

## Once Again 881

### Chapter 881. Sequence 14

There were many cameras. She had heard about this, but seeing it for real made her dizzy.

“Think of it as talking to some close friends. I’m sure you don’t know where to look because there are more cameras than you’re used to seeing at drama shoots, but you don’t have to be conscious of the cameras at all. You’re more conscious of the actor you’re acting with when doing dramas instead of the camera, right? It’s the same here. Most entertainment shows are scripted to a certain extent, so you just need to do the shoot like you’re doing a rather lax drama. Also, it’s fine to make mistakes. It can all be edited out in post and the producer will bring out what’s best.”

That was what the writer said before they came to the studio. Would she really be able to talk in front of the camera comfortably? Hamin’s fingers fidgeted right against her thighs. The desire to do well and the worry that she must not make a mistake clashed against each other, making her feel dizzy.

“We’ll shoot the opening now. Three, two, one.”

A staff member clapped the slate and fell back, which was then followed by Younghoon speaking from the middle seat.

“Yes, this is Chatterbox.”

Such a simple greeting was how Chatterbox always opened. Following that, the hosts talked among themselves for a bit. Jay asked what happened during the past week, and Hyutkae and Taeksoo would reply to that. Younghoon listened to them from the side and grumbled about the things they did. None of them looked at the script placed on the table. It was improvised, but there was no gap at all. She thought that they were indeed pros after watching them continue the conversation for 10 minutes.

“Let’s stop our chatter here, and allow me to introduce you to the guests who have come to Chatterbox today. To describe our guests today, I dare say that they are like me.”

“Do they have foul mouths?”

“Or maybe get a lot of bad comments on the internet?”

Hyuktae and Taeksoo both made a jab. Younghoon didn’t bat an eyelid and just continued speaking. Hamin chuckled when she saw the theater-like scene.

“They are scene stealers. They, like me, aren’t mainstream but are actors who are great at attracting people’s attention. I guess there’s also the fact that they’ve been gaining a lot of attention recently. Now allow me to introduce to you our guests for the day. Please welcome, actors Yoo Jihyuk, Choi Jeonghee, Park Hamin, and Han Maru.”

The four of them went in while receiving the applause of the hosts. The hosts stood up and walked over to one side of the semicircular table. Hamin sat down on the seat that the writer had pointed out beforehand.

“How did you feel when you heard that the theme was ‘people who suddenly became popular?’”

As soon as she sat down, she received a question. Hamin spoke without getting flustered,

“It didn’t really feel real to me that I had become popular, but I was happy to be invited to Chatterbox because it made me feel like I was a little popular now.”

“If we were as popular as before, you would be correct, but as you know, our viewing rates aren’t that good lately. The ones who really become popular would either go to Happy Day or This is Camping.”

“Really?”

She smiled and wrapped up the question. This was not something she had been told about beforehand, but she didn’t feel that nervous about it as she had prepared herself for it. She had often heard that she was the type to do well on stage, and it seemed that it was true for entertainment shows as well.

“I’m sure the rest of you feel the same. Actually, the reason we called you here today is so that we can get some of that energy from you. We will receive the energy of the people who suddenly became popular and our show will become popular too! Or so the main writer told me as they talked about what today’s theme was. A terrible idea for a theme, don’t you think?”

Everyone laughed as though it was mentioned beforehand. It was easy to figure out when to laugh when watching Younghoon’s gestures. He might act vile, but he was a kind guide. Hamin decided to observe Younghoon closely to have a look at how the show went.

“This is an official corner of Chatterbox. You introduce yourselves. Those who want to make it long, make it long. Those who want to make it short, make it short. We’ll start without giving you any time to think. First, Mr. Yoo Jihyuk.”

Although he said that, it was announced beforehand, and she had also seen it on one of the previous episodes, so she had prepared beforehand. Yoojihyuk turned around to look at the camera and greeted in a polite manner.

“I want to be remembered as a good actor. I am Yoo Jihyuk, an actor who has always dreamed of acting. Nice to meet you all.”

The hosts all applauded. Hamin also clapped as well. Following that, Taeksoo pointed at Choi Jeonghee and asked her to introduce herself.

“Hello. I’m so nervous because it’s my first time on an entertainment show. I may look strange, but I hope you can take a good look at me. Also, is it okay to introduce myself with a dance?”

Before any of the hosts told her to stand up, Choi Jeonghee leaned forward to stand up. She was very bold. She should have known that her cleavage would be emphasized if she leaned forward like that. Choi Jeonghee walked in front of the table. Hamin stared at her back before remembering that there was a monitor that showed the camera footage from the front camera and looked there. Choi Jeonghee bit her lips slightly and winked. When a popular girl idol song flowed out, she jerked her shoulders before showing a very refined dance. Whenever she flicked her body, her black one-piece dress fluttered as well. Hamin felt her mouth go dry. This girl was completely different from how she was in the waiting room. It wasn’t just her outfit that she had carefully chosen.

When the song ended, Choi Jeonghee neatly folded her hands together and took a bow. Yoo Jihyuk rejoiced even more than the hosts did. Hamin had thought this when he had a peek at her cleavage, and it seemed that this man was really helpless in front of pretty women.

“As expected of a scene stealer. Your skills in attracting other people’s attention are incredible.”

“I thought you were really from an idol group. Miss Jeonghee, how long have you been practicing that?”

As there was some good action, questions followed up as well. Unlike Yoo Jihyuk, who only did a greeting, Choi Jeonghee answered questions for several minutes. Was she coming on strong from the get-go? Hamin did not know how to dance or sing. She could sing, but it was at most a quiet ballad, and while she could dance, anything fancy was out of her league.

.

“That must put a lot of pressure on Miss Hamin. I want to give you some time to prepare, but the official corners of Chatterbox will not give you any time. Well then, Miss Hamin!”

“Hello. I’m Park Hamin, an actress who wants to try being the main character of a drama one day. The person in front of me did such a splendid self-introduction and left me with nothing. What should I do?”

She felt like it was a rather decent improvisation. The hosts reacted immediately. It was just as Jay said – the hosts would react to them as long as they didn’t stiffen up.

“Miss Hamin. Do you have any special skills that you’d like to show us? If you’re saving it for later in the show, you might get edited out, so now’s your chance.”

“Err, I can mimic a woodpecker.”

“That’s a little too classic, but it has been a while since we’ve seen one. Would you like to show us once you’re ready?”

Hamin cleared her throat and did an impression of a woodpecker that she had practiced by herself many times. She started off well and sang a clear note, but she eventually lost strength in her voice and started coughing.

“Sorry about that. Can I do it again?”

“Unfortunately, Chatterbox doesn’t give second chances. But you were still cute, so I’ll give you a passing score.”

“Thank you.”

Hyuktae made a heart with his two hands. With this, she didn’t do as well as Choi Jeonghee, but it wasn’t a bad start. Just as she was thinking about a funny episode to talk about later in relief,

“Everyone, you don’t know how cute I am, do you?”

She heard a song next to her. It was the ‘Princess song’ that was trending these days. She was startled and looked next to her. Han Maru had placed his hands on his cheeks and was shyly singing the princess song. There was no accompanying soundtrack, and he was even doing the dance routine as well. Even the hosts, who were sitting on the other side, looked like they were watching an incomprehensible

creature before eventually showing their unique responses. Younghoon nagged him for doing something like that from the get-go, while Jay sang along, saying that he was doing well. Hyuktae and Taeksoo kept just clapping in a daze.

Hamin also zoned out before smiling because she felt like she had to do something. She never imagined that he had prepared something like that. Just watching him made her feel like she wanted to disappear, so how would he feel? He was a scary man after all. That was on a whole new level even compared to Choi Jeonghee's 'TV show attitude.' He looked like he was going to sell his soul in order to attract popularity.

The song changed midway. Han Maru stood up and looked ever so serious. He locked his hands behind his back like a stern King and continued singing the princess song in a low pitch with a big frown on his face. He was looking towards the staff while singing, but his voice was loud like it was being amplified. She didn't know about anything else, but she had to admit that his voice was good. She exclaimed subconsciously when she heard the thick voice enter her ears.

The childish as heck princess song suddenly felt tragic like a scene from *The Phantom of the Opera*. Han Maru walked around the studio like it was his stage and sang towards the camera. The sense of tragedy in his actions and expressions made it feel like he was holding a musical.

"Why am I so cute?"

Though, the lines were all like that, so the disparity was unnerving. It still made her strangely want to keep watching it. The chorus "I'm the cutest in the world" sounded like "To be or not to be, that is the question" from Hamlet. The overwhelming detail in his facial expression acting made it so that the lyrics did not feel awkward.

"Bravo!"

Younghoon, who grumbled at first, stood up from his seat. The other hosts also did not hesitate to praise him while putting their thumbs up. They talked about how this was the first time someone left such a deep impact in the history of Chatterbox.

"This fella. He's full of wack. Oh hey, are you going to get dragged to the communication commission if I use that word, producer Kang?"

"I'll take care of that, so don't worry about it. More than that, Mr. Han Maru. We were totally taken aback. Do you see the camera directors all taken aback? It was good but notify us beforehand next time. Anyway, it was the best."

From how the producer cut in, it seemed that this part was going to be edited out. Hamin drank a sip of the water placed in front of her. As frustrated as she was, he was both funny and cool. The fact that he chose a trending song and did not simply stop at singing and included acting in his performance – everything was good. How long had he been preparing that? It was only a brief performance, but she could tell for sure that he was not someone who was bad at acting. He made what might be a cringy performance a good one through his acting. His attractive powers were so great that she had forgotten that this was a show.

Hamin looked at Maru, who was chatting with the hosts. This made him even more spiteful. Why did he betray a person's earnest feelings despite possessing such skills? From Giwoo's words, Maru was someone who did not know how to pay back his graces. He had enough skills to have a fair showdown through acting, so why did he act like that?

Just then, her thoughts were caught by a speedbump. What did Han Maru do to Giwoo-oppa again?

"I asked this back in the waiting room, but do you have something to say to me?"

"No, nothing. It's nothing," Hamin replied hastily.

She was in such deep thought that she didn't realize that they locked eyes. Thinking back, Giwoo didn't tell her what exactly happened between them. He fell silent before she did.

"Okay, we'll start again," said the producer.

Hamin stopped worrying about it. Just going by the mood Giwoo had that day, it was clear that Han Maru had done something very wrong to Giwoo. Though now, it felt slightly iffy that she didn't know exactly what it was.

"Looks like everyone who came here today has geared up. Especially you, Mr. Han Maru, I thought you were staking your life today."

The program resumed with Younghoon's speech.

#### **Chapter 882. Sequence 14**

"This fellow's wack. Anyway, Mr. Maru. You'll have a hard time later if you put too much strength into the beginning. You'll be raising our expectations of you which will make you unable to react to most things."

"I'd be getting a lot just by making myself known on my first entertainment show."

"Are you saying that you're already satisfied then?"

"No, I'm saying that I achieved my primary objective. But that won't get edited out right? If it does, I might cry at home."

"You're already worried about being edited out, huh? Geez, the truth about entertainment shows has gotten too widespread. Even normal viewers know that editing is king. Of course, being an actor, I'm sure you know more than most people. Jay, isn't that right?"

Younghoon suddenly directed a question towards Jay while talking to Maru. Jay, who was drinking some water, suddenly started coughing.

"Younghoon-hyung, please don't ask me any questions while I'm drinking. I cough every time, and I might end up going to the hospital for it."

"You should focus then. Mr. Maru here is talking."

"You mean you're talking. Sheesh, you're quite something when it comes to making others suffer."

Hamin kept watching as Younghoon and Jay bantered. It was hard to find the right time to cut in. She had been advised several times that she must not become part of the audience, but now that she was actually in the shoot, she realized just how hard it was to cut into a conversation. In dramas, the timings were already predetermined by the script. She thought that she would be able to speak easily as long as she was on the lookout for an opportunity, even if it was an entertainment show as it too followed a script to an extent, but unlike what she originally expected, she could not budge her lips. On top of that, the shock she received from the opening performance still remained within her. Thanks to Maru, who grasped the atmosphere in his hands, both Mr. Yoo and Miss Choi also remained smiling just like her.

“There’s something I was notified of beforehand. Miss Hamin, I heard that, despite your small build, you are known to be quite a drinker. How much can you drink?” Younghoon tossed her a question.

He seemed to be redistributing the attention that had been gathered on Maru. Thanks to that, she could be relieved a little.

“I can’t drink that much.”

“Why don’t you tell us? How many bottles of soju can you drink?”

“When I’m in a good condition, about three bottles.”

“Three bottles? Over how long?”

“Uh, the thing is, I drank while watching movies by myself, so it’s probably around 4 hours. I watched two.”

“You drank by yourself while watching movies? You’re a young woman. Why do you sound so tragic?”

She finally felt like she could talk about the story she had brought. Hamin thought back to that day and prepared herself to talk about it.

“I originally started off as an idol. I remained as a trainee for quite a long time as well. I was supposed to be a part of a girl band, so I practiced instruments a lot, but ultimately, I never got to go on stage properly. The president, who told me that everything will go well, suddenly cut off all contact, and the girls who practiced with me all looked for other agencies or started looking for other jobs after telling me that they no longer had any intention to stay in the entertainment industry. I can still remember it clearly. I bought soju and some snacks from the supermarket in front of my house, and I drank while watching movies. It was quite stifling.”

“The president ran off?”

“I’m sure he must have had his reasons. But it would’ve been good if he told us something at least,” she said with a smile.

It was something she could smile about as it was a thing of the past, and since this was supposed to be a show, it was all the more reason for her to stay smiling.

“What a bad person. I thought those kinds of people disappeared recently, but it looks like they still exist. Miss Hamin. Since we’re at it, you should give a message to that president you talked about.”

“Right here?”

“The greatest revenge is to become successful. You might have slipped up as an idol, but you received attention as an actress. Say something to the president who might be watching from somewhere,” Younghoon said as he pointed at the front camera.

Hamin turned around to look at the camera. This was her chance to get the screen to herself. There was no time to hesitate.

“President, are you staying healthy? I don’t know why you did that back then, but don’t scam innocent young people in the future. You’ll get punished for it. I mean it.”

“How soft. I’m sure you’re thinking about saying something else in your heart.”

Taeksoo urged her. She couldn’t swear since she was on TV, but something on the level of ‘punk’ might be fine. If she went overboard, the producer would just edit it out, so there was no need to worry about it.

“Hey, you punk! Get a life!”

Since she was at it, she shouted with all her might. Younghoon was delighted, saying that that’s how it’s done. Seeing the hosts respond positively to her actions, she felt she had done something good. It was always the first time that was difficult. Now that she actually uttered it out loud, she felt much more confident.

“But if you were originally preparing to become an idol, doesn’t that mean that you can sing and dance as well? Or maybe not so much dancing since you said it was supposed to be a band.”

“I have terrible reflexes. I was also not the main vocalist, so I’m not that good.”

“But those who practiced are different. Let’s have a look at what you can do later.”

It was already agreed upon beforehand that she would sing. Younghoon probably said what was on the script. Hamin pretended to pull back but eventually agreed to it. The song she prepared was a ballad that wasn’t too high-pitched, so it wasn’t that difficult. Other than the intro, the shoot was currently going smoothly so far.

Younghoon then asked Mr. Yoo and Miss Choi how much they could drink. From how he was asking the same question, it was likely that the boring answers would get edited out. Mr. Yoo’s and Miss Choi’s stories were ordinary. Both of them just said that they were good drinkers, but that was it. They had no story. Hamin believed that her story was the best.

“Actually, the reason I asked you how much you can drink is because of Mr. Maru over here. Our writers picked up an amazing fact.”

Taeksoo handed over a question sheet. The hosts looked at the question sheet and started exclaiming. If this is true, then it’s simply incredible – Younghoon said in a small voice. Just what was on it that made them exclaim like that? Hamin looked at Maru through the corner of her eyes and perked up her ears.

“Let’s check these first. This is really unexpected. Is it true that you’re long-time drinking friends with Sir Yoon Moonjoong?”

“I’m not sure how you found that out, but yes. You’re right. I drink quite frequently with the elder.”

Maru replied with his eyes wide open as though he was truly surprised. For a moment, Hamin wondered who Yoon Moonjoong was before recalling the face of a great senior actor. Younghoon, who had been listening, suddenly cut in,

“About senior Yoon, I’m not sure about anything else, but I know he’s picky as heck when it comes to finding drinking partners.”

“I was lucky that the elder sees me in a good light. I met him for the first time while I was in high school. He said I looked polite and smart, so maybe that’s why.”

“Mr. Maru. You know you’re boasting about your youth, right?”

“Me? I only told you the truth though.”

“I’ve never seen a good guy who can boast so naturally.”

“Well, I have my way with being bad too.”

Maru didn’t seem awkward at all while talking to Younghoon. It was as though he had prepared for it. Younghoon laughed. He was probably excited because instead of getting single-word answers, he was getting entire stories. Hamin also prepared herself so that she could talk just as smoothly.

“Looking here, you two appeared together in the film *Twilight Struggles*, right? The senior appeared as the lead character, while you were a minor character. I watched this in the cinema, and it was quite a shocker. If I’m not wrong, it’s a story about a father’s murder of his own sons, right?”

“Yes, that’s right. It was a film that contained a slight social critic vibe. I watched the elder act right in front of my eyes, and it gave me goosebumps. He was truly scary.”

“It was scary when I saw it through a screen too. I can only imagine how bad it was to watch him from up close. How was it? I believe that must have been your first film too.”

“I only appeared for a brief moment, but it’s definitely a precious piece for me. The elder told me that there was a role that I’m suited to and told me to take the challenge, and I managed to win that role through an audition. It also became an opportunity for me to reform my mindset towards acting.”

“So you two share no ordinary relationship. You said that was back in high school?”

“Yes, that was when I was in my 2nd year of high school.”

“If that senior looked after you from such a young age, it must mean that he must have valued your skills highly.”

“Rather than skills, I think he just liked me because of how I acted.”

“No, no. I can’t say I’m very close to him, but he’s not someone who would suggest to someone to take a role just because he dotes on someone.”

“You want to butt in everywhere, huh, hyung? Are you sure you know senior Yoon?”

Jay told him to stop pretending like he was close, which made Younghoon cough awkwardly and get some drinks. While the two hosts continued with their banter, Hyuktae continued asking the questions,



“Our writer got confirmation from Sir Yoon Moonjoong himself. Allow me to mimic him for a second: ‘I’ve never seen a young man who can drink better than that boy Maru.’ So, being us, we investigated a little, and someone unexpected gave us some info. There are a few famous drinkers in the industry, and one of them is a member of my group: Sungjae-hyung.”

“Sungjae-hyung?”

Maru acted like he was acquainted with him. Hamin stayed silent and observed the situation. She found it absurd that Maru had bigshot connections like Yoon Moonjoong and Ahn Sungjae. One was the giant of the acting industry, while the other was from a top-tier idol group.

“It turns out you’re quite close to Sungjae-hyung, huh? When he found out that you’re coming to Chatterbox, he even said that he was willing to help.”

“We received acting lessons together. Even after that, we met up quite frequently to talk to each other.”

“How did you get to know him? Did you meet him for the first time at those lessons?”

“My sister is a fan of TTO. I said hello to him to get an autograph, and that’s how we met. After that, various things happened and we got close.”

Hyuktae nodded.

“Sungjae-hyung is no joke if he decides to set his mind to drink. You know about it, Jay-hyung, right?”

“I do. I don’t think I’ve seen a better drinker than Sungjae around me. He can drink five bottles in one sitting.”

“Yet, that same Sungjae-hyung told me that he has never seen Han Maru get drunk. Usually, Sungjae-hyung is the type to help other people get home when drunk, not the other way round, right? But he told me that he often had Maru help him get home because he got drunk.”

“Don’t even start on that. Once he gets drunk, he will grab onto something and not let go, and there were more than a few times that I had trouble putting him away. Oh, is it somewhat wrong to use ‘putting away’ for a person?”

“No, I would describe it that way too. I know because I had the same experience a couple times.”

Hyuktae and Maru laughed while consoling each other for their hardships. Thanks to the continuous mention of bigshot figures, the hosts all shifted their attention to Maru. She thought that this would be the end of it, but no. The writer sitting in the front suddenly started writing something before giving it to Hyuktae. Hyuktae looked at the paper that the writer gave him and spoke,

“Please excuse us for a second. We’ll give someone a call. This person rarely ever appears on TV. Maybe this is his first appearance in a talk show, even if it’s just his voice.”

“Who is it?”

“You’ll find out soon.”

As Hyuktae talked about it, one of the staff members came in with a phone connected to a microphone.

“Producer Kang, who is it?” Younghoon asked the producer.

The atmosphere had gotten much freer while some setups were underway.

“Director Park Joongjin.”

“The film director?”

Hamin clearly heard what the two talked about from the side. The super director who would get 7 million views at least with every work was giving a call because of Han Maru?

“We’ll resume the shoot now.”

When a staff member clapped the slate, the shoot resumed as though nothing had happened. As they waited after putting the phone in the middle, the phone’s connecting ringtone could be heard. The hosts all knew that they were expecting director Park Joongjin, but they all talked about who it might be. A man’s voice flowed out amidst the people’s attention.

-Hello?

“Ah, yes. Hello, director. This is Chatterbox of RBS, and I’m Hyuktae. We said hello once last time. Do you remember me?” Hyuktae said smoothly.

-I do remember you, Mr. Hyuktae. You’re good-looking, so I definitely remember you.

“You sound like someone told you to say that, but thank you anyway, director.”

When they heard a laugh, the hosts laughed as well, and so did the guests.

“Director, I’m sorry but could you introduce yourself to the audience?”

-Sure. I’m honored to appear on such a renowned entertainment show. I’m Park Joongjin, a run-of-the-mill film director.

#### **Chapter 883. Sequence 14**

"Good work. You’re borrowing one of our boys, so you should do at least that much. Even if you say that you’re doing your piece and not someone else’s, it’s not bad to receive attention. Alright, let’s have a meal together sometime. I also have some things I want to ask about the film."

Junmin hung up the call he got from Joongjin. Even though it must have been a bothersome request, he accepted it readily. He even sounded rather delighted.

Junmin put down his phone on the table. A bulldog lingered around his feet as though it wasn’t satisfied with the fact that he hadn’t played with it for a while. He picked up a ball and threw it out into the garden. The bulldog rushed towards the well-mowed grass, followed by several other dogs. Junmin quietly looked at the dogs who were all gunning for the ball. After a bout, the victor came back with the ball in its mouth. It was neither big nor strong, but it was smart. It snuck its snout in at the crucial time and snatched the ball away. Junmin gave a piece of dog gum to the dog who came back with the ball. Ultimately, only one dog could get the prize.

There were many actors with potential. Ultimately, the problem came down to whether he or she was given a place to blossom or not. Junmin had the confidence to scatter the seeds in fertile lands. It was entirely up to the seed which flower it would bloom, but he did well when it came to protecting it before it got trampled on.

The dogs that came late all got into a fuss wanting snacks. Junmin gave up and went to the kitchen to get more snacks. Sometimes, handling dogs was harder than handling people.

“Today, luck is on his side.”

When he heard that the shoot was around RBS, he was convinced that the goddess of luck stood behind Maru. The sister of that same goddess was going to visit the studio soon. He wasn't the type to let his food get taken away because of cautiousness, so there was no need to worry about that. In fact, he was worried about the other guests who might get swept up in Maru's pace and talking skills. If it was someone who knew how to find opportunities, they would be able to get a ride on Maru's speech skills and have an easy time talking, but if there was someone who tried to win against him, they would have a tough time.

“Yes, sir. I'll visit you soon.”

Junmin scanned the dogs who tired themselves out before standing up.

\* \* \*

“We'll resume the shoot.”

Younghoon let go of the straw in his mouth. The shoot, which he expected to be difficult, went quite smoothly thanks to an unexpected talent. The intuition he got from Han Maru before the shoot was not wrong. When he gave one, he would get two back, so there was no better guest than someone like this. He even knew when to butt in and when to leave. He stopped talking about stories that may sound boring, and he provided cover fire when it was time to add some vitality to the show.

Choi Jeonghee benefitted the most from him. She watched the guests with a seductive smile and seemed to have realized who the main character was today. When Maru spoke, she reacted and even asked him a few questions, to which Maru would reply delightfully, which made her shine in the process. The two shared a banter they didn't agree to do beforehand, so the only thing he had to do was just applaud from the side.

“Maru, your connections are amazing.”

“Well, it's all a coincidence.”

“Connections are the same as assets in this industry. I think that you'll definitely rise to the top.”

“Having you tell me that feels like I'm already halfway there.”

After the conversation, Maru went to the other side of the table and sat down. During break time, Maru approached everyone first and discussed how he was going to call everyone. Younghoon also liked the fact that he did not hesitate to approach them and just treated them comfortably without much thinking. Although TV shows usually focused on skilled people even if they might be a little shy, it was

natural for a proactive person like Maru to be more eye-catching. As for his skills, it was as good as proven since he was acknowledged by Yoon Moonjoong.

He also belonged to JA, which was known to be hard to get into, so it was better to see Maru as someone who was already on the path to success.

During the intro, Younghoon thought that he was just a rookie who just prepared one big impact and had no substance, but during the phone interview with Park Joongjin, he proved that his speaking skills were not ordinary. He asked both questions that the viewers might be curious about as well as questions to proceed on with the show, and Younghoon almost ended up blurting out 'that's my boy' from the side. At the end of the interview, Park Joongjin said that he was going to start shooting a film soon and that he had selected Maru as the main character, along with the words that this was news that he had not announced anywhere else yet. He could still clearly remember producer Kang looking like he was overjoyed to death after the interview. As long as they could make the teaser well, increasing the viewing rate was going to be easy.

He read what the writer added to the script as he started the shoot. The promising talent Yoo Jihyuk, and the one they originally planned to push, Park Hamin, did not do anything after the phone interview as though they ran out of battery. It might be that they couldn't do anything. After all, the talk was centered around Maru. Distributing screentime was the host's job, so he was looking for opportunities, but if the people in question lacked enthusiasm, he couldn't hand over the microphone to them. To feed someone, that someone had to have their mouth open.

"I think I should talk about it here: Why did I become popular? The four of you received just as much attention as the lead characters from your respective dramas, right?"

"Hyuktae, you're making it obvious that you're reading from a script. Even if it's written like that, you should say it in your own words."

"Just wait a second. I'll change it into my own words soon enough."

"Just send me an email when you decide to do so."

The boy who was too stiff to even read the script five years ago was now capable of retorting back. It meant that time had definitely passed. Younghoon stayed silent so that Hyuktae could proceed with the show.

"Mr. Yoo Jihyuk. You received good responses as an evil torture expert in the movie Heaven's Decree. I watched it and even I thought you were a psycho. How are you actually? Do you really have an obsession with details or things like that in reality?"

Hyuktae also seemed worried about Yoo Jihyuk's lack of appearance, since he was inducing him to answer.

"Yes. I do have such a side to me."

"Do you have any fun episodes where you ran into trouble because of your personality that you would like to share with us? For example, not being able to sleep because of a single thing that's out of line."

"You make the most terrible examples, sheesh."

Younghoon chimed in a little. Hyuktae told him to stay still. Younghoon twitched his lips and leaned back on the chair. The younger member retorting to an older member was something that always worked on the viewers. The only thing remaining now was for Yoo Jihyuk to package his episode well.

“Well, nothing of the sort happened to me.”

It was no good. Younghoon hinted at the other hosts. Yoo Jihyuk had lost all his cheerful attitude from the beginning and was now no different from a teddy bear that parroted the same words when pressed. Even without getting attention, he should have reminded himself that this was a TV show and that he should try his best to liven up the mood, but Yoo Jihyuk acted like a lost child. He acted like he didn't know what to do. Like this, there was no way to help him. Although producer Kang would probably tell him that he could relax, if he stiffened up on the inside, it would be hard to get any fun out of him no matter how many times they knocked on his door from the outside. This was a common mistake made by rookies on TV, so it wasn't even that surprising. The only thing they could hope for from him at this point was for him to applaud well.

Hyuktae talked to Yoo Jihyuk a few more times for his screen time, but all the answers were things that were hard to use for TV. Hyuktae also forfeited after seeing that it was just an ordinary conversation without any interesting or emotional elements.

“Miss Hamin. You passionately played as a terminal patient in Doctor's Office, right? Do you remember that you even went on the search term rankings back then?”

“The atmosphere was good at the shoot, but I didn't think that it would be reviewed so well.”

“It was hard back then, right? Your eyes were bloodshot, you know?”

“I didn't realize that. I just tried my utmost best, and it felt like my eyes were going to burst. I thought about taking a break midway and doing it again, but I was worried that my emotions might get out of line, so I just forgot about it and did my best.”

Park Hamin replied with vitality when Hyuktae gave her a chance. It meant that she still had the energy to receive what she was given. Responding like Park Hamin would allow the hosts to liven up the mood. Hyuktae was someone who made tens of thousands of people jump out of their seats. With enough preparation, he could turn anyone into a main character.

Park Hamin calmly continued her talk. It wasn't anything laugh-inducing, but it wasn't bad either since it showed her truthfulness. While listening to Hamin, the writer gave Younghoon a signal. It seemed that she judged that this was the right time to refresh things.

“Miss Hamin. I think you should pick up that call.”

“Eh?”

She seemed completely clueless. Younghoon received a phone from a staff member.

“Hello? Mr. Lee Hyuk. Can you hear me?”

-Yes. I hear you.

Hearing the name 'Lee Hyuk', the staff rejoiced. Although their voices didn't get picked up by the microphone, the guests could see that the staff were rejoicing. Park Hamin also put some strength into her eyes. He didn't know what happened to her, but she looked like she had realized that this was her opportunity to create a flow favorable for her.

-Miss Park Hamin is a junior I cherish a lot. I realized that she was someone really passionate about acting the first time I met her.

As expected of an actor who had been in this industry for a long time, Lee Hyuk followed up the interview fluently.

"Hello, senior."

-Yes, Miss Hamin. How are you doing?

"I'm not sure. I'm very nervous."

-Don't get too embarrassed and do your best.

Younghoon quickly cut in after seeing Park Hamin act embarrassed.

"You two sound pretty distant. Are you sure you're close?"

-Of course.

"Then call each other comfortably like you would in private."

-Shall we, Hamin?

After being called out to, Hamin shyly replied 'Yes, oppa.' Hyuktae and Taeksoo jumped in at the chance like hyenas, saying that Hamin probably fancied Lee Hyuk.

-If that really is true, then I'm grateful. I've been single for too long.

Lee Hyuk fluidly responded to that. Park Hamin also did not miss the opportunity and told him that they should have a meal together sometime. Going any further and there might be viewers that might be uncomfortable watching, so Younghoon hinted at the juniors. Taeksoo and Hyuktae both noticed him and changed the topic.

The call with Lee Hyuk was not that long. In the first place, it wasn't a phone call that they were planning to do for long. The guest was Park Hamin after all. Park Hamin smartly talked about episodes she had with Lee Hyuk to gain the upper hand in the conversation. There were some funny stories as well. She talked about the secretive stories of a top star that the viewers might be interested in without crossing the line. It was no surprise that her agency looked out for her a lot. Who would want to leave someone like her alone when she could pick up the hints and follow up? With a little push, Park Hamin spoke fluently like she had gained wings.

"Is that true?"

"It absolutely is."

Younghoon looked at Maru who sneakily spoke to Park Hamin from time to time. This guy was incredibly good at reading the flow. He did not try to change the flow from going over to Park Hamin and instead rode on it while increasing his opportunities to speak. He was practically a veteran. It was hard to think that this was his first entertainment show. Park Hamin, who seemed to be competing against Maru before also changed her posture to face Maru since the timing of his responses was almost artistic. It was to the point that the hosts didn't have to talk a lot in order to proceed with the show. Choi Jeonghee, who was ousted a little, also participated in the conversation proactively once Maru tossed her a question. Yoo Jihyuk still stayed a sitting duck.

There was no helping it. There were 8 people in this show talking. It would be great if everyone could give the audience something to laugh about with equal distribution, but TV shows weren't so easy. He only got to say a few words because of the hosts' considerations.

While Park Hamin kept taking the lead, Younghoon saw the youngest writer suddenly leave her seat. When she came back, she ran up to the producer in an instant. Her busy movements caught the eyes of the guests as well. Park Hamin stopped talking for a little. Then, the source of the busy staff peeked into the studio. Younghoon inwardly shouted 'awesome' and stood up.

"Oh my god, aren't you Ahn Joohyun?"

#### **Chapter 884. Sequence 14**

Her hobby was to read fashion magazines ever since she was young. Her mom used to say that it was funny how a little toddler who didn't know how to read was fascinated with magazines. Perhaps she had admired that world even when she was too young to know about anything. Even when she entered middle school and became a trainee idol, she always carried around magazines. Just like how a faithful believer always carried around a Bible in their bag, she also read magazines of successful entertainers over and over again as a believer would their bible.

Then one day, a friend of hers, who said her dream was to become an actress, gave her a magazine containing an interview with an actress, saying that she was her role model. Hamin was fascinated by that page. That was none other than Ahn Joohyun. For the first time, Hamin went traveling with her friend to see an actress. Indeed, it was traveling. She went all the way to Busan on a day she didn't have practice. Looking from afar, Ahn Joohyun looked like she came straight out of the magazine. There may be actresses who were prettier than her, but she was convinced that there was no one as charming as her. Only after she ran up to her did she see the manager block her way. Just as she was about to give up thinking that getting an autograph was out of the question, a hand suddenly appeared in front of her.

"I don't have any paper with me right now, so do you want it on your clothes? If I do it on your hand it'll get erased."

She was wearing one of her favorite shirts, but there was no reason to hesitate. She immediately turned around and let Joohyun write on her back. The sliding sensation of the pen felt like a dream. Her friend, who was with her back then, also rejoiced.

"Still, you can't just rush in like that next time. You might get into an accident."

The Joohyun who slapped her back and told her to go her way had appeared in front of her eyes once again after a long time. She had not changed at all as though she had leaped through space and time

from ten years ago to this studio. In fact, she became even cooler. Hamin almost leaped out of her seat and ran towards her, just like she did back in Busan.

The shoot came to a complete halt. Joohyun peeked in and asked if she was interrupting with a bright smile. Producer Kang welcomed her with his hands in the air.

"Oh no, what interruption. We were just about to get some rest as well."

"It's been a while, director."

"It has, and it's so nice to see you. What brings you here?"

"I just had a shoot nearby. I was about to go home after it, but I heard that Chatterbox was being shot, so I made a visit."

"You should visit more often. I'd always welcome you. Since you're here, why don't you join the shoot for a little? We'll give you a seat."

Hamin thought that it was half a joke. She was sure that the producer wanted to invite Joohyun as a guest, but it was nearly impossible to scout a top-tier actor without any agreement beforehand. Producer Kang was someone who knew that.

"Shall I? I can do it if it's just for a little."

She did not hear wrong. Hamin looked at Joohyun walking over to the guest seats. She was an actress who was known for her refreshing personality, but Hamin didn't know that she was someone who could decide to feature in a show arbitrarily on the spot. It was something impossible for a new actor to even think about doing. It was only possible for top-tier actors who could change the rules of a company on a whim. Producer Kang, who stood there in a daze, suddenly moved around everywhere like he was stepping on lava.

"I'm Ahn Joohyun. Hello, everyone."

Her idol was standing right in front of her. Her mind blanked. She could not remember where she was, or what she was doing, and focused all of her brain cells on the figure in front of her.

"Unni, I mean, senior. Do you perhaps remember me?"

After she asked, she realized what an absurd question that was. After seeing Joohyun wait without a hint of displeasure despite how taken aback she must be, Hamin quickly changed her question.

"It's natural for you not to remember. I saw you in Busan ten years ago."

"Busan ten years ago? Sorry about that. It's been too long. Did we meet because of work?"

"No, I was just a trainee back then, and I went to Busan to see you. When I saw you for the first time, I felt so delighted that I reflexively ran over to you, and I even got an autograph from you on the back of my shirt."

While explaining, Hamin realized that this wasn't the time to be doing that. She realized that talking about something that happened 10 years ago and hoping that she would remember was being too



greedy of her. Taking her time away because of some private matters was not polite as well. Memories were better off as memories.

"Were there perhaps two of you? If I remember correctly, there were two high school, no, middle school girls. Anyway, two girls suddenly ran over to me and asked me for an autograph. That I remember clearly. I probably signed their shirts. One on the back, and one on the stomach."

Joohyun rubbed her fingertips as she tried to remember. Hamin couldn't believe it. Her idol remembered meeting her.

"Yes! The girl who you signed on the back was me. I was a fan of yours from back then."

"Really? Nice to meet you like this."

"Me too."

She quickly grabbed the hand that Joohyun reached out. When she played a minor character in a drama and received attention from the public, it didn't feel all that real to her. She even slightly doubted the fact that she was an actress even when Chatterbox reached out to her. But now, she could be sure. She had become an actress. She could call Ahn Joohyun her senior without issue.

It felt as though God was saying that luck was on her side today. Just getting a call from Lee Hyuk, who she was close enough to forgo the honorifics but not contact personally, was lucky enough already, but now Ahn Joohyun, whom she had admired most of her life, came to visit the studio as well. Not only that, she even said that she was willing to join the shoot. She did not know what would happen for the remainder of the shoot, but she even had the confidence that she would be at the center.

Just as she was about to call out to her again, she discovered that Joohyun was looking past her shoulders.

Joohyun walked past her. Hamin only mouthed her words and turned around. There were still many things that she wanted to talk about, but she had no choice but to lower her raised hand. She couldn't grab her.

Was she going to greet Han Maru now? Joohyun looked at him for a while before finally speaking,

"How's it going?"

She sounded very intimate.

"What brings you here?"

"Didn't you just hear all that? I came here because I heard that Chatterbox was being recorded. You're doing your first TV show, so I can't just pass by. I might be able to see something interesting."

"You probably won't get to see much. I'm actually doing quite well."

"I'm sure you are. Director, you're going to start shooting from the entrance shot, right? It'll be strange if I'm suddenly sitting down here."

Producer Kang, who was next to her, nodded.

"But hey, you seem to be acquainted with Mr. Han Maru."

"He's a junior I cherish and one I feel grateful for. I have a debt to him, so I'm going to pay him back a little today."

"Miss Joohyun owes a debt?"

Joohyun stood up and walked towards the back of the studio as though she had no intention of resolving producer Kang's curiosity. It was where the camera would have an easier time shooting. She seemed to have already realized how to make herself look good during her entrance. Outside the view of the camera, Joohyun was putting on her wireless mic. The producer and the writers talked to the hosts. They were probably discussing how to proceed with the show.

Hamin looked at Joohyun before looking at Maru again. Just what was this guy? Just going by what happened between him and Giwoo, he was someone who betrayed other people's trust and was someone who would egotistically take care of himself. However, the best entertainers and actors in the industry were looking out for him. It was a strange thing. To consider them all as idiots, their reputations were too incredible.

Above all, she was shocked by how Ahn Joohyun acted quite close to him. There was no way an actress who was bold enough to wage war against the media would stand up for a less-than-decent human. Not only that, she was indebted? Everyone was acknowledging Maru's skills and character. Even Choi Younghoon, who met Maru for the first time today, said that Maru was a 'decent guy.' He may look like he said whatever he wanted to, but he would become very polite once the cameras were off, yet out of the four guests, he only treated Maru comfortably. It meant that he wanted to get close to Maru regardless of business.

During the three-hour shoot, Hamin kept observing Maru. The cheesy yet novel way of introducing himself during the opening, his reactions and talking skills during the talk, as well as the encouragement from many famous people; everything was pointing to the fact that Han Maru was a decent person with skills. There was nothing bad about him. It wasn't that he derogated anyone in order to raise himself to a pedestal either. He was powerful when he was talking and humorous when he tossed the words to another person. Even without the support from many famous people, he would have probably gained the spotlight. She had to admit, he was above her in every single aspect.

Hamin imagined what would have happened without the phone interview with Lee Hyuk. The atmosphere wouldn't have changed, and she would not have been able to attract any interest.

"I'm not such a bad guy," Maru said.

The out-of-context words made her heart sink. It seemed that he had discovered her staring at him strangely. Looking back, she was indeed too conscious of him.

"It's not that...."

She was about to make an excuse, but she stayed quiet. She did not want to lie. It was a foolish thing to change what was on her mind in order to escape a momentary crisis.

.

"Since it's come down to this, I'll tell you. Actually, I've heard bad things about you, Mr. Han Maru. I can't tell you who told me, but that person...."

"Kang Giwoo, right?"

At this point, it was scary. She involuntarily had to stay silent twice in a row now. It was a good thing that the camera wasn't rolling. There was a problem with Joohyun's microphone, which delayed the shoot.

"I don't have anything to tell you. People's words weigh differently according to how much credibility you give them. Even if I stand up for myself here, it won't sound good in your ears, Miss Hamin. Of course, I don't think that you're foolish enough to be swayed by just one person's words. And, it's all the more reason I don't need to stand up for myself."

He put it nicely, but in the end, what he meant was this: I don't believe you're an idiot who believes in nothing but that man's words. Hamin's eyes twitched. Kang Giwoo was a good man. The words he told her whenever she had a hard time energized her a lot.

"Giwoo prefers to say the truth while omitting one thing rather than outright lying proficiently. Think carefully about what he said about me. If he blatantly lied to you, you would have noticed it on the spot, but if he left you to deduce it, you should be able to find out what is happening."

Seeing Maru smile, Hamin thought about what Giwoo said: about how Maru and he were friends, about how he talked to the drama writer without Maru knowing, and finally, vaguely ending the conversation while talking like Maru had done something wrong. Hamin frowned. Indeed, Giwoo did not say it properly. He just shut his mouth with a bitter expression. Everything else was her own deduction. She believed that no words were necessary. Anyone would predict a bad outcome if someone turned around with an expression like that.

"We're ready. Let's begin now."

Hamin looked in front of her. Neither Maru, Joohyun, nor any of the hosts entered her eyes. That one doubt made all of her senses distant. Did something bad happen between Giwoo and Maru? Or did Giwoo induce her to think that way? No matter how hard she thought about it, she could not arrive at a conclusion. Hamin looked next to her. She saw Maru talking to Joohyun. If there was one thing that she could be sure of amidst the uncertainties, it was that Maru was someone who didn't need Giwoo's support. He was a ship with a smooth sail or a bird with its wings spanned.

"Something feels off if you think about it, right?" Maru said while tapping on the table.

#### **Chapter 885. Sequence 14**

When he learned that Moonjoong was on the phone for an interview, he didn't think much about it. He just thought that the elder was looking out for him. When Hyuktae, one of the hosts, mentioned Sungjae while asking questions, he just believed that he was lucky. However when even Kim Suyeon's name was mentioned, Maru realized that this 'coincidence' was all designed. The first person that came to mind who might have given the information to the staff beforehand was Byungchan, but that guy wasn't someone who would plan things so meticulously.

"Did you have a call with the president?" Maru asked Joohyun.

"Not really a call, but I did receive a text during my shoot. He told me that Chatterbox was being shot in the building next to me and that you are one of the guests. It seems like your president looks out for you a lot since he texted me."

"That sounds like a lot of pressure on me. If I screw up the show, I might even get called by him."

"I came all the way to support you, so if you don't benefit at all, then you are worth a scolding."

"Are you okay with the president now? I have always thought that you hated our president."

"Did I look like I hated him? Well, I guess that's not such a surprise. We stayed distant from each other when we needed to talk to each other. If I think about it, I was the source of the misunderstanding. I'll tell you the details after the shoot. I think it's fine if you know," Joohyun finished her words there.

"Sorry about that. I had bad stomach cramps."

Younghoon returned from the bathroom. The staff members also returned to their positions and got ready for the shoot.

"We'll resume the shoot."

After the producer's words, the slate clapping could be heard. Younghoon picked up the question sheet slightly and spoke,

"Unfortunately, Miss Ahn Joohyun, who made a surprise visit to our show today, has to go because of her schedule."

"Sorry about that. I'd love to stay here for the whole day, but I have things to do."

"Then why don't you join our show some other time? If you promise, we'll give you a solo seat without any other guests."

"Will you really?"

"I can't make promises, but the director of our entertainment department can. Director, it's about time you use the saved-up money."

Maru applauded from the side in response. There was one additional thing necessary to 'respond' to someone's words on a TV show. It was to do it properly. The studio was not that different from a theater stage. Small voices and movements were no different from being rude.

"It's such a pity to send you off already, so can I ask for something?"

"I'll hear you out first."

"I heard that you and Mr. Maru over here have acted together in a drama once, right? I didn't know about it, but one of our writers showed me a video just now. It was incredible. You looked like you were about to kill someone and bury the corpse in a mountain or something."

"Oh, you're talking about The Witness."

Joohyun was surprised, asking where they had found something like that, but the writer had revealed everything to her beforehand. Even Younghoon's commentary about it was predetermined to a certain

extent. Scripting was as important for general TV shows as much as it was for dramas. It was definitely a difficult thing to rely on the reflexes of the hosts all the time for the show.

"I'd like to see that scene here. Originally, we were going to ask Mr. Maru to show his acting by himself, but since you're here, you should do it together."

"I've never acted on a TV show before. In fact, I don't even show up in TV shows that much."

Joohyun declined it once. This wasn't scripted. Younghoon chuckled before acting cute with that burly build of his. He even made a nasal voice. Joohyun laughed out loud.

"Miss Joohyun. You laughed, so you better do it. I don't do comedy like this anywhere, you know?"

"Alright. But even if you didn't do it, I was going to do it anyway."

"You should've told me beforehand. I don't do this that often."

"I'm sure there will be gifs floating online now."

Joohyun stood up and hinted to Maru. Maru said he was not good around strangers and that he couldn't do it, but he eventually stood in front of the main table, as though he couldn't help it.

"Oh, but we need a desk. We need to be facing each other."

"There's a splendid table right here, so you can use it however you wish."

Hearing Jay's words, the hosts all stood up and moved over to the guests' side. Maru faced Joohyun with the hosts' table between them.

"It is a little embarrassing to do it so suddenly."

"Hey, I don't even have any lines and I have to shout like crazy. You're better off than me."

"Why did I project myself to this suffering...."

"Since you're here, please do your best. You said you owe me. Though, I don't remember anything like that."

"I'm paying everything off with this, so remember it. You ready?"

"I'm always ready."

"So I just have to do it?"

Joohyun placed her hands on the table and took a deep breath. The OST from The Witness flowed out into the studio. It was one of the soundtracks that came out a lot during urgent situations. Behind Joohyun, the faces of the hosts and the guests could be seen. Their expressions were varied. Expectation, jealousy, indifference. Maru also placed his hands on the table. This was no different from any other stage. The audience in a theater looked at him with similar gazes. There was only one thing he had to do, and it was to make their eyes stay with his acting.

"Don't do it too roughly. There will be trouble if you bleed like you did back then."

"And I was praying that I would bleed."

"You're taking this as an opportunity?"

"Sure I am. Someone great is supporting me, so I should receive it well."

He didn't have the luxury to refuse when he was being fed. 'You could've started ages ago' – When Gaeul mentioned those words, he just smiled it off, but he was actually quite conscious of it. It wasn't that his repeated lives took away his desires. Just because his life was going to be reset didn't mean that he became an extreme skeptic. Maru wanted to live fiercely. Gaeul was a strong woman who did not need his support. Now that there was no need to pursue financial benefits for her sake, what Maru desired the most was a stage which he could throw himself into. Ironically, such stages were always tied to capital. Rather than dying in a deserted alley acting by himself, he wanted to act in front of the world. In order to do that though, there was a need to raise his value. He had to give the production companies the notion that putting this actor in a set that was made practically of money was a good idea.

Joohyun flicked her eyebrows once. It was her signal telling him to get ready because she was going to start acting. It was also a form of encouragement to receive her act. Maru nodded. After sending off the express train to success that was Flaming Lady, he finally got this chance. This strand of opportunity, which started off from the drama Doctors, was something that he could not afford to let go of. Even if he became sick after being fed too much, he had to receive all of it and let out everything he had. This show might become a foothold to that after all.

"Open your eyes," Joohyun said.

\* \* \*

How did things come to this? Hamin looked in front of her. Joohyun was in the driver's seat, and Han Maru was sitting next to her. A pop song she didn't know the name of resounded inside the car.

She thought back to what happened an hour ago. There was a get-together scheduled after the shoot. The participants were the cast, the producer, and the writers. It was a great opportunity to make new connections. Just as she was about to say that she was definitely going to go, Han Maru apologized and pulled out.

"I'd love to go, but I have a prior engagement. I might not be attending today, so I will definitely treat you all out next time."

Younghoon said that it was a pity and sent Maru off after a handshake. Hamin looked at him going towards the parking lot before leaving the group as well.

"I also have something to do. I'm so sorry everyone."

While she was walking towards the parking lot after leaving the group, Hamin regretted it a lot. She felt like she had wasted an opportunity to become close to those people. However, to just laugh and eat together with those people, what Maru said to her tugged her mind too much. She felt like she would have a hole in her stomach if she didn't tie up the ends properly. So, she followed Maru. She lingered around the parking lot filled with cars looking for Maru. Only after she climbed up to the third floor did she find Maru leaning next to a pillar. She called out to him and approach him. When she got closer, she found a person behind the pillar. It was Ahn Joohyun. Hamin looked at Maru and the surroundings

alternately before freezing up on the spot. She thought that Maru would naturally be by himself, but someone unexpected appeared in front of her.

"Miss Hamin?"

"Yes?"

"Do you have business with him?"

"No, uh."

She couldn't explain the reason she came looking for Maru, and since she couldn't explain, she would look suspicious. Hamin was not so proficient at smiling things off in such situations and avoiding the topic. She eyed Maru looking for help, but he looked away as though it was not related to him. He even smiled, not knowing how she felt.

"So you do have something to talk to him about. Then do you want to go eat together?"

Hamin sighed. She thought that she had to reply 'no' to that question, but she ended up nodding at the strange hope that she might be able to eat with Joohyun. The result was that she was sitting in the back seat awkwardly like this.

"Miss Hamin. How was my acting back then?" Joohyun suddenly asked a question while humming along with the pop song.

Hamin sat up stiffly. She felt like she had to reply with her utmost effort.

"It was the best."

"There are no cameras here, so you can just tell me honestly. I can only learn if I receive criticisms too."

"I mean it when I said it was the best. I was just watching from the side, yet it made me shake in nervousness. It was the ideal acting that I've always imagined about."

She wasn't lying. The reenactment of The Witness that she saw at the studio was freakishly good. Hamin did not even breathe until Joohyun and Maru's skit ended. Joohyun bared her teeth like a murderer herself in order to interrogate a crazed killer, and it felt like she showed what charisma was. When she grabbed Maru by the hair and smashed him down on the table, she honestly thought that it was a mistake. It was just that realistic. She even worried that Maru might have been injured.

"I've ridden along with the flow again today," Maru said from the side.

Hamin moved her gaze, which was on Joohyun's face, to Maru this time. This guy was surprising as well. The way he growled while his face was smashed against the table made him look like a crazed dog. The violence and cruelty could be seen in his eyes, and he felt like he would rush out and bite the throat of a human if he was not on a leash. The question sheet the hosts placed on the table fell on his body. The whole thing was so dynamic that the producer and the writer almost interrupted halfway. It wasn't surprising that the production staff were surprised. They probably didn't know that the two would go so far.

When the act ended, both the hosts and the guests forgot to applaud. Only after the soundtrack flowing through the speakers came to an end did they awkwardly praise the two.

It was so stunning that they took another break just ten minutes after they resumed. Everyone was in a daze. When she came to, the first thing Hamin felt was displeasure; as though she had seen a real interrogation scene, and as though she had seen a real killer. The other guests had similar expressions, so they probably felt similar things.

"But hey, did I butt in between you two? If it's like that, then tell me quickly. I'll get out of your way quickly."

"No! Absolutely, definitely not!" Hamin replied while waving her hands in the air in a flurry.

She didn't want to get misunderstood by her idol. Maru also replied that it wasn't like that.

"Then I guess we can take our time eating. Miss Hamin. What would you like to eat? This must be fate, so we'll go with whatever you like."

Things were going in a weird direction, but Hamin subconsciously said 'cream pasta.' After blurting those words out, she slapped down on her own lips.

#### **Chapter 886. Sequence 14**

"Um, am I really allowed to join you two?"

"What are you even saying at this point? Come on in."

Joohyun handed her car keys to the valet parking agent and entered the restaurant first. Hamin watched as the rear lights of the car disappeared into the left side of the building. She ended up following all the way here, but she thought that perhaps just going inside like this was really being shameless.

"What are you doing? Not going in?"

Maru stopped just as he was about to go in.

"I somehow came all the way here, but I feel that this isn't an occasion I should join. Also, I only called out to you because I had something to hear from you, not interrupt you two like this."

Joohyun, who had left first saying that she had a prior engagement, actually turned out to be waiting for Maru. They didn't look like they had an intimate relationship, but it was clear that they were close enough to meet up in private. It would be uncomfortable if an uninvited guest suddenly joined them when they met up to eat after a long time. If she was to return, she had to do it now. If she followed the two of them inside and ended up making the atmosphere awkward, her best day would turn into the worst.

"There's nothing you can interrupt, so just come in already. Joohyun-noonim is the kind of person to mean what she says. She's definitely not the kind of great person who would smile and do something that she doesn't want to do, so don't worry about that. In fact, if you decide to go now, you'll get an earful from her, you know? Also, she looked like she wanted to talk to you. A person who was once her fan has grown up into an actress and appeared before her after all. If you really wish to leave, then I



won't hold you back. We can talk about Kang Giwoo over the phone. Well, it's not like I have anything to tell you, but if you ask questions, I can answer them."

Maru gestured towards the door with his chin. Hamin fidgeted her toes inside her heels before walking up the stairs. Finding out what happened between Maru and Giwoo was important, but above that, she did not want to miss the opportunity to talk to Ahn Joohyun on a private occasion. There was a load of stuff that she didn't talk about during the show.

"First, let me apologize. I suspected you after just listening to one side of the story."

"It's fine since it hasn't caused me any harm. You answered me well without ignoring me during the show too. We were quite good partners back there, don't you think?"

"Yes, that's true."

Maybe it was because of the competitive spirit that was telling her not to lose against Maru that made her proactively talk back to every word he said. She planned to suppress him using her talking skills. Though, as time passed, she joined the flow rather than suppressing him and they became like a team.

They were guided to the 2nd floor by a waiter. Right in front of the stairs was a bar-like eating space. Two pairs of young couples were sitting side by side. The night scenery could be seen behind the whole-glass wall. The lights emitted by various buildings turned the big panes of glass into stained glasses.

"The lighthouses of overnight shifts, I see," Maru said.

The rather emotional-looking scenery suddenly felt tragic. Hamin's lips twitched. It wasn't that she wanted him to get into the mood, but she definitely didn't want him to break other people's moods as well. Lighthouses of overnight shifts?

"What were you two up to that you were so late?" Joohyun said as soon as they opened the door and went inside.

Joohyun was no different from a model as she sat down comfortably on a chair with her coat off. She wanted to take a photo with her. It was an opportunity she did not want to miss as a fan since she was young. She fidgeted with her phone as she sat down. While taking glimpses at her, she met eyes with her.

"Miss Hamin. You've been giving me a lot of glances for a while, but I'm not such a strange person. The media likes to show me as a rough person, but they're all just false reports."

"They aren't really false," Maru said as he tilted his cup.

The way they exchanged jokes made them look like they were very close. She was once again worried that she might have interrupted an occasion she should not be joining.

"You can be at ease. I invited you out to eat because I wanted to talk to you, Miss Hamin. I'm personally grateful too, about you not forgetting what happened 10 years ago and telling me about it, as well as the fact that you made me such memories. Whether it's how you look or what you said back then, they're all so vague now, but I do remember two girls screeching while running towards me."

"We weren't screeching."

“Even though I remember two girls shouting ‘unni’ in really loud voices as they ran across the sandy beach?”

“We did shout because we felt delighted, but it wasn’t on the level of a screech.”

“Really?”

“No.... Probably.”

She faintly recalled that the people around looked at them with surprise. Hamin scrubbed the table for no reason. It felt dream-like to talk to her face-to-face like this, but remembering what she did in the past made her embarrassed.

“Why did you want to see me so much when you were so young? I’m not entirely sure, but if I remember correctly, you told me that you came all the way to Busan from Seoul.”

“Yes, we did go to Busan from Seoul.”

“It must not be easy going all the way to Busan when you’re just a middle school student. Did you really come just to see me?”

“That friend of mine has a good driver. Moreover, she told me she would pay the travel expenses and told me to go with her. She was quite well-off, you see. Monetary problems are the biggest roadblock when you’re young, but that had been taken care of, so there was no reason for me not to go.”

The awkward silence lifted. Hamin became excited as she talked. She talked about the fact that she found out about Ahn Joohyun’s schedule through the mom of her friend, the fact that she had a sleepless night with the train ticket in her hand, the fact that she asked around everywhere in order to find Ahn Joohyun in Busan, and finally, the fact that she screeched after seeing her.

“See? You did screech,” Joohyun interrupted.

Hamin smiled awkwardly. Joohyun listened to everything she said joyfully without looking bored. Seeing her express that she was interested with her whole body made her even more excited which made her talk about how happy she was back then. She even mentioned how they laughed and chatted throughout the whole night at a hotel with the signed shirts.

“I’ll ask just in case, but do you still have that shirt with you?”

“I have it at home. It’s too small for me now, but I am keeping it.”

“Can’t you give it to me?”

“Absolutely not.”

“Even though I signed it for you?”

“I heard that taking away what you’ve given away is a bad thing to do.”

“Then let’s exchange it. I’ll sign this coat and give it to you, so give me that shirt. I also want to own an item that contains memories like that. It’ll make me feel better if I can look at it from time to time and remind myself that there were two young girls who came to see me.”

Joohyun grabbed her coat, telling her not to hesitate. She really looked like she would take out a pen if she wasn't stopped. Hamin felt complex. Joohyun laid out the coat on the table. The brand logo that she knew had one more zero than what she expected, entered her eyes. She reflexively raised her hand.

"You can't sign an expensive coat like that."

"Then I'll give you the coat without signing it, so can you give me the shirt?"

"No. I won't give you the shirt. It's mine."

"Miss Hamin. You are quite a stubborn person unlike what I saw during the show."

She felt that the conversation was heading in a weird direction, but she became weirdly obsessed with protecting her shirt after seeing Joohyun's serious eyes. That shirt was a treasure that contained her memories. She managed to get a sign from an actress she admired on her first trip with a friend of hers.

"You'll receive retribution if you toy around with a young person like that," Maru said from the side.

He kept drinking the appetizer tea, saying that it was good. When he raised the teapot, Joohyun made a soft smile and pushed out her cup. She also hung the coat back on the coat hanger. Hamin realized that she had been toyed with.

"You should also have a drink and calm down. It's a habit of hers to probe people out and play pranks on them."

"It wasn't a prank though. I really want that shirt," Joohyun said while giving Maru a glare.

Hamin received the tea for now. She was just feeling thirsty from all the talking.

"She did something similar to me when I was in high school. She's a strange person who asks a kid about what acting philosophy he has, so don't worry about it too much."

"Did you ever see me ask that to other people? I only asked because there was a kid in front of me who I didn't know what he was thinking. Usually, I just chat delightfully like I'm doing with Miss Hamin here."

"It may be delightful for you, but it makes the listener feel complex because they can't tell whether you're joking or being serious. I mean, look at her. She looked good before she came here."

"She looks the same. Miss Hamin. Did I make you uncomfortable?"

Hamin shook her head. She was rather flustered, but it was fun regardless. She could talk to Joohyun like a friend despite the fact that this was practically her first time meeting her. If her friend heard about this, she would be very surprised, and she might even get angry for not calling her over.

"Uhm, can you take a photo with me?"

Maybe it was because of the nice talk that allowed her to gain the courage to speak. Though, she wouldn't be able to do anything if she said no.

"You were giving me glances just to say that?"

"No... actually, yes. May I?"

"In fact, I would have asked for it if you didn't. It's not every day you get to meet a fan like this. Han Maru, what are you doing? Get her phone."

Maru put out his hand while sipping tea. Hamin quickly placed her phone in his hand and went next to Joohyun. She stood modestly and created a v with her fingers.

"Come closer. It's a celebratory occasion."

"Can I?"

"You have a cute side to you, huh? You don't have to ask for my permission for everything. You're someone I invited out to eat because I wanted to."

Joohyun hooked arms with her and smiled brightly. Maru, who was standing on the other side, raised the phone to eye-level.

"Here it goes. Three-two-one."

There was no pause between his words at all. As soon as he said those words, he shot a photo and lowered his phone. Hamin subconsciously raised her voice,

"Do it properly!"

Only after she said it did she regret it. She felt like she snapped out too sharply. Joohyun, who hooked arms with her, laughed to the point that it echoed inside the room.

"Yes, that's the voice I remember. Maru, do it properly, will you? Go up on a chair and get a good angle."

"You called me here to have me do this, didn't you?"

"You just realized? Go on up. I have to look pretty in the picture with Miss Hamin."

Maru scratched his eyebrows and went up on a chair. Hamin took a photo with Joohyun with their cheeks almost touching each other. The moment she took the photo, she had the vague premonition that everything would go well this year.

"Can I send the photo to the friend that was with me back then?"

"Of course, you should do that. But do you still keep in touch? A 10-year friendship sounds amazing."

"Yes. She's also an actress. Unlike me, she's been practicing acting since she was young."

"Then I might know her, huh?"

"I heard that she met you in a press conference? Or something like that."

"That's quite a fate too. Tell me about her too."

Just as she was about to send the photo to her friend, the door opened and a server came in with a cart full of food.

"Let's talk about the rest over some food. If you don't want to, I am more than willing to hear you out while eating by myself, so keep on talking. Oh, you know that pasta doesn't taste good once it gets bloated, right?" Maru said while pointing at the plates.

## Chapter 887. Sequence 14

"I know it's a little too late to ask, but what business did you have with Maru, Miss Hamin? You looked really urgent."

Hamin put down the pasta she wrapped around her fork. It was a question that she wished wasn't asked. She didn't know what to say to it.

"Looks like I asked a difficult question. Sorry, I was just a little curious."

Joohyun smiled while rinsing her mouth with some water. Hamin looked at Maru, who was next to her. Maru, who was dipping a slice of baguette into a gambas al ajillo, received the gaze and shrugged as though he was completely clueless.

"Should I give you two some space after all?" Joohyun asked.

"No, you don't have to."

"It bothers me that you two are exchanging glances like that. It makes me feel like I'm interrupting something."

"It's really nothing like that. Right, Mr. Maru?"

She did not want to put Joohyun in discomfort. She was a person that Hamin was grateful to for inviting her out to a meal and listening to her stories. She couldn't bear to push out the host when she butted in midway.

"I told you. You shouldn't get swept up by the atmosphere. She's acting like that because you keep reacting to her, Miss Hamin," Maru said as he lifted the oil-soaked baguette. Hamin looked at Joohyun's face. She looked wronged. She looked like she had been scammed after signing a loophole-filled contract.

"Don't look away and keep staring at her," Maru said just as she was about to take her eyes off.

Hamin kept her eyes fixed on Joohyun, feeling like she was doing something wrong. Not long later, Joohyun frowned.

"Are you really not going to tell me even though I went so far as to do this? I would have revealed it because it bothered me so much."

Joohyun grumbled and put a piece of steak in her mouth. She was a lot more liberal and prone to acting as she pleased than she had originally thought. Hamin had momentarily forgotten that she was the kind of person to swear at the media and that she liked her because of it.

"She's the type of person to think that holding back because of the mood is making a loss," Maru said.

At this point, she found herself pathetic for being so nervous about the matter with Kang Giwoo. Was it a matter she had to hide from Joohyun? In fact, it felt like it would be better to reveal everything and get her opinion on it. Since she was close to Maru, she would keep this matter a secret as well. Hamin turned around to face Maru.

"I'd like to continue talking about what we talked about at the studio, is that alright with you?"

“I believe I said that I told you everything back then.”

“It’s because something doesn’t sit right with me.”

Hamin got ready to speak and looked at Joohyun.

“I will not say anything I heard here outside. If what is said here gets around outside and you receive harm because of it, I will take full responsibility. I will not talk about it, but if such a thing happens, I will take responsibility even if it’s not me.”

“I believe you, and this is nothing that great, so there’s no need to call it a secret. Maybe I’m just misunderstanding all of this.”

A misunderstanding – she wished for it to be like that. Giwoo wasn’t simply a friend. Giwoo was the actor who had the closest relationship to her agency, Soul. If Giwoo indeed intentionally vaguely ended his words so that she could come to the wrong conclusion with malicious intentions, how was she supposed to face him in the future? Just being worried about it felt stifling. It would be great if he could remain the grateful friend who helped her out during her time of need.

“What do you want to know about that person?”

Maru spoke first. He did not say Giwoo and instead referred to him as ‘that person.’ She thought that he was being considerate. Hamin decided to do the same.

“First, what I know is that that person is an incredibly good friend. I’m not saying this just vaguely. That person encouraged me a lot when I had a hard time. I said during the shoot that I started off as an idol but failed. Just as I was feeling despair, the agency reached out to me, suggesting that I should switch to being an actor instead of staying as an idol.”

“You said your agency is Soul, right, Miss Hamin?” Joohyun asked.

She replied ‘yes’ to that.

“I met that person there. That person gave me courage when I was exhausted. Thanks to that, I was able to gain energy.”

“And that person spoke badly about me, or to be precise, induced you to think that way. Am I right?”

Maru was right on point. This was definitely something she had to set straight.

“That person told me that he mentioned your name to the writer of ‘Doctors’ so that you could do well. Is this true?”

“It is. I heard from the writer herself. Though, I have an idea as to why he did such a thing.”

“If it’s true that he did that, then that person did it for your sake, right, Mr. Maru?”

“If you look at the results, then yes.”

Hamin tensed her eyes.

“Then don’t you think what you said back at the studio is a little too off? You told me that becoming suspicious after just listening to one side of the story is nothing good, right? But now that we checked, that person has not lied at all. In fact, he helped.”

“That’s a feasible suspicion. It’s also natural for you to believe that person you’ve known for a long time instead of me who you met for the first time today. Honestly speaking, I don’t really care how you see me, as long as it doesn’t directly harm me. If harming someone in one’s imagination is illegal, the entire Korean peninsula won’t be big enough to imprison all the criminals. However, I will give you some help to clear your mind since you seem to believe that this is such a serious problem that it is to the point that it made you come all the way here.”

Maru wiped his mouth with a napkin. All of his actions exuded leisure. The way he responded calmly made her suspicious instead. The president of her former agency, who had gone missing, also had a nice, gentle first impression. Joohyun was watching, no longer having that smiling expression on her face.

“First up, what is it that you want, Miss Hamin?”

“What I want?”

“I’m sure there’s something you want. You didn’t come to me without a goal.”

“First, I want to set things straight. There are two things I am sure of. One is that that person talked to the writer about you, and the other one is that he described you poorly in front of me.”

“To be precise, he didn’t describe me poorly, but made you think like that, correct?”

“Yes.”

“There’s a simple solution to this. You know his number, right?”

.

“I do.”

“Then call him and ask him yourself. That’s the most surefire method. It would be a meaningless act if I were not here with you, but it is a different story if I’m here listening with you. Just promise me one thing. If he asks how I did, then tell him that I did terribly. Also, tell him that you did great and so I wasn’t able to say a word.”

“Would I find out something if I say that?”

“Yes. There’s a bit of a lie mixed in, but just think of it as a checking process, or you can consider it as repayment for suspecting me for no reason. I’m telling you this beforehand because you look like you dislike deceiving people.”

Just as he said, this didn’t feel right to her. She would be suspecting a friend of hers after all. There was the option to put an end to the situation here and accept the conclusion that she made for herself, but she felt like she would regret it if she left it hanging like this. Thinking about how she ended up after trusting the missing president’s words, this was something she ought not to delay.

“One more thing. If things go well, I’m sure things will become awry for you. If you don’t have confidence in your skills in feigning innocence, you might as well stop here. After all, it’s completely fine for you to think of me as a bad guy.”

“Isn’t it uncomfortable to receive suspicion from another person without a reason?”

“I told you. I don’t care as long as I don’t receive direct harm. What I am a little worried about is what would happen to you if you keep associating yourself with that person, but honestly, that’s none of my business.”

“Putting it like that makes me want to check even more.”

Hamin took out her phone. Once she made a call, Joohyun would find out that the person they were talking about was Giwoo, but it should be fine. She had given a promise that she would not expose any of this outside this place. She changed her phone to speaker mode and made the call.

-Hamin. Did you finish the shoot?

“Yeah. Thanks to you, it went without a hitch.”

-It’s not thanks to me. It’s because you prepared well. Wasn’t it hard?

“It was okay.”

Maru stared at her. Hamin licked her lower lip with her tongue and spoke,

“People said I did well too.”

-That’s good.

“Also, you know Han Maru, right?”

-Yeah.

“I didn’t do it because I heard such things about him from you, but I somehow ended up blocking him from speaking. It was his first TV show appearance, but he wasn’t able to do anything. After the shoot, he even glared at me.”

-Really?

“You had a hard time because of him, didn’t you? I received a lot of help from you when I had a hard time. It’s not really a repayment, but I wanted to tell you. He did terribly.”

-Er, Hamin.

“Yeah?”

-I don’t understand what you’re talking about. Why did you do such a thing to Maru? I should have told you that I am on good terms with Maru.

Giwoo’s voice contained panic. Hamin looked at Maru, who was right in front of her. Maru just put his hand out in front as a gesture for her to continue.

“You told me right before the shoot, didn’t you?”



-Tell you what?

“You didn’t say what exactly, but you put on a difficult expression because of Han Maru. You even fled the place without finishing your words.”

-That was just because I suddenly remembered something urgent. But Hamin, was Han Maru that helpless? Did he look angry? I’m asking because I’m worried.

Hamin didn’t know what to say. Then what was with that bitter smile and pained look in his eyes that he showed while talking about Maru that day?

-Hamin?

“Sorry. It looks like I misunderstood.”

-Yes, you misunderstood. I am on great terms with Maru. You didn’t happen to tell Maru that you acted aggressively because of me, right? I trust that you aren’t such a hasty person.

Hamin shut her mouth. The missing president’s speech tone overlapped with Kang Giwoo’s voice. Maru drew his hand across his neck. He seemed to be asking her to finish the call.

“Sorry for calling when you must be busy. I’ll hang up now.”

-Alright. Good work.

Hamin pressed the end call button. This was the result she wanted: that she was misunderstanding. She should be feeling refreshed, but she felt a headache instead. It was because Giwoo pulled out while saying that everything was entirely her fault. Not only that, he even tried to check on Maru’s state discreetly. He even sounded joyous when he asked if Maru was angry. She looked at the black screen on her phone. Was it over now?

“How quick.”

Maru’s phone rang. He put it in speaker mode as well and placed it down on the table.

“What is it?”

Maru replied aggressively, as though he wasn’t feeling good. Giwoo’s voice could be heard.

-Maru, are you okay? I heard from Miss Hamin that you weren’t able to focus on the shoot because of her. I felt sorry for it, so I called you about it. Actually, Hamin, that girl, is a little slow-witted. She trusts what other people say easily, so there seems to be a misunderstanding.

She had to hold herself back from laughing because of the absurdity. ‘Miss Hamin’, he said. Maru pulled out two napkins.

-Maru? Can you hear me? What’s wrong with this....

Hamin wanted to tell him that the Han Maru he was looking for was waving napkins around in the air like he was dancing.

“Bingo,” Maru said softly.

## Chapter 888. Sequence 14

“Sorry, my phone was not working for a second. I get what you mean so later.”

-If you're angry because the shoot didn't go well, I'll apologize in her stead.

“It's not even your fault. Also, the shoot went well. It looks like you're misunderstanding something. It went so well that I couldn't think of it as my first ever TV show. I didn't know that I would do so well. Though, there is the fact that I've received help from many places.”

-Really?

“Yes, I'm telling you. I actually got along with Miss Hamin quite well, so the shoot ended quite delightfully. I'm not sure what made you worry about me, but don't waste your energy on useless things. We aren't close enough to do things like that. It's about time we stop asking each other how we're doing, don't you think? We're worse than strangers.”

-What got you so mad now? Aren't we close friends? Oh yeah, are things going well with senior Suyeon? You two seemed to be in a good mood from what I saw last time.

Hamin immediately recalled Kim Suyeon when she heard the name 'senior Suyeon.' During the shoot, there was a phone interview with Suyeon as well. It was just her instinct, so there was a chance that she was wrong, but her instinct was on the more accurate side. Were he and Suyeon not just close but actually lovers? She wanted to pretend like she didn't hear it because it was a very private matter, but Giwoo's voice was way too loud.

Maybe he was fine with his romantic relationships being exposed? Or maybe he was expressing that there was no special relationship between them? Maru kept waving around the napkins in his hands and continued the talk,

“I don't know what you're talking about. Did you see me that day?”

-Right, that was a private room, wasn't it? I'm sorry if I annoyed you. There's no way I mentioned it to get on your nerves, right? It was just a mistake, so please understand.

“So these days, you can smack a person and be forgiven if it's a mistake?”

His voice was sharp to the point that it made her face prickle. Maru spoke as though he was incredibly angry, even though he was waving around napkins in the air. His face was smiling, but his voice was growling like he was about to wrestle with an opponent. Incomprehensible things were unfolding right in front of her. Why was it that Maru was pretending to be angry? And why was it that Giwoo's voice contained more and more hints of laughter the more intense Maru's false anger became? And also, why did Joohyun look like she was in disbelief, with her eyes twitching and everything? Everything about this brought up questions that she wanted to know the answers to.

-Let's have a drink together some time, with Gaeul too.

“Not happening. If you wanna drink, then drink by yourself. Play a video or something. I heard that drinking alone these days isn't as pitiful as before.”

-Don't say that and....

Before Giwoo's words even ended, Maru pressed the end call button. Hamin had a lot to ask. Just as she was about to ask one of the questions floating in her mind....

"You're going out with Kim Suyeon?" Joohyun abruptly stood up from her chair and asked.

She approached Maru without hesitation. She crossed her arms and looked down at Maru, and she looked like she would not hesitate to use violence depending on his answer. Hamin swallowed the question floating around in her mouth. Joohyun's eyes were too scary for her to speak right now.

"A man and a woman can date, yes. I hate that woman so much, but it's between you two, so let's say that it can happen. But what about Gaeul? You're real trash if you make such a good girl cry like that."

What was this now? She found out two secrets that she didn't want to know about. She even wanted to leave the room. She felt like she would get to hear all sorts of things if she kept staying here. She had the confidence to keep secrets since she wasn't the type to spout sensitive topics, but there would be nothing good for her to know about another person's sensitive romantic history. She felt uncomfortable, but her head still decided to organize the situations in her head. Maru was dating a person named Gaeul, and he was two-timing her with Kim Suyeon? Or did he wrap things up with her and was dating Kim Suyeon anew? Seeing Joohyun's response, it was likely that he was two-timing.

The situation suddenly turned dynamic like it was a morning drama. Was she supposed to stay still in a corner without saying anything? Just as she felt rather embarrassed and started fidgeting with her fork, she recalled a woman, an actress, who both Joohyun and Giwoo were acquainted with and went by that name. Coincidentally, that actress was shooting the same drama as Giwoo and Hamin herself. It wouldn't be strange for Joohyun to know about her if she was an actress too. The pieces suddenly fell into the right positions. Hamin subconsciously blurted out,

"Are you perhaps talking about the actress Han Gaeul?"

The one who showed a response was Joohyun. She denied it immediately as though she just remembered that Hamin was here. To Hamin though, that sounded like 'yes.'

"Is this a confession room? Sensitive topics are flying around everywhere."

Maru scratched his eyebrows and sighed. Hamin had to become awkward without even any time to admire her own deduction skills.

"I'm sure you aren't the type of person to blurt other people's stories out like the absurd guy we just called, right?"

"I'll pretend like I never heard it. I'll even forget about what I just said."

"You can't pretend like you never heard it when you did hear it. Just don't talk about it anywhere. I'm not asking your conscience for this request. If what you heard here somehow ends up in Kang Giwoo's ears or rumors about it spread around, I will make you very uncomfortable with all the means at my disposal. I'm not joking. I hope that such a thing doesn't happen, I truly do. If what you heard here ends up getting spread outside, a person very important to me might get into trouble. I am quite tolerant when it comes to malice that's directed at me, but I cannot stand any form of malice towards my person."

For a brief moment, she was reminded of the Maru that she saw during the shoot. He had the eyes of the murderer that he acted. At the same time, he had the eyes of someone who was desperately trying to protect something. He was reminiscent of a guard dog that would neither bark nor bite unless one approached the fences. If she tried putting her hand between the fences even as a joke, she would definitely get bitten.

“I will absolutely not say it anywhere,” she said in resolve.

She didn’t have any intentions of telling others about this in the first place, but she felt like there was a need to establish some trust by expressing herself loud and clear so that she didn’t get bitten by him and could get along with him in peace.

“We’re both in a position where getting exposed means trouble, so let us both be careful. First, noonim, do you think I’m crazy enough to break up with Gaeul? It’s nothing like that. I replied like that during the call just now because of some circumstances.”

Maru gave Hamin a glance while mentioning ‘circumstances.’ He meant that he would tell her the details later because Hamin was here. Hamin wished for him to do that. Her heart couldn’t tolerate any more of Maru’s secrets.

“Fine. I’ll trust you for now. But does Gaeul know about this?”

“Yes. I’ll explain it to you later.”

“You’ll have to explain it properly.”

“I don’t dare lie to you. Also, Miss Hamin, since it came down to this, allow me to tell you something. You should only involve yourself with Kang Giwoo for business needs. He might be treating you nicely now, but he will mercilessly cut you off with a smile if things go wrong. I’m sure you understand a little after that call just now.”

Maru pointed at his phone. She was once again reminded of Giwoo’s voice. Not even a minute after she ended her call with him, he called Maru and exposed everything while probing him. That was definitely not nice. Giwoo’s ever-so-nice first impression started crumbling.

“Kang Giwoo, huh. I’ve never seen him after meeting him during the shoot for the movie ‘Building,’ but he’s known to be quite a gentleman, isn’t he? Now that I think about it, Gaeul was there too,” Joohyun said.

“He’s a mood maker. He treats people nicely too.”

“They say you can never know what someone is thinking, and I can see that rumors can’t be trusted after all. I can see how worthless he is from what you showed me just now. Miss Hamin. People can lie and change their words in life, right? I mean, I’ve lived like that too. It’s actually quite hard to speak what’s on your mind. But someone who knows manners would not change their words on a whim just like that because of a phone call. I’ve experienced much dirtier things than what you can probably imagine, and the people who stand at the center of such matters change their words every second for the sole sake of their convenience.”

Hamin nodded. He turned what she clearly remembered into a simple ‘misunderstanding’ and did not hesitate to call the related person just to mock him. She could not interpret this in a good way at all. Even the most optimistic person would swear if they were put in the center of this scenario.

“But what you said to her just now was going overboard. You sounded like a typical villain,” Joohyun said while pressing Maru's forehead with her index finger.

Maru replied as though he only did what was natural,

“You know that I’m human trash. Miss Hamin. You know that likes repel, right? The reason I despise Kang Giwoo so much is because he’s also human trash. You should respond well and squeeze out the recyclable bits before throwing him away. That’s the most beneficial relationship with him.”

“I’ll put those words to memory.”

“Don’t forget what I said too. I was definitely not joking.”

“I’ll also remember that as well. I don’t want to be in an uncomfortable position either. But now, the things I told him and the things you told him are completely different.”

She told Giwoo that she had given Maru a blow during the shoot, while in reality, the two of them got along so well that they talked to each other a lot throughout the show. If Giwoo watched the show and called after that, she would not know how to respond.

“Just tell him that you told him that because you wanted to look good in front of him. Princes like being lifted onto a pedestal. Giwoo probably thinks that it’s natural for you to treat him like that. As long as you can respond to that well, there won’t be a big problem. He’s probably feeling smug right now thinking that he’s given me a blow,” Maru said.

Hamin committed those words to memory. She thought that she could make use of it later. Just what was the relationship between the two? To consider them as enemies, Giwoo sounded too nice. Maru played along with him to a certain extent as well.

“Er, can I ask one more thing?”

“What is it?”

“Are you really dating Miss Han Gaeul?”

“Yes. You heard everything, so I guess there’s nothing to hide anymore. But why are you curious about that?”

“Because a friend of mine is really close to Miss Gaeul. I’m not entirely sure because I only heard a few things from her, but I heard that she was too busy to meet up with her nowadays.”

“Someone close to Gaeul? Who is it? I think I might know her too.”

“It’s Yoojin. Lee Yoojin.”

Maru exclaimed ‘ah’ the moment he heard the name.

**Chapter 889. Sequence 14**

“Then I’ll be leaving now.”

“Watch out on your way home. Respond well if Giwoo ever calls you.”

“I will. Er, senior.”

Joohyun told Hamin, who looked at her after saying goodbye to Maru, that it was okay to call her any time.

“Thank you.”

“You’re welcome. I’ve taken a liking to you. I’ll drop the honorifics with you next time. A sister-like relationship is better than a senior-junior relationship. See you next time.”

Hamin stiffly replied ‘yes’ like a shy teenage girl. The taxi that had been called stopped in front of the restaurant. Joohyun gave her a 50 thousand won bill despite her adamant refusal before sending her home. She was someone who would feel uncomfortable sending a junior of hers off without anything. Hamin opened the window and said that she’d treat her out next time.

“What a good girl. It’s nice to see someone like that.”

“Noonim. You look out for your juniors quite a lot. You even give them taxi fares.”

“Only then does it put me at ease. I became popular suddenly without any period in the dark, so I don’t know what a rookie’s pains are like, but I’ve seen some quite a lot.”

“You’re secretly even bragging, huh?”

“I wonder if you know the hypothesis that all languages in the world came to be in order to brag.”

“I think I might have heard of something like that before. But are you going to give me money when I go home as well? If possible, I’d like two 50 thousand won bills. I’m a junior of yours too, but if I remember correctly, you’ve never given me taxi fares before.”

“But you earn a decent amount.”

“What about when I was back in high school?”

“It’s a bad thing to keep bringing up the past.”

Joohyun pointed at the café in front of the restaurant. They still had things to talk about.

“Aren’t there too many people there?”

“And what about it?”

Joohyun pushed the door open instead of Maru who was hesitant. She knew what Maru was worried about. When the door attached to the bell started ringing, the people sitting near the door gave her a glance. It was probably a reflexive action. Most people turned their focus back to their own coffee and the people they were with, but a group of girls sitting at the table left of the door did not take their eyes off her. Joohyun winked at them and walked inside. Maru was still outside.

“What are you doing?”

Joohyun waved at Maru. Only then did he walk through the door with an awkward smile.

“You’re different from the actors I know of. Those people prefer places without a crowd.”

“I’m sure that’s just what’s more comfortable for them, and this is just what’s more comfortable for me. If you think about it, having a strong impression isn’t all that bad.”

Joohyun stood in front of the counter. After ordering, she received an alarm token.

“Uhm, you’re Joohyun-unni, right?”

It was the group of college girls. Two of them remained at the table, while three of them came to her. In their hands were pieces of A4 paper that they clearly intended to use for their assignments. She took a step closer to them, as they were too nervous to come any closer.

“I am.”

Even after listening to her answer, the three of them hesitated. After a few seconds of exchanging gazes, the one in the center held out the piece of A4.

“Unni, I’m really sorry, but can you give me an autograph?”

“If possible, a photo too.”

“Me too.”

When one of them spoke, the other ones followed suit. The two others who were watching them from the table had also approached.

“We’ll be bothering the others if we’re too loud, so let’s take a photo at your place. But you can’t interrupt me while I talk, okay?”

“We won’t disturb you even if we die.”

“You don’t have to die. Are you going to take one together?”

She sat down and gave the students an autograph each. While she took photos, she could see Maru walk over to the counter with the alarm token.

“Good luck with studying.”

Leaving behind the girls who shouted ‘we love you unni,’ she walked over to the table in the corner of the café. Maru was drinking some coffee through a straw.

“Are you done with your fan service?”

“For now.”

She sat down and grabbed her cup. The girls were quite obedient. They didn’t even glance her way as though to keep their promise to not disturb her. They were quite cute.

“Care to finish what you were talking about before?”

She had to hear the story of Kang Giwoo, Han Gaeul, and Han Maru that he could only vaguely talk about when Hamin was present. Two of the three were her cherished juniors, and the other one was an actor whom she had a good impression of. She had to find out the details of the situation so that she could respond accordingly in the future.

“It’s a bit of a long story. I’ve been tangled up with him since high school in a bad way.”

Maru bit on his straw hard as he talked about Kang Giwoo. It seemed that he despised him quite a lot. According to what Joohyun knew, Maru was the type to smile the more he hated or was displeased with a person. Not making enemies was like a life philosophy for him after all. If he went against that philosophy and expressed his clear hostility, it meant that his anger was considerable. Perhaps it might be better to call it hatred.

Maru sipped on his coffee for quite a while as though he was organizing their history until he started talking, starting with the words ‘that guy.’ Joohyun listened earnestly and focused on Maru’s expression. It was a long story that a person who wasn’t good at talking would have a hard time explaining, yet Maru quietly talked about everything without stopping. His first impression, the cruel deeds that Kang Giwoo made his ‘friend’ do, and the way he called such cruel actions ‘pranks.’ Just from that, she knew he wasn’t a man to be associated with. She even jumped up on the spot when she heard what a young girl named Bitna had to go through. How scary must it have been for such a little girl? If Kang Giwoo was in front of her, she would have grabbed him by the collar.

“That’s why Suyeon-noona listened to my request. It was better for us to make him have the misconception that Gaeul and I broke up.”

“So Kim Suyeon can do something kind for once, huh.”

She felt chills go down her back when she thought about how Kang Giwoo might have done something to Gaeul as he was the type to treat other people like objects. Thankfully, things didn’t seem to go awfully wrong thanks to Maru’s good responses.

“Then why do you look like that? You’ve solved the case, haven’t you?”

Maru smiled bitterly after she said those words.

“It’s just that something unthinkable has happened. Noonim, are you the type of person to notice if a man has feelings for you?”

“Most of the time. But isn’t that the same for you? You can discern if a man is simply being kind or if he has other feelings after a couple of meetings.”

“How about asking someone out for a meal in private despite having been rejected once already?”

“That’s obvious. One hundred percent.”

“And therein lies the problem.”

“That’s the problem?”

Joohyun was about to sip some coffee when she realized what that meant. She felt like cockroaches were suddenly crawling in front of her. Not one, but dozens of them.



“Kang Giwoo that fucker likes Gaeul?”

Her voice became a pitch higher. Maru became startled and gestured to her to calm down. Joohyun let out a breath while pushing her lower lip forward. The café felt warm when she came in, but now it felt hot. She was fuming inside.

“What did Gaeul say?”

“Obviously, she told me she would handle it. Even if I want to help her, I don’t really have a way. I mean, as you probably know, the easiest way is to admit that we’re dating, right?”

“That’s the surefire method.”

“Once he realizes that he’s been toyed with, I can imagine what kind of things he might do. He’ll probably start by leaking the news to entertainment journalists. Gaeul can become a good actress. She’s a good actress now, but she can definitely become someone who can play on a larger stage. You must know how fatal a scandal, no, a clear truth like that is to a girl like that. People aren’t as opposed to dating as they were before, but you can only find less than a handful of people admitting their relationship. Everyone’s being cautious so that they don’t get chewed by the blind public’s teeth.”

Joohyun bought a cold drink from the counter and gulped it down in one go. She couldn’t tell him to announce it openly without being so frustrated about it. Maru’s worries were things that all actors went through. Entertainers talked about love more passionately than anyone else, but ironically, they were also restricted from love more than anyone else. Entertainers who are at a suitable age for marriage might be able to get married while receiving the cheers of their fans, but for celebrities who were still growing while receiving the love of the younger generation, romantic relationships usually became a flaw. Entertainment agencies that started off as idol management agencies still put ‘no romantic relationships’ in their contracts. The fact that such a thing was explicitly stated in contracts was proof that romantic relationships were detrimental to earning money.

“I’m worried about Gaeul now.”

“She tells me she’s okay every day, and I have no choice but to keep watching her without being able to do anything, so I’m getting stressed out. I trust that she’ll respond well, but worrying is another matter altogether. She’s not a stranger to me.”

“Maybe we should’ve gone for a drink instead of coffee.”

She could feel how frustrated Maru was. She didn’t have a way to help either. She could go with her usual personality and give Kang Giwoo an insult the moment she met him, but Maru would probably not want that. It’d be rather strange to insult him rather suddenly.

“Just give her some encouragement when you see her later.”

“Encouragement? I’ll bring her around to some good places so that she can get some energy.”

“Thank you. Now that I got that off my mind, I do feel a little refreshed.”

“If something like that happened, you should’ve called me out way before and asked me to take you out to drink. I would’ve taken you out even if it meant putting off my schedule.”

“That’s exactly the reason I didn’t tell you about it. Also, you know I’m not the type of person who does that.”

“I know. I know that you don’t like talking about a matter that you can’t resolve by just talking about it. But what do I do about this prick Kang Giwoo? I can’t exactly beat him up.”

“You know what they say. You avoid shit because it’s dirty. Just don’t get yourself involved with him. It’ll be a pain if the smell gets on you.”

“If you see shit on the side of the road, you should clean it up.”

Actors were those that only met during work unless they became personally close. She had never seen Kang Giwoo in private after shooting the movie ‘Building.’ She thought that he was a polite junior who could respect his seniors, but he turned out to be arrogant trash who waved around his sword everywhere. From how he controlled others behind their backs, he was more like the secret mastermind.

“Oh, I was right. It is Ahn Joohyun.”

Joohyun turned around. A couple was putting a phone out to her with their arms locked.

“Hey, take a photo for us.”

“I’m sorry, but I don’t feel like it right now. Sorry.”

The man stepped up, dissatisfied that his girlfriend was rejected.

“Taking a photo isn’t such a hard thing to do. Also, why are you being so gnarly? Your attitude towards fans is terrible.”

Her temple felt like it was thumping. Joohyun stood up on the spot. She could hear Maru say something. He was probably trying to stop her. If she were feeling good, she would have taken photos with the rude couple that claimed to be her fans, but not now.

“Give me the phone.”

The man smiled victoriously. Joohyun raised the phone and took a photo of the couple. The couple froze on the spot as they were just about to approach her.

“I took a photo of you, so done now?”

“Are you kidding me?”

“That’s a little rude. Do you think I’m kidding? Am I your personal clown or something? How dare you shove your phone right at my face from the get-go!”

She expressed about a quarter of the anger she got from Kang Giwoo. The couple freaked out from just that. The man stuttered incomprehensibly as though he had no idea that a celebrity would shout at his face. The woman also paled.

“Got something to say to me?”

The man glared at her as though he was trying to save his pride before leaving the café. Left behind, the woman also followed suit. She felt a little more clear-headed now. Maybe she should snap out at Kang Giwoo if she met him after all? The guests around started applauding. The girls who were watching from afar shouted that she was cool.

“Noonim, you shouldn’t vent your anger on the wrong people,” Maru said with a smile.

#### **Chapter 890. Sequence 14**

“Let me catch that guy once, and I’ll make him cry until he can’t anymore. He sounds like someone who thinks he can look down on anything just because he’s the grandson of the head of a big business company, but I should let him know that the world isn’t so easy.”

“Don’t get too angry.”

“I’m getting angry in your stead.”

“I’m really grateful for that, but I don’t want to see you getting involved with him. If it was anyone else, I would have just smiled it off, but you’re someone who would really take action, just like what you did to that couple just now.”

Ahn Joohyun was definitely not all talk. If she said that she was going to do it, she was the type of person to forge ahead no matter what anyone said to her. She was the epitome of being decisive. She was someone who recklessly went against problems despite experiencing dangerous things in the past, so even if her opponent was Kang Giwoo, she would probably not hold back.

“I’m sure I don’t look reliable to you, but please let him be this time just this once.”

“You are reliable. It’s just that what he did is so awful. I really just want to grab him and ask why he did so. Just what is in his head that made him act like that? Does he not have any sense of ethics or morals?”

“I’m sure he does. It must be that the boundaries of his ethics and morals are strangely narrow. He’s probably more obedient and kind to his family, you know?”

“No way. I’m sure his family just let him be despite knowing what he’s doing. Otherwise, would he have grown up so twisted? YM’s very controversial, you know? One of their subsidiaries treats its employees like slaves. I’m sure he grew up twisted because he grew up under the owner of such a company.”

“I’m pretty sure that’s not the entire reason. There are decent people among sons of chaebol families. They don’t simply just smile pretentiously in front of people. Though, that one is a little cocky because he’s too perfect,” he said as he recalled Sooil.

It was likely that the environment was a big factor in Kang Giwoo’s twisted personality, but that was not enough to indulge him. Above all, he enjoyed harming other people.

“I won’t tell you to forgive him with a big heart. It’s just, the next time you see him, just get involved with him for business only and ignore him for everything else. Please, you’re making me worried because you’re saying you’ll hit him.”

“I know how to handle myself. Do you think I’d really beat him up or something?”

“I said it before that I’m worried because you’ll really do what you say. You won’t do it, right?”

Joohyun smiled bitterly. It was her reply that she would not do it. He could now rest at ease now that he got a clear answer. Now, Kang Giwoo wouldn’t suddenly get his collar grabbed all of a sudden.

“In return, tell me if something happens. I’m involved in this now. And reach out to me anytime you need help. If something happens and I find out about it while you’re hiding it, I’m going to go find you before I find Kang Giwoo.”

“What are you going to do after finding me?”

“If you’re so curious, you can hide it until that time. Oh, by the way, I despise getting betrayed by the ones I trusted the most. Above. Everything. Else.”

Joohyun patted him on the shoulders in encouragement before turning around. Maru felt thankful that she became worried and angry like it was her own matter. It would be understandable if she took a step back and pretended like she was never a part of this, but she even rolled up her sleeves and said that she would help. He should be feeling glad that he gained a reliable ally, but Maru had no intention of dragging her into this dogfight. The more he cherished a person, the further away he had to place that person. For Gaeul, it couldn’t be helped since she was the person who was caught up in this mess, but Joohyun would be fine as long as she didn’t touch Giwoo.

Kang Giwoo wasn’t simply a little child who liked playing cruel pranks. He was someone who was very well-versed in using authoritative power, knew exactly what sociability was, and was a schemer who did not hesitate to stab a person in the weak point. Right now, he could still go against him since he was an immature one, but since he was growing up under the protection of the head of a big conglomerate, he would soon grow up to be an excellent strategist. Once that smart guy started finding out just what exactly was in his hands, Maru would no longer be able to face him. Once that day comes, he would probably have to wave white flags in both of his hands and beg for forgiveness.

Just as Joohyun was about to depart in her car after getting her car from the valet parking agent, the brake lights turned on. She got out of her car and came over to him with two 50 thousand won bills.

“I’m going now.”

He didn’t have the opportunity to say that he was joking. Joohyun got back in her car and left. He laughed. He resolved for a moment to become a senior like that but then gave up on it. It was impossible. He might be able to give people money, but he could never become a senior who other people could be comfortable around like her. Maru fidgeted with the bills in his hands before grabbing a taxi.

“Banpo Je-in town please.”

He got in the taxi and called Gaeul. The signal lasted a long time. Was she in a shoot right now? He moved the phone away from his ear to end the call.

-Hello?

“You don’t have to pick up if you’re in a shoot.”

-No, I just finished a scene. I did it in a single take. I sometimes marvel at my own skills.

“Looks like today’s the day of bragging.”

-What do you mean?

“I’ll tell you the details at home. How was today? Nothing happened?”

-Giwoo hitting on me once is on the side of ‘nothing much’, so I guess nothing much happened today?

Maru opened the window slightly. The near-winter air seeped in through the gap.

“Should I prepare some beer for stress relief?”

-Sounds good to me.

“I’ll get it ready then. Tell me if it feels like you’re going to be late.”

-I think it’ll end before midnight today. Rather than that, how was it on your side? Tell me your first impressions after going on a TV show.

“I think I did that once already.”

-But now it’s after the shoot. I believe that it’s different now.

“Can’t I say that it’s the same?”

-Nope. You better tell me now. If you stay silent, something interesting is going to happen at home.

Maru smiled and spoke,

“I was really nervous before the shoot, but thankfully, I was at ease because a lot of people helped me. Personally, I don’t think it was that bad considering that it was my first time.”

-People helped you?

“I received unexpected help. It turns out there are a lot of people looking out for me.”

-You’re a blessed man.

“Not really.”

-But I don’t believe it when you say that you were nervous.

“I’m also a man with a heart. I’m bound to be nervous about the things I do for the first time.”

-I don’t think you were nervous during your first kiss. Maybe it’s because you already had another partner in mind?

“Wow, I’m having a hard time following your twist in topics. It’s suddenly about first kisses now.”

-Maybe it’s because I just shot a kiss scene. When I shot it, I brainwashed myself into thinking that I was kissing a dog, but it still leaves a bad taste. I feel a little sorry for dogs too. At least dogs are cute, aren’t they? Kang Giwoo doesn’t have a cute side to him at all.

“You sounded a little angry when you picked up the phone, and now I get why. Did he hit on you during the shoot?”

-If he did, do you think I would've let him be? I would have snapped out at him to do it properly. He was so spiteful and did all the acting properly. He separates his public and private matters. He's a scary guy. It just means that such a fine-looking man did such atrocious things behind people's back, doesn't it? I get startled several times a day. How can he do something like that with a smile on his face?

"If you want to vent your frustration, now's your chance. A very good listener is on the other side of the phone."

-While I do want to do that, I'll stop now. Nothing good would come out of infecting other people with my annoyance. In return, though, you have to drink with me joyfully.

"I'll show you what I did during the show. It had pretty good responses."

-You prepared something like that?

"I needed a solo shot for something. Let me just tell you that I put my soul into my self-introduction. You can watch the rest at home."

-I'll be looking forward to it a lot.

"Don't get too high hopes. You might be disappointed."

-Unfortunately for you, I'm already filled with expectations. Don't you dare do it half-assedly. I'll compare it when the episode airs and get back to you for it.

Maru stroked his throat. If he wanted to do it properly, then he had to exercise his throat right now. If he could make her smile and relieve her stress with a funny act, then it wasn't a bad deal at all. While waiting for her who told him 'just a moment', he danced lightly and muttered the princess song.

"Are you a preschool teacher? I heard a lot of men are doing it these days," asked the taxi driver.

He laughed saying that his daughter was looking after toddlers at preschool.

"I'm not exactly a preschool teacher."

"So you are an elementary school teacher."

"I don't really teach anyone."

"Then why are you doing something like...."

I'm doing it to show my girlfriend – he could not say those words. The taxi driver looked at him with confusion, muttering that he didn't look like he had a child. A strange sense of silence gave off an uncomfortable atmosphere.

-Sorry, I need to go to the shoot now.

"Go on. Let's talk about the rest at home."

-Alright. See you later.

"Good luck with work."

Maru looked outside the window. The taxi driver's gaze on him that was reflected in the rearview mirror was too prickly.

Hey, don't glare too much. We're both getting old, aren't we? You must have acted cute in front of your wife when you were young, right? – these were words he couldn't say out loud.