse.

“He’s probably the Han Maru that you know of. You shot a drama together before too, haven’t you?”

“Is it really ahjussi?”

“Ahjussi?”

“No, senior, or well, should I call him oppa? I called him ahjussi when I was little, then oppa. My way of calling him changed quite a lot.”

The smart girl’s face was filled with question marks. Gaeul had fun watching her face. As she was smiling, the lights changed.

“Can you pick it up?”

“Me?”

“Tell him that you’re Kim Bitna and see how he reacts.”

Bitna hesitated a little before picking up the call with a nod.

“Hello? This is Kim Bitna.”