

I Became a Villainous Character with a Limited Lifespan

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Episode 91

Professor Kim's face didn't look good as he was checking the test results. Since the treatment was focused on pain relief rather than recovery from the beginning, even if he visited regularly, there would never be a day when he could see Professor Kim's bright expression.

"Your condition is not good. Some figures remain the same, but some have dropped... The instability of your pheromone levels last time was a bit concerning, so we conducted additional tests..."

Professor Kim examined the last set of results with a serious face. Seung-hyun didn't particularly feel any changes. He waited for the words to come with a calm face.

"Although we need to check additional figures in various situations to be certain, your pheromone gland has started to completely collapse. Not only is it losing function, but pheromones will suddenly be released strongly, and conversely, pheromones transformed from alpha pheromones will be released weakly. It's one of the common complications..."

"There's no point in hiding it now. I won't be shocked by every little thing, so just tell me straight."

"...Since it's a complication that comes in the very late stage, it seems..."

In other words, the already short time left may have been further reduced. He had expected it, but it was still a bitter thing to hear.

"I'll prescribe you pheromone suppression medication. Since your pheromone gland is damaged in many ways, you may not be able to judge for yourself, so I'll also prescribe a detection kit. It's okay to take it in advance, but I don't recommend taking it excessively... It would be best to take it only when you have contact with others."

Professor Kim wrote a new prescription. Along with the warning that traveling would be dangerous if his condition worsened further, he received a long lecture, but Seung-hyun didn't regret going on the trip.

Because it was definitely enjoyable, even if it was a little different from the ideal trip he had in mind. So much so that he wanted to spend every day like that if he could.

If his condition had been a bit better, he could have gone to Europe as Jae-young had initially suggested, and he could have visited the villa he talked about so often.

He had thought there would be nothing to regret since this life was like a bonus time, but as time passed, he gradually became greedier and his regrets grew.

It was the thing he feared the most and wanted to avoid, but things in life didn't always go smoothly.

It seemed it wouldn't be easy for him to cut it off himself. He didn't know how much time he had left, but he still wanted to enjoy the present as it was.

[Jae-young: You'll be home tomorrow, right?] 4:12 PM

[Jae-young: I'm coming over.] 4:12 PM

Seung-hyun smiled slightly at the sudden declaration of coming over, not even asking if it was okay. Jae-young had been acting as if it were his own house for a while, and he thought it was something to at least inform him about.

"I'll have to prepare before he comes."

After returning home, Seung-hyun hid the prescribed medications in places out of Jae-young's sight. They wouldn't be noticeable unless the storage spaces were deliberately opened, but he placed them evenly so they could be taken out from anywhere in case of urgency. Then he threw himself on the bed.

Although he had been away from home for quite a while, there was someone managing it, so the bedding and mattress were fluffy.

'Should I change the bed...?'

But somehow it didn't feel right. The bed in the hotel room where they had spent several days seemed more comfortable, and Seung-hyun tapped the innocent bedsheet.

“A white oval pill, a small yellow round pill, and a blue capsule?”

“Yeah. Do you know what medicines they are?”

Jae-young asked his friend who was working as a doctor. He said he called because he was curious about how Seung-hyun was doing, but that was just an excuse.

After a long, meaningless exchange of greetings, Jae-young casually asked what he was really curious about. Although Seung-hyun said it was nothing, that momentarily pale face was on his mind, making it hard to believe it was really nothing.

Seung-hyun wasn't someone who told him everything, so he thought he should find out this way to feel at ease.

Jae-young waited for the answer to come, feeling a bit tense. It really should be nothing. The brief silence felt too long.

“The white oval pill. Do you remember if it had any markings or not? Like a line drawn on it or some kind of symbol.”

“Huh?”

“When you say small, how small are we talking about? Do you remember if it was orange, dark yellow, or light yellow?”

“No. I don't remember that much...”

“Then it's difficult. Medicines all look similar, so it's hard to differentiate with just that much information. The capsule also varies depending on whether it was all blue on the top and bottom, or if it had any printed symbols.”

He had only glanced at them hurriedly, so he couldn't see them in that much detail. Jae-young answered with a flustered voice.

“The capsule was half blue and half white, I think, and there were no separate symbols.”

“You're not certain, right?”

“...Yeah. The colors are like that, but the symbols... I didn’t get a proper look.”

“Even if you had seen it properly, it wouldn’t have much meaning. If there are no symbols at all, that’s something taken to protect the stomach when taking strong medicines.”

“.....”

Jae-young made a troubled face. Not only had he failed to find out what the medicine was, but the one thing he had managed to remember was the unsettling fact that it was taken along with strong medicines, making him feel even more frustrated.

“But why are you suddenly asking about that? Is there someone sick at home? Your brothers or parents?”

“No. It’s not that, I just... suddenly thought of it.”

“It doesn’t seem like that’s the case.”

His voice had been somewhat controlled until he asked, but the moment he heard that the information wasn’t enough to know, his voice became serious. His friend said to Jae-young,

“To know exactly, you’d have to take pictures of the medicines and send them. Even if it’s the same medicine, the judgment of the condition will differ depending on what other medicines it’s taken with, so it’s best to include everything taken if possible.”

“...If I get the chance. Yeah.”

“More than that, I heard you haven’t been coming out much these days. Are you dating after Seon-hu got married?”

“Don’t say nonsense. Dating...”

He should have said what dating, but he couldn’t. The only condition to continue his relationship with Seung-hyun came to mind. Don’t define this relationship with a beautiful name.

“What’s with you? That makes it even more suspicious. Well, it wouldn’t be strange for you to get married to someone at this age. If anything, aren’t you late? Most people are already married.”

“No. It’s not that.”

“Why are you hiding it so much? If you go too, I’ll really be all alone. I’m the only one left. Being busy is a sin.”

“I said it’s not like that.”

It would be nice if he could say that. Jae-young let out a small sigh, feeling a bit bitter.

“Anyway, if it’s important, take a proper look and contact me again. And it’s good to date, but come out and show your face to us too. I’m going to forget what you look like.”

“Yeah. Let’s meet next time.”

The call ended without much gain, and Jae-young checked the messages that had come during the call. There was one message telling him to contact before coming.

‘He’s definitely hiding something. There’s no point in pressing him to talk properly since he’s not someone who will, so I have no choice but to find out myself...’

How could he find out? Jae-young thought about secretly searching Seung-hyun’s house tomorrow while avoiding his eyes.

It was clear that both he and Seung-hyun regarded each other as special, but unlike being able to be sure of that fact, there was nothing he could know for certain about Seung-hyun.

Contrary to his resolve to take it slow since he had plenty of time, as his feelings for Seung-hyun grew, so did his anxiety. He had thought everything would be fine as long as he had feelings, but he felt like he was missing something.

Things were going smoothly, so why did he have such a bad feeling? He gripped the phone tightly. This situation of becoming more anxious the happier he was felt strange.

“The conversation...”

There were many things he wanted to ask, but he was also afraid that the current peace would break if he asked carelessly. Sometimes, the moment when Seung-hyun cried in anxiety and asked him to keep his mouth shut came to mind.

Should he maintain the thin ice-like peace without knowing, or should he learn the truth even if the ground beneath his feet crumbled? Jae-young was more of a coward than he thought when it came to choosing one of the two.

‘Let’s think about it after meeting him tomorrow. My thoughts will somehow be sorted out after seeing his face.’

[I’ll come at lunchtime. You’ll probably sleep in and skip lunch again, so I’ll have to come and take care of you.] 5:01 PM

The message written with a stiff smile was light as if there were no worries at all. As if there was no anxiety, the kind words were the best he could do right now.

‘He shouldn’t be sick. He’s not good at taking care of himself, so I’ll have to pay more attention...’

He wanted to be in a position where he could meddle a bit more. Jae-young thought so and tried to sort out the things he had to do tomorrow in his head.

Episode 92

“...What is this?”

The next day, as soon as Seung-hyun saw Jae-young’s face, he asked while looking at something that had arrived before him. In the late morning, a display case had arrived unexpectedly without prior notice. He was about to send it back when he checked the name of the person who ordered it and left it as it was.

“It arrived earlier than I thought.”

Jae-young said while slightly adjusting the position of the display case. His actions were so natural that anyone who saw him would think it was really his house.

“It would be great if the things to fill it arrived quickly too.”

“...Were you serious about that?”

“Of course. When have I ever said empty words?”

Jae-young put down the box he had brought from the car on the floor. Looking at the items inside, there were indeed a few small decorations.

“Actually, I didn’t know it would arrive this early, so I just brought some items from home that I thought would go well with winter.”

As Jae-young said that, he put the items from the box into the display case. He wasn’t sure if they went well with winter, but it did feel like he had carefully picked them out with some consistency.

“What’s this?”

“Ah. This...”

Most were like that, but there was one thing that wasn’t. A slightly worn-out, palm-sized black cat doll. It was an item that didn’t suit Jae-young or winter.

“I had a chance to try a claw machine when I was young. You control the claw to pick out the dolls inside the machine... It was harder than I thought. It was the first time I had picked one out, so I kept it in my room as a memento... As I was packing, it seemed to resemble Seung-hyun a bit.”

It was amusing how Jae-young eagerly explained it, as if he thought Seung-hyun wouldn’t know what a claw machine was. Seung-hyun chuckled and said,

“I think I get it. How much did you spend?”

“I don’t think it was 100,000 won...”

With that money, he could have bought over twenty of these dolls. Of course, it would be a meaningless amount to Jae-young, but Seung-hyun thought it was a waste.

“You could have just bought it separately. Why bother doing that?”

“Then it wouldn’t have meaning. Isn’t it important that I picked it out myself?”

All dolls were the same. Seung-hyun had always thought claw machines were the most meaningless waste of money among all wastes of money.

He had never tried it even once, thinking there were better ways to spend money. But seeing Jae-young smiling as if he still felt proud thinking about that time, Seung-hyun thought his opinion might change a bit.

“Anyway, it has nothing to do with winter... I just thought of it when I saw it.”

As Jae-young said that, he placed the doll in the most visible spot in the display case. Seung-hyun thought the reason about doing it for him was just an excuse, and Jae-young was just doing what he wanted to do.

But what did it matter anyway? Seung-hyun approached Jae-young and straightened the slightly tilted doll properly.

“We should start preparing for lunch now. Eating the same thing every day gets tiring, so I’m thinking of making something different today.”

“I’ll help today too.”

“No, there’s no need for that. Just go inside and rest.”

Jae-young refused Seung-hyun’s help. He was planning to have Seung-hyun rest while cooking and find the hidden medicines in between. If Seung-hyun didn’t go inside, there would be no chance to do that.

“It feels like I’m always just receiving. I want to try it again after a long time too.”

“You don’t need to think like that. I’m doing it because I like it.”

“And I’m saying I’ll do it because I want to.”

But Seung-hyun didn’t seem to have any intention of going inside at all. Jae-young thought about persuading him more, but he stopped, thinking it would look more suspicious.

‘Yeah. There will be many more opportunities...’

“Alright. Then can you prepare this for me? I’ll do this.”

Jae-young assigned the simplest task to Seung-hyun and grabbed a knife. It seemed his words about knowing how to cook weren't a lie, as he looked familiar with handling the knife and preparing the ingredients.

“Ah.”

“Are you okay?”

Jae-young, who was lost in thought and slightly cut his hand, hurriedly pulled his hand away from the cutting board. Seung-hyun quickly noticed and checked the wound.

“It's just a small cut... but it's not good for the wound to get wet. I'll get some ointment and a band-aid. Wait a moment.”

Seung-hyun, who had been looking at the small wound with an exaggeratedly serious expression, went to find the first-aid kit. Jae-young followed behind him.

‘If I'm lucky, I might be able to see where he keeps the medicines.’

“I told you to be careful.”

“I was too busy watching you do well next to me.”

“You can do well on your own, so don't worry about that. Don't get hurt worrying unnecessarily.”

Seung-hyun held Jae-young's hand and treated it. Jae-young's eyes quickly scanned around.

‘Doesn't seem to be here.’

The medicines he had seen last time weren't in the cabinet where the first-aid kit was stored. While Seung-hyun was focused on treating Jae-young's hand, Jae-young looked around the room, but there was nothing that looked like a medicine bottle in plain sight.

“There. It's done. If it hurts, tell me to change it right away. And don't take your eyes off the knife.”

Meanwhile, Seung-hyun, who had carefully wrapped a band-aid around Jae-young's finger, let go of his hand. Jae-young stared at his finger for a moment, feeling like he could see Seung-hyun's personality in the treatment.

The lunch they made together was definitely delicious. Despite saying he hadn't tried it much, Seung-hyun's cooking skills were quite good.

"You're better than I thought. Did you secretly practice without telling me?"

"...Practice, my foot. I just looked it up a bit because I felt bad for always relying on you."

Seung-hyun couldn't say it was cooking he learned for survival, so he gave a short reply and changed the subject.

"You seem to be forgetting, but this is my house. So shouldn't I be the one doing things?"

"Where does it say that? If I want to do it for you, I'll do it."

Jae-young didn't back down at all. It was definitely a problem that rather than finding him annoying, Seung-hyun thought he was getting cuter.

"...Anyway, even if you don't do it, the housekeeper does everything for me."

"Still, I want to do it for you. Even now. Don't overexert yourself and rest a bit."

"How is walking around inside the house overexerting..."

Seung-hyun made a dumbfounded face. It seemed the reason was because he had collapsed in front of Jae-young due to dizziness, but no matter what, being treated like someone who couldn't even walk around was a bit surprising.

'This won't do. If it's like this, I won't have the leisure to look around the house...'

Jae-young was lost in his own worries. If Seung-hyun quietly went inside the room, he would be able to look around the house and find out what the problematic medicine was.

"Then shall we think about how to fill the display case? We decided to fill it with items that suit winter."

Jae-young, who quickly racked his brain, thought of another way to keep Seung-hyun occupied. Although he acted annoyed, it clearly wasn't a look of dislike.

If he suggested looking for items to fill the display case, Seung-hyun would definitely agree. And while looking for the items, he would surely be distracted enough to not notice if Jae-young left for a bit.

"...Since you already bought the display case, I have no choice."

As planned, Seung-hyun immediately nodded, and the two of them ended up looking for items in the room.

"I think it would be good to go and pick them out in person. Let's think of it as just looking for reference..."

"The weather is cold, so let's just buy them online. There are many interesting things."

Although he spoke as if it was bothersome, his gaze was fixed on his phone, so it seemed possible to buy some time. Jae-young sat in the chair across from Seung-hyun, pretending to search for decorations, and then got up from his seat.

"I'll be right back from the bathroom."

"Okay."

Leaving Seung-hyun, whose attention was focused elsewhere, Jae-young quietly went into another room and looked inside. He did feel a pang of conscience, but he thought he would feel more at ease this way.

"What's this?"

Then Jae-young discovered something and stopped in his tracks. It wasn't the medicine bottle he was looking for, but there was one item that strangely bothered him.

"Looks like a test kit. What's it used for?"

It wouldn't hurt to take a look. Jae-young picked up the item and examined it for a moment, then took a picture of the kit first. After taking pictures of both the front and back, he put it back where it was and moved to the next room.

“Not here either. Here too... Ah.”

Jae-young, who had been quietly moving around the house, found a pill bottle. Although it was a different type from the one he had seen last time and there was only one bottle, it would definitely help satisfy Jae-young’s curiosity.

♪♪♪.

“...!”

Jae-young, who had taken another picture and quietly came out to the hallway, almost dropped his phone, startled by the sudden ringtone. The screen displayed the name [Madam Ju].

“She must be bored again.”

Jae-young thought it was no big deal and hung up the call. As soon as he sent an automatic reply message saying he was outside and unable to talk, a reply came back from her.

[Madam Ju: You’re outside? Come home today. I have something to tell you.]

It didn’t seem urgent, but it looked like she had something she wanted to convey. Jae-young sent a reply saying he understood and headed back to the room where Seung-hyun was.

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As he entered the room, he saw Seung-hyun quietly staring at the vibrating phone. He looked dazed and composed at the same time. It wasn’t a face that could be clearly described.

“Did you get a call?”

Seung-hyun glanced at Jae-young, who was holding his phone, and asked. Jae-young nodded.

“Yes. From our Madam. It’s not an urgent call, so you don’t need to worry...”

“I guess the news has spread everywhere. Then please leave for today.”

His tone was calm as if he knew what would be said. Seung-hyun spoke again without taking his eyes off his phone.

“You probably won’t want to come here again after hearing it.”

“What are you...”

Feeling the ominous atmosphere, Jae-young grabbed Seung-hyun’s shoulder. The gaze that turned to Jae-young had already cooled coldly.

To the point where it was hard to believe he was the same person who had been laughing and talking together just a moment ago. Jae-young was so startled that he unknowingly took his hand off Seung-hyun’s shoulder.

“...I guess this is the end too.”

“I can’t understand what you’re saying. Speak properly...”

“It would be better to hear the proper story from Madam Ju. So please leave now.”

At Seung-hyun’s resolute words, Jae-young had no choice but to leave his house. The distance from Seung-hyun’s house to the main house was not far, so he arrived at the familiar house before long.

“You said you had something to do?”

“...There were circumstances. What is it that you had to make me come and hear it instead of just telling me over the phone?”

“You. Are you still close with Director Han these days?”

The way she asked with sparkling eyes gave an inexplicable feeling of ominousness. And such premonitions had a way of never going astray.

[HJ’s leading successor candidate, Senior Executive Han Tae-sung.
Suspicion of financial lobbying to Assemblyman A, a leading presidential candidate]

[Allegation of entertainment in exchange for HJ’s new business site in City C two years ago]

As soon as the article was published, most people predicted the source of this information to be one person. Because the content of the article was

excessively specific. It was a detailed tip-off to the extent that only an insider would know.

Currently, HJ was full of people desperate to get on Tae-sung's good side, who had become the only successor candidate within the group, and there was no one who would harbor ill feelings towards him.

Even those who thought Seung-hyun would return had accepted the fact that he had completely lost interest in this path after hearing about the incident at the dinner and had switched their stance to Tae-sung's side to find their own way to survive.

However, if it had only been that, it would have been a bit ambiguous to be certain. There was one more reason why people became convinced of who the informant was.

'I heard Director Han's secretary has now become Director Jeong Hyeokjae's secretary.'

'I wondered why he suddenly went there...'

The person who would benefit the most from this incident was none other than Director Jeong Hyeokjae. Currently, the two were competing with the goal of winning the same business. There were other competitors, but as time passed, it was becoming certain that one of the two would win the bid.

But an article tarnishing his reputation right before the final decision, it was as clear as day who would benefit from it.

Tae-sung, who had come to the chairman's office to report, tried to explain the situation to Chairman Han.

"Chairman. I will explain. The article..."

"I don't care whether that article is true or not."

Chairman Han spoke before Tae-sung could even finish his sentence. It sounded calm at a glance, but Tae-sung could easily predict that a roar full of anger would fly at him next.

"Whether it's true or not, you should have prevented the article from being published! Do I have to hear this kind of story through the secretarial team?"

Are you going to act recklessly just because that bastard Seung-hyun is not here?"

As expected, an angry shout resounded through the chairman's office. Chairman Han spoke in a resolute tone as if he had no intention of listening to Tae-sung's explanation.

"Now that that bastard Seung-hyun has left after causing such a fuss, you must think you'll naturally inherit my position. But to me, this company that I have built! This title is more important than blood ties. I can easily bring in another punk like Taehyeop."

It meant that just as he had brought in his distant relative Taehyeop instead of Tae-sung's father, he could bring in another promising child. Tae-sung silently endured his anger without answering.

"Even though I'm old, I can still easily last 10 years, no, 15 years. I'm not so senile that I can't even wait."

"I will keep that in mind."

"Get out. Now that this has happened right before the bid, we've only done Director Jung a favor."

Chairman Han clicked his tongue and gestured for him to leave. The moment the article was published, the bid result was as good as decided.

Even if he tried to explain the article, there was no way this incident wouldn't affect the bid that had come right in front of them. He had called him not to solve the problem, but to warn him.

Tae-sung knew that too, so he bowed without making excuses.

"I will make sure not to disappoint you in the future."

"What the hell is Han Seung-hyun thinking..."

Just before closing the door, Tae-sung heard the sound of Chairman Han clicking his tongue. Tae-sung returned to his office and sat back in his chair.

"Yeah, Han Seung-hyun did what he had to do... and now I just need to do what I have to do."

It wasn't surprising. Rather, he felt relieved thinking the incident that was bound to happen had finally happened. The Han Seung-hyun that Tae-sung knew was that kind of person.

Perhaps his words about quitting the company were sincere. But even if he stepped down, he knew Seung-hyun was not someone who would step down obediently.

Considering the incident happened only now, it felt like he had waited quite patiently.

But Seon-hu seemed to think differently. Seon-hu, who confirmed the article, got angry as soon as Tae-sung returned home, saying it couldn't be.

"Why are you saying such nonsense? Don't worry about it."

"You seem to be more worried about it while telling me not to worry. I'm fine."

"...How can you be fine? You worked hard to prepare."

Seon-hu made a face that he was more upset and drooped his shoulders. It was the first big project Tae-sung was undertaking after Seung-hyun had completely withdrawn from the succession structure.

Tae-sung had apologized, saying he would show that he was a capable person even without a competitor and that he wouldn't be able to pay attention to him for a while.

They weren't in a relationship where they were jealous of each other's work to the point of not being able to trust each other's feelings. Since the project would end someday, they had planned to go to their favorite restaurant and spend time leisurely on the day the results came out...

"It's okay. It would be a lie if I said I wasn't disappointed, but I know why it turned out this way. It would be good to clean things up completely this time."

"Who did it on purpose?"

Seon-hu looked at Tae-sung in surprise at his words that he knew the reason. Tae-sung took off his tie and said,

“Yeah. It’s true that I met Assemblyman Park. Not for lobbying, but when Chairman Han wanted Director Han to be engaged to Assemblyman Park’s daughter.”

“Director Han, you mean...”

“Yeah, Han Seung-hyun.”

A few years ago, Assemblyman Park’s daughter was the best daughter-in-law candidate in Chairman Han’s mind. The only omega daughter of Assemblyman Park, who was considered a leading presidential candidate for the next generation. Chairman Han had put in quite a bit of effort with Assemblyman Park to bring her in as his daughter-in-law.

‘The grandsons I have are all born with flaws. Tsk.’

If he pushed Seung-hyun, his dominant trait was an issue, and if he pushed Tae-sung, there was no one who didn’t know he was an illegitimate child, so he was worried Assemblyman Park would think he was disrespecting him.

In the end, Chairman Han, who couldn’t decide, arranged a meeting for the two of them and backed out. Just hinting that he would support whichever side married Assemblyman Park’s daughter was enough.

Seung-hyun faithfully carried out Chairman Han’s orders. Although his dominant alpha constitution became a lifelong obstacle, his outstanding appearance and perfect acting were more than enough to seduce a young lady who had grown up beautifully like a flower in a greenhouse.

It didn’t take long for Assemblyman Park’s daughter to become Seung-hyun’s lover. However, Tae-sung found that method rather uncomfortable and didn’t show interest in Assemblyman Park’s daughter, only doing his own work.

It was because he didn’t know when the capricious old man would change his words again, and he also didn’t like the idea of mortgaging his life for just one marriage.

While the two of them exchanged engagement rings and Seung-hyun was feeling triumphant, Tae-sung received a secret meeting request from Assemblyman Park.

‘What’s the ulterior motive?’

He could tell it was a meeting with something he wanted as soon as he heard the message through his secretary. Why the person who would soon become Seung-hyun's father-in-law called him, who was in an adversarial relationship with Seung-hyun, it wouldn't be a trivial matter at the very least. With that thought, he went to the meeting and received a rather startling proposal.

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'I'd like you to help me out a bit. Would it be difficult?'

'What could I possibly help Assemblyman Park with? If you need help, your future son-in-law...'

'Yes, that's exactly why I called you here. It may sound a bit ridiculous for people like us to say this, but I cherish my daughter quite a bit.'

'.....'

'Since she's a child I raised without any wrinkles, she easily trusts people and gives her heart. She's not the kind of child who can act out love for necessity like us.'

Assemblyman Park handed a document to Tae-sung. Tae-sung could recognize the identity of the document at a glance. He had personally reviewed it and handed over the final version, so there was no way he wouldn't recognize it.

'How did you get this, Assemblyman?'

'The governor and I are close. We sometimes ask for each other's opinions and help each other out. I met him not long ago and briefly talked, and I got to see this. It was a good proposal. I got the impression that you grasped the essence very well.'

'Thank you.'

He wouldn't have called just to praise. Tae-sung asked,

'Did you call me to tell me to take my hands off this project because it would make Director Han uncomfortable?'

'No. It's the opposite. It's a good plan, and there's no reason not to accept it.'

‘Then...’

‘Director Han knows that the governor and I are close. So he thinks B Group will take this job. But I recommended you to the governor.’

Perhaps Seung-hyun didn’t appeal to him as a son-in-law candidate. Tae-sung carefully asked,

‘Are you opposed to Director Han and your daughter’s marriage?’

‘If it was simply opposition, I could have just called off the engagement without needing to call you. But... that child wouldn’t obediently listen to me anyway.’

Seung-hyun’s intentions were clear to see, but Assemblyman Park’s daughter was quite taken with Seung-hyun. Perhaps because she was raised so freely, unlike her peers, she quickly became interested in Seung-hyun, who was polite and had a neat appearance.

She was pure enough not to know that affectionate actions under the guise of love could be acted out. That’s why Assemblyman Park thought even more that Seung-hyun wasn’t suitable for his daughter.

‘If they truly want each other, I can’t oppose it. But if not, it’s a relationship that needs to be cut off quickly. He even got engagement rings made on his own and spread rumors... a broken engagement is a hundred times better than an unhappy married life.’

‘...Then, are you saying you want to monitor Director Han through me?’

Tae-sung finally understood Assemblyman Park’s intentions. If Seung-hyun knew about Assemblyman Park and the governor’s relationship, he would internally think that Assemblyman Park would step up to prevent Tae-sung from winning this job.

Even if not, he would think there’s no way Assemblyman Park would step up to help Tae-sung. But Assemblyman Park directly met with Tae-sung, praised him, and hinted that he could win this job.

It wasn’t even a secret meeting, so this meeting could definitely be conveyed to Seung-hyun, and this would be a kind of message.

Even if he married Assemblyman Park's daughter, don't think about reaping the benefits.

'Honestly, I'd like her to marry the second or third son of a moderately well-off family. I couldn't refuse because I owe Chairman Han, but... I don't like unnecessary rumors either.'

'Then even if it goes to marriage...'

'If he's willing to get married even with the resolve not to receive help, that would mean Director Han truly loves our daughter. Then I won't oppose it, but... well, I don't think that's the case.'

Tae-sung also had the same thought. Having clearly understood Assemblyman Park's intentions, he nodded.

'I understand. Then the reason you called me today is to let Director Han know that you intervened in this decision before the results are announced.'

'Well, I didn't have much to do with that decision... but it will look that way to Director Han. Don't you think?'

Assemblyman Park spoke in a relaxed manner. It was a situation with nothing to lose for Tae-sung. It seemed like it would be fun to watch Seung-hyun become a dog chasing a chicken.

As the two expected, Seung-hyun broke off the engagement not long after. Since there was no benefit in being at odds with Assemblyman Park, it seemed he had skillfully made the fiancée's side bring up the topic of breaking off the engagement first.

It was obvious that Seung-hyun's pride would have been greatly hurt by this. But Assemblyman Park was too big of a figure to express dissatisfaction to, and as long as he didn't leave this field, he wasn't someone to make an enemy of.

But now that he seemed to have no lingering attachment to HJ, it was just convenient gossip to drag Tae-sung into the mud. It was a convenient tool to simultaneously deal a blow to Tae-sung, Assemblyman Park, and even Chairman Han, who often received help from Assemblyman Park.

“I’ve never done anything to be ashamed of. But if there’s someone who can have this much dissatisfaction about this matter and even prepare materials, I know them well.”

“Seung-hyun...”

Tae-sung sighed as he saw Seon-hu’s expression darken a bit. For some reason, Seon-hu had a good impression of Seung-hyun.

Tae-sung couldn’t understand at all in what aspect he thought that rascal was a good person.

‘Being positive and kind is good, but... trusting someone like Han Seung-hyun who has nothing to trust.’

“But it might not be, right?”

“The secretary who gains the most from this used to be Han Seung-hyun’s closest aide. We have no choice but to think that the information was passed from that side.”

“Then, if he was Director Han’s closest aide, it means he knew the story, so the information could have been passed from somewhere else...”

“I really can’t understand why you think Han Seung-hyun is a good person. Seeing the positive side of people and not giving up. It’s good. It’s good. But... I know Han Seung-hyun well.”

Tae-sung interrupted Seon-hu’s words. If it were someone else, he might have supported Seon-hu’s good intentions. But Tae-sung knew too well who Han Seung-hyun was and what kind of person he was.

“I know best how much Han Seung-hyun hates me. ...It’s not incomprehensible. But we’ve come too far to turn back now, and the current Han Seung-hyun is someone who wouldn’t be able to bear seeing me do well even if he died tomorrow.”

“...I can’t say I know him better than you do. I only met him a few times. But... I might know the recent him better.”

Seon-hu said, looking at Tae-sung. They were solid eyes showing his straightforward personality that Tae-sung liked. It was just frustratingly lacking now.

“You think you know Han Seung-hyun well, so you have no interest in what kind of face he’s making now or what kind of attitude he’s showing.”

“Of course, because it’s obvious even if I don’t pay attention.”

Tae-sung didn’t deny Seon-hu’s words. The fact that Seung-hyun and he hated each other, and what Seung-hyun wouldn’t be able to let go of even if he died.

“I don’t know anything about the Han Seung-hyun you know. So I saw that person without any prejudice, and the person I saw...”

“Looks like a very kind person? Or someone with a story?”

“Don’t be sarcastic. I told you I don’t like it when you talk like that.”

Tae-sung closed his mouth at Seon-hu’s words. Seeing his habit of being sarcastic, which had been quite fixed while living with Seon-hu, come out again, it seemed he was quite excited.

“He looked like someone who had given up everything. So as if he had nothing to fear.”

Seon-hu spoke seriously, but Tae-sung barely held back another sarcastic remark that was about to slip out. Give up? Han Seung-hyun? It was so unfitting that it was almost laughable.

“I can see that the Han Seung-hyun you’ve seen and the one I’ve seen are very different. But... even if it’s just once, look at that person without any preconceptions. You’ll definitely see a different side than before.”

“...Yeah.”

But Tae-sung didn’t want to fight with Seon-hu over this, so he just nodded without saying more.

“Alright. I’ll think about it again too. So don’t worry about unnecessary things. Don’t worry. It won’t be resolved in a day or two... but since there was no exchange, it’ll all come out if investigated.”

Tae-sung comforted Seon-hu and headed to his study, saying he had things to take care of. The project he had prepared for months had gone to waste, but since many tasks had been passed to Tae-sung after Seung-hyun quit the company, there was no time to spare.

'Han Seung-hyun and giving up. It's really an unfitting word even thinking about it again.'

After looking at the documents for a while, Tae-sung recalled what Seon-hu had said and sneered. It was a ridiculous thing to say even thinking about it again.

Look at Seung-hyun without any preconceptions. But how could he think about him apart from the past when he knew too well what kind of person Seung-hyun was?

"Come to think of it... why did I come to think of him as the worst?"

But for some reason, those words kept circling in Tae-sung's head. In the end, Tae-sung became immersed in past memories without being able to fully review the documents he was holding.

Episode 95

"I heard your father is looking for you."

"...?"

They were casual words that should have been easy to understand, but it took time for Tae-sung to comprehend his mother's words. It had been a long time since his father's existence was mentioned from his mother's mouth, but it was also because it was a completely different statement from what she had said before.

'Your father is dead. Is that enough? He's a person I don't even want to think about, so don't ever bring him up again.'

In his childhood, before entering elementary school, the answer he received when he asked the childish question of why he didn't have a dad was a chilly response that left a scar on his young heart.

His mother wasn't usually the affectionate type, but he had never thought of her as scary, but the mother who mentioned his father had frighteningly cold eyes.

As if she literally didn't even want to think about him, Tae-sung, who was scared of his mother's terrible expression, had never brought up the topic of his father again since then.

"They were people from his family that I didn't want to get involved with again. When they told me to live as if a mouse had died..."

"Then, Father..."

Until he saw her nervously biting her nails with a dumbfounded face, he had only predicted that at most he would end up interacting with his father.

It was a bit surprising, but at most, he was in middle school. It was an age when he still had curiosity about his father. What kind of person his father was, why he had abandoned his mother and him. There were many things he wanted to know and ask.

"...From now on, you'll be living with your father."

"...What?"

But he had never even thought that he would suddenly end up living with his father. Tae-sung carefully asked,

"Could it be that you two are re..."

"Don't say ridiculous things. Why would I, with that kind of person...!"

Could they be getting back together? Then could he live with his mother and father now? He had such thoughts, but his mother's frightened reaction immediately extinguished that hope.

"...Now you won't have anything to do with me."

"What..."

"I really thought of your father as a dead person and tried to raise you well. Facing your face that resembles that person as you grew up, taking

responsibility for you alone. I thought I could do it all... but I guess I can't with just my will, in the end."

"I don't really understand what you're saying."

Tae-sung looked at his mother with a confused face at her incomprehensible words. After chewing on her nails until there were none left, she finally explained the situation to him after a long time.

Tae-sung's mother said she had met Tae-sung's father as a regular employee of a client company when she had just started working. She thought there seemed to be something he was hiding, but at that time, her feelings of liking him were greater, so she ignored it and continued dating him for three years.

However, that relationship, which was happy in its own way, shattered to pieces when she became pregnant with Tae-sung. When she told him she was pregnant and asked to get married, Kyungseok made a troubled face and avoided the situation, saying they would talk about it later. And that was the last time she saw Kyungseok.

The threatening men who came to her saying they had something to tell her. That day, she found out what kind of person the man she loved was. Not an ordinary employee of a client company, but the son of a chaebol family who was acting as a figurehead director of an HJ subsidiary due to lack of ability.

Moreover, a man who was already married and even had a child. He was just enjoying playing around with a naive omega who was new to society. From beginning to end, everything was a lie to the point that the only thing he properly told her was his three-letter name.

'It would be better to get rid of it. In case Chairman Han has any illicit feelings...'

'No. No. This child is my child. I don't know who Chairman Han is, and I don't want to know. So just leave me alone.'

She felt betrayed and it was desperate, but she decided to forget about Kyungseok, thinking that since it had already happened, it couldn't be undone anyway.

She would think of the child's father as dead and raise the child alone. The HJ side mentioned compensation as if it were hush money, but she refused.

She thought that if she took that money, the father would have at least a small role in raising the child. This child was hers alone. She raised Tae-sung thinking he had no father.

Although it was painful to see the child's face because he eerily resembled his father, she still did her best to raise Tae-sung in her own way. Even if she couldn't become a friendly, friend-like mother, at least as a mother and an adult, she fulfilled her responsibilities and duties, and there clearly existed a family bond between the two.

She thought they could live as an ordinary family like that, but that was not a problem she could achieve with her determination alone.

"...Your cousin. In other words, the grandson your grandfather had designated as his successor was finally diagnosed as dominant. So... since you're recessive, he contacted me saying he would take you."

"...I don't want to go. I just want to stay with you, like this..."

"That's not something you can choose. Me neither."

He was curious about what kind of person his father was, but if the situation was like that, he thought it would be better to remain as strangers. But whether he would go or not was unrelated to Tae-sung's wishes.

"...You probably know how great of a person your grandfather is even without me telling you."

Even middle school student Tae-sung knew how great a company HJ was. But he didn't know to what extent a person with such power could change someone's life.

"...If they come at me fiercely to take you, there's nothing I can do. And... rather than living a hard life under a powerless mother, it would be better to walk a path with a guaranteed position."

"I don't need that. What kind of father is a father I've never even seen once? It's not like he doesn't have children, and you said he has other grandchildren."

"...If you weren't a recessive alpha, they wouldn't have done this either."

“What does being recessive or alpha have to do with it...?”

He couldn't understand why they would take someone they had abandoned like picking an object when they were living well, just because of that.

“...Someone will come tomorrow. And if you go to your father, you won't have any reason to see me anymore.”

“I don't want to. I just...”

“I'm sorry. But... I have no confidence. I may not have been a very good mother to you... No, no.”

She tried to say something but couldn't finish her words and got up from her seat. As she picked up the luggage she had prepared in advance, she said,

“I want to completely break free from that person now too. I'm sorry to you, but I can't do it anymore either. They said they would send someone in the morning, so just pack the absolutely necessary things and go to that house.”

“Mom. Where are you going...?”

“...I'm sorry. For not being able to take responsibility until the end.”

Leaving those words behind, she left the house. If he had followed her, he could have stopped her, but that apologetic face looked so exhausted that Tae-sung couldn't follow her in the end.

Although he was told someone would come in the morning, he had no intention of waiting as he was told. Who decided that on their own?

That night, Tae-sung packed his bags and left the house. However, that escape didn't last long. A middle school student's runaway without money or skills usually doesn't last long anyway, but Tae-sung was caught by unfamiliar men before the sun rose the next day and was dragged to a strange house.

“I gave you time to see each other without regrets since it's the last time, but the woman who's your mother abandoned her son and left... She loudly declared she would raise you herself, but I guess she couldn't even play house properly.”

The first thing Tae-sung heard from Kyungseok was not a welcome greeting, but ridicule. As soon as Tae-sung saw his father, he understood why his mother sometimes made a strange face when she saw his face.

They looked alike to the point of discomfort. A face that was a bit older and a bit sharper. Except for the slightly dark eyes and unpleasant atmosphere, he could be sure that his face would definitely look like that when he got older because of how similar they looked.

Tae-sung bit his lip, thinking that his mother must have been reminded of that man's face every time she saw his face.

“.....”

Next to Kyungseok, who was like that, stood a woman with a disgruntled face. Although she didn't say anything, he felt like he could tell who she was just from the atmosphere.

“...I'd appreciate it if you didn't call me unless it's unavoidable in crowded places.”

“You're too cold. You should practice in advance...”

When the woman glared at Kyungseok, he belatedly closed his mouth. She would definitely be the person who would officially become his mother from now on. Thinking that, Tae-sung sighed.

‘...I want to go back.’

But Tae-sung found out less than a month later that that day was still one of the better days out of the countless days he would spend here.

Episode 96

“This is your cousin, Han Tae-sung. You probably already know since you've heard, but he will be your future competitor, so observe him well.”

It was an excessively businesslike introduction for a family introduction. On the day he first met Seung-hyun, he avoided Seung-hyun's glaring gaze and picked at his food.

“How disgraceful at the dining table.”

Chairman Han clicked his tongue, seemingly displeased with that behavior. Putting down his chopsticks as if he had lost his appetite, he said,

“Get rid of the bad habits you brought from outside as quickly as possible, and especially teach him table manners in a short time. I can’t stand seeing this unseemly sight every morning.”

“Yes, Father.”

Tae-sung’s stepmother quietly answered Chairman Han’s words. Although it would be natural for her to show dislike since she had been burdened with a bothersome task, perhaps because it was in front of Chairman Han, she answered without showing any such hint, which made Tae-sung feel a bit creeped out.

‘The people here seem to have no humanity. I don’t want to become someone like that.’

“I should get up now.”

When Chairman Han got up from his seat, the people sitting at the dining table simultaneously got up. Tae-sung, who was surprised and checking the atmosphere, awkwardly got up, and Chairman Han clicked his tongue again seeing that and left.

‘I’ve never heard anyone say I eat disgustingly anywhere.’

Tae-sung embarrassedly checked his table to see if he had spilled or ate messily. Seeing that, Seung-hyun sarcastically said,

“Not spilling or splattering is a given. The way you hold your spoon alone can show what kind of person someone is. But this is...”

“What did I do wrong?”

“Do I have to teach you that? Am I your teacher?”

It bothered him that Seung-hyun was talking down to him without even using honorifics, let alone calling him “hyung,” even though he had heard Seung-hyun was a year younger.

“This is why you can’t just pick up anyone from outside. Just...”

Just because he's a recessive, they brought him to potentially replace me. To think the person they brought is just someone like that. Seung-hyun fiercely glared at Tae-sung.

There was a precedent with his father, so if they had brought in a really outstanding person, he might have felt anxious but his pride wouldn't have been hurt.

But from his behavior of looking around uncomfortably at the dining table to the point of being annoying while endlessly shaking the hand holding the chopsticks, to unconsciously trembling his leg... There was nothing proper about him, yet this guy was threatening his position as a competitor.

'If I wasn't dominant, someone like that would be... so unremarkable that even if I passed by him on the street, I wouldn't remember him at all.'

"It's clear to see how he was raised. This is why home education is important. Our levels don't match."

At the mention of home education, Tae-sung's head shot up. He was trying to endure as much as possible, but it was a different story if he brought up his mother.

"You don't seem to have received such great home education either."

"...What?"

At Tae-sung's words, the atmosphere at the dining table suddenly changed. Taehyeop and Kyungseok had left with Chairman Han, and Seung-hyun's mother had not come to the dining table, making the excuse of being sick, so the only people left were Tae-sung's stepmother and her children.

Tae-sung's voice continued, making even their movements, who had been ignoring the two's conversation as if it were on mute, come to a stop.

"You probably know my age, so I'm not expecting honorifics, but at least you shouldn't be so casual with me, right? Seeing that you don't even know such basic etiquette, it doesn't seem like you received such great home education either?"

"...!"

Seung-hyun bit his lips tightly, unable to answer. Judging by the way he was rolling his eyes and checking the atmosphere, he thought Tae-sung would shrink without making a sound if he stepped on him, but he was flustered by the unexpected answer.

“...Why should I treat someone like you as a senior?”

“I don’t want to hear you call me “hyung” either. But isn’t it funny for you to talk about home education while being rude yourself?”

The people sitting at the dining table tried to hide their expressions at Tae-sung’s words. They also disliked Tae-sung, but their resentment towards Seung-hyun that had built up so far was greater.

They had a hard time catering to him because he was designated as the successor early on, so they were inwardly refreshed to see the annoying rolling stone who had no fear due to lack of knowledge put Seung-hyun in his place.

“Just because Chairman Han isn’t here, do you think you’ll be tolerated for anything just because you’re recessive? Do you think you can naturally sit in the successor’s seat? The chairman values not only qualities but also abilities. So...”

“I’m not interested in such a position. You can have it.”

Although his appearance of trembling and trying not to get excited looked a tiny bit pitiful, at that time, Tae-sung was also young and impulsive enough to not think about future consequences.

“I preferred living with my mom, just the two of us. It was your grandfather who forcibly brought in someone who said he would live well on his own. If I could go back even now...”

“I said I’m not interested.”

Seung-hyun looked at Tae-sung with cold eyes. As expected, he didn’t like this rolling stone from head to toe.

While someone was devoting their not-so-long life to working hard... Even if he worked that hard, he was trembling with anxiety that all his efforts so far

might turn to bubble because of one innate quality that he could never change with his own strength.

While having that quality that Seung-hyun himself could never have no matter how hard he tried, just by luck. Because of that one quality, he came into this house and said he wasn't interested in such a position while scratching Seung-hyun's insides with his mere existence. There was a limit to making someone miserable.

"Then get out right now."

Seung-hyun poured the bowl of side dish in front of him over Tae-sung's head. Before the surprised Tae-sung could even grasp the situation, Seung-hyun wiped his hands and got up from his seat.

"If it's a position you don't even want, why are you holding on to it?"

"What are you doing?"

"That's what I should be saying. You can have it? If you can say that so loftily, take off everything you're wearing right now and leave. Because they're clothes you wouldn't even be able to imagine wearing if you lived with that great mother of yours."

"I...!"

'I heard your mother says she wants to live her own life.'

'.....'

'She says she doesn't want to get involved with this side again. I have no intention of bothering someone who says they'll live quietly. Of course... only if you stay quiet.'

'...!!'

Tae-sung recalled the conversation with Chairman Han. He wanted to refute that he wasn't staying here because he wanted to, but he felt like he would be the only one becoming miserable if he did that.

"No. I'm so resentful that I can't do that."

"Ha."

“I changed my mind. I’m not interested in such a position even if you just give it to me, but I’m curious what’s so great about it that you’re making such a fuss and tormenting me.”

“.....”

“Since I was born with this quality, I might as well make use of it. What someone wants but can’t have...”

Slap-

He wasn’t serious. Tae-sung originally had no interest in qualities and didn’t feel much when he found out he was a recessive alpha. Rather, through this incident, the scale of judging people based on a single quality felt even more terrible to him.

To the point where even his own quality felt disgusting.

So these words were just childish impulsiveness. He had only said what Seung-hyun would hate to hear the most in order to make him feel bad.

“How dare you say such things in front of me? You?”

It seemed those words had sunk in more strongly than Tae-sung had thought. Before Tae-sung could finish speaking, Seung-hyun slapped his cheek.

Not only his face but even his eyes had turned red, so he seemed quite angry. But Tae-sung wasn’t someone who would meekly take a beating and let it end.

Slap-

Once again, a sharp sound resonated in the dining room. Tae-sung had returned what he had received.

“Why do I have to watch every word I say to you? I’m someone who returns as much as I receive, as much as I suffer. You came at me like that first, so do you expect me to revere you like some pushover?”

Seung-hyun bit his lips and trembled. His eyes had turned even redder than a moment ago, and for a moment, it seemed like he would shed tears at any moment.

The people who had been sitting at the dining table at some point were now looking at the two of them, forgetting to manage their expressions. It was a face mixed with surprise and refreshment.

“...You disgusting bastard. I knew it.”

No, that’s probably what he had hoped for. Tae-sung, who was about to answer like that, suddenly hesitated. Although anger was clearly felt in the trembling voice, at the same time, it seemed like a bit of wetness could be felt.

‘Could he be... crying? He’s a year younger than me, even if it’s not much... Did I take it too seriously?’

Tae-sung briefly checked Seung-hyun’s condition. After taking a short deep breath and raising his head, Seung-hyun discovered Tae-sung’s hand that had been held out to him at some point and fiercely slapped it away.

“Get your dirty hand away from me.”

Seung-hyun glared at Tae-sung with bloodshot eyes and left the dining room. Of course, it seemed his voice had trembled because he couldn’t control his temper.

“...I’ll stop eating now. This...”

“I’ll remove what’s stuck on your head, so go wash up and rest.”

A housekeeper who had been watching from behind the corridor came out and cleaned up Tae-sung’s head. It was a disastrous first meeting.

Episode 97

Even after that, the relationship between the two was a mess. Although they didn’t express their emotions and get angry like the first day, Seung-hyun didn’t even make the minimum effort to hide his hostility towards Tae-sung.

At least in front of Chairman Han, he maintained etiquette, but even that was only formality. In the first place, Chairman Han had brought Tae-sung under the plausible pretense of competition to make the two fight.

Chairman Han knew full well that Seung-hyun was cunningly tormenting Tae-sung behind the scenes, but far from stopping him, he only encouraged it. It was nothing but suffering for the two of them, but for him, the situation might have felt amusing.

In the beginning, he had thought a few times that Seung-hyun was pitiful. Although there was only a year difference, that one year could feel quite significant during middle and high school, and Tae-sung was notably tall among his peers as a recessive alpha.

When they were going through their growth period, there was quite a difference in height. So sometimes Seung-hyun seemed younger than his actual age. He was smart, but there were aspects of his behavior that were childish.

When he first saw Seung-hyun being treated worse than others by his parents, even though he was boiling with anger, he reluctantly came to the dinner with Chairman Han and ended up collapsing in front of him, receiving an evaluation that he was a pathetic guy who couldn't even manage himself.

He had thought a few times that Seung-hyun was pitiful, but as they say, humans are adaptable creatures. Without realizing it, Tae-sung had become accustomed to the abnormal order of that household, and before long, he was able to pass by that sight without thinking much of it.

Moreover, Tae-sung wasn't kind enough to understand someone who tormented him to the point of annoyance, nor did he live a life with such leisure. In that way, the two naturally became accustomed to disliking each other as they became adults.

Since they were in a structure where they had to bring each other down in order to rise themselves after being put into practical work, their relationship worsened even further.

It had been a long time since he had come to think of it as natural, but recalling that period after a long time made Tae-sung feel a bit strange.

At that time, Tae-sung was also young, and Seung-hyun had picked a fight first, so he didn't think he had done anything particularly wrong. But now that he had become an adult and recalled that situation, his sentiments had changed a bit from back then.

'No, it's not simply because I've gotten older, but because I've left that abnormal house and met a warm person like Seon-hu.'

And it was the same for Seung-hyun, who had completely escaped from that detestable house. One day, he suddenly submitted his resignation as if he had gone crazy and went on a trip, and seeing that, Tae-sung definitely thought he had some ulterior motive.

'The incident has already happened, and resolving it comes first. But... I should at least ask why he did it.'

However, while he had become willing to listen to Seung-hyun's position, he still didn't think that what Seung-hyun did wasn't his doing. Seon-hu was too kind of a person. To the point of considering Seung-hyun's circumstances, whom he had only met a few times. But Tae-sung couldn't do that.

No, perhaps he was just as ignorant about Seung-hyun. If Seung-hyun were the same as the one in Tae-sung's memory, he would have been able to easily predict his next course of action, but at some point, Seung-hyun had become a person whose intentions were completely unreadable.

Anyway, it wasn't like he could immediately figure out Seung-hyun's true intentions, and for now, resolving the incident that had occurred came first. Tae-sung let out a long sigh and sat down in front of his study desk.

"As expected, he's not the type to back down so easily."

Jae-young, who was told it would be better to come and talk in person, went straight to his family home. But after hearing his family's story, he only became more confused. Jae-young stood blankly for a while, unable to even muster the courage to sort out his dizzy mind. Jae-sung, Jae-young's older brother, clicked his tongue seeing Jae-young like that.

"It seems you didn't know anything. Well, everyone knows how meticulous Director Han is."

“This is like a declaration of war. Since he’s completely on Chairman Han’s bad side, it will be difficult for him to make a comeback within HJ... Is he thinking of growing his own business?”

“That could be the case. Although he left, he knows a lot about HJ and this industry, and he’s a capable person.”

“Still, Director Han isn’t someone who keeps people by his side for long, but he’s maintained a friendship with you for quite a while... Didn’t you hear anything from him?”

Jae-young couldn’t properly understand what his family was saying. He already knew that the Seung-hyun he knew and the Seung-hyun they knew were very different.

However, at least around the time Jae-young got to know Seung-hyun, he was really living a quiet life. Saying that he hated noisy and bothersome things and wanted to live a peaceful life, Jae-young, who vividly recalled his appearance, found it difficult to accept this story.

“Couldn’t it be the arbitrary action of his former secretary?”

“You may not know because you’re not interested in this field, but... It’s well-known how incredible their relationship is. There’s a reason he’s even called a loyal dog.”

“...I’ve never seen that.”

“Of course. It’s not like you’re with Director Han all day.”

Jae-sung spoke, shrugging his shoulders. Of course, they hadn’t spent every day together all day, but they had still spent quite a lot of time together.

‘He never mentioned other people...’

He had never heard about Seung-hyun meeting other people or preparing for something. Seeing Jae-young like that, Jae-sung said,

“I don’t know why Director Han was close to you... But he’s originally a born politician. Not showing what he wants and acting it out wouldn’t be difficult at all for him.”

“Didn’t he give any hints that he wanted something? You probably just didn’t notice. Definitely...”

“Is this what you called me here to talk about?”

Jae-young asked his mother. She nodded.

“Yes. If I do it over the phone, it’s obvious you’ll just gloss over it again.”

“If I knew anything, I would have told you. When have I ever lied to you, Mother?”

“Even if you didn’t lie, there were many times you slyly changed the subject and avoided it.”

“...Sigh. Really, there’s nothing. If that’s all you had to say, I’ll be going back now.”

“Try asking him to at least give you a hint about what he’s planning to do. You two seemed to be quite close, so didn’t Director Han approach you because he wants something from you too?”

Jae-sung’s words caught Jae-young, who was about to turn around. His tone was certain that Seung-hyun had approached Jae-young with calculations from the beginning.

It was Jae-young who had gone to meet Seung-hyun in the first place, and it was also Jae-young who had clung onto Seung-hyun, who was trying to pretend that night never happened, out of shock. But perhaps because he kept hearing these things, a few suspicions began to arise within Jae-young as well.

Seung-hyun was known for being thoroughly calculating. Could he really not have known that the bar Jae-young had gone to for a drink was run by Jae-young’s friend?

Contrary to appearances, the life of the upper class had a fairly limited range of activities. If one put their mind to it, figuring out a person’s relationships wasn’t that difficult.

‘Although we spent a lot of time together, I was busy at the end of the year, so we hardly met. He could have met other people during that time and could have easily planned other things.’

It was a well-known fact that Jae-young was active as the face of his mother’s Y Group, so predicting when he would be busiest wasn’t difficult either.

Even though he thought there was no way, strange thoughts kept coming to mind. Jae-young was about to head straight to Seung-hyun’s house, but thinking that he wouldn’t be able to have a proper conversation in his current state, he pulled over to the side of the road and stopped.

“...Just until these strange thoughts go away, just for a moment...”

He thought he would quickly calm down if he took a breather and sorted out his thoughts. But even after a long time had passed, he couldn’t move again. The last words he had heard kept bothering him.

‘...I guess this is the end too.’

Before Jae-young returned to his family home, Seung-hyun had said that. No matter how he heard it, it sounded meaningful. It seemed like he knew what his mother would say, and it also seemed like he was certain of what choice Jae-young would make after hearing those words.

He wanted to ask why, but Seung-hyun’s face looked somewhat bitter as he said those words, so he couldn’t say anything more.

But if he had known he would have these concerns, he should have just clung onto him and asked. Those words that he had passed by without being able to ask more kept bothering him.

Seung-hyun, who acted as if he knew everything, and Jae-young, who didn’t know anything. It became even more frightening to confirm because he clearly felt that their understanding was misaligned.

“...There’s plenty of time. Let’s not rush.”

Although he had thought about it for a long time, he didn’t have the confidence to face Seung-hyun again today. He was afraid that the words that would come out of Seung-hyun’s mouth would be something he didn’t want to hear.

The answer wouldn't change even if he heard it later. But for now, he needed time to prepare his heart.

No matter what answer he received, it didn't seem like his feelings would change, but he couldn't act as if nothing had happened either.

In the end, he turned the car around and headed to his own house. Although nothing particularly significant had happened, the simple but enjoyable daily life he had spent at Seung-hyun's house felt as distant as if it were a very long time ago.

Episode 98

Although he was sure he had never given out his number, people contacted Seung-hyun as if it were natural. He blocked most of them, but there were some contacts he couldn't avoid.

[I will come see you tomorrow.] 7:12 PM

It wasn't a saved number, but he could immediately tell who the message was from. Just from reading the message, it felt like he could hear the voice. The flat yet longing-sounding low voice.

Seung-hyun, who had been staring at his phone until the screen went dark, belatedly put it down. Was he thinking of reporting the progress after stirring up this kind of situation on his own?

He knew since meeting Seok-hyung last time that this kind of thing would happen. He had also anticipated that his tranquil daily life would be broken and he would be caught up in bothersome matters before long.

However, Seung-hyun did nothing and waited for Seok-hyung to make his move. It wasn't simply because what he could do was limited.

Honestly, Seung-hyun liked his current life. Even knowing that his relationship with Jae-young couldn't end beautifully, he enjoyed the time he spent with him and the peaceful days were delightful.

So he didn't have the confidence to leave these serene days on his own. It was a dream too sweet to end with his own hands, a dream he didn't want to break.

Although he couldn't know exactly what actions Seok-hyung would take, he could roughly predict it. He would do exactly what the "Han Seung-hyun" in the original work would have done. He had also inwardly guessed that Seok-hyung would attack Tae-sung even if it meant using a self-destructive move.

And that prediction came true exactly. Since it meant making Assemblyman Park an enemy, in a normal situation, he would have looked for another method, but now it was a situation where he didn't have to think about such things, so he had detonated the matter he had saved as a last resort.

"He's acting as if there's no tomorrow."

It wasn't that he had absolutely no concerns. Han Seung-hyun had no tomorrow, but Yiseok-hyung would have many days left, so was it okay to do this? He had such thoughts.

But that thought didn't last long. Because it wasn't a situation where he had the leisure to worry about others.

Seung-hyun suddenly recalled the moment he had sent Jae-young away. He had looked surprised by the sudden words to leave.

Because he was always kind and considerate of Seung-hyun's condition, Seung-hyun had thought he would follow his wishes, but he seemed to have inwardly hoped Jae-young wouldn't go.

At first, he thought he could cut it off easily. At most a year. He had thought there was no way he would have a special relationship in that short time.

He had thought this was like a bonus game, so he wouldn't have any lingering attachments. He had thought about it so lightly. If he hadn't met Jae-young, perhaps things would have flowed as he had expected.

He would have lived a life that was boring to the point of being leisurely and idle every day, making only light relationships where it was good to meet but not greatly missed if not.

Just like his past self, he would have lived aimless days, spending each day for the next.

He didn't know because he had never had a deep relationship with others. That having a precious person, genuinely coming to like someone, could change a person's life so drastically at once.

He had thought he had lived without desiring anything. He had realized too late that he simply hadn't had the leisure to do so, that he was also a person with greed, that his greed was so great that he was just a weak human in front of desire to the point of walking the wrong path even knowing what was right and wrong.

In the end, he couldn't sever this relationship with his own will. The wind stirred up by Seok-hyung would clearly become a strong gust that would swallow up even Seung-hyun, but he was fine with getting a little hurt.

He needed a situation that was inevitable. A situation where even he, who had become selfish not wanting to end this relationship, had no choice, a situation where Jae-young would be sick of even thinking about Seung-hyun.

He didn't like being lonely, but he had no intention of dating anyone until the end of this life. This experience was enough even once, and being lonely would be better than being distressed.

'He has probably heard about the situation by now. Seeing that there's no contact, it seems he's quite confused.'

No matter how disinterested Jae-young was, his family members were people who led the group. There were times when Jae-young grumbled about hearing bothersome things, so the immediate contact was clearly due to the impatience of the family members who knew about Jae-young and Seung-hyun's friendship.

Even if he was confused right now, he would contact Seung-hyun before long. How should he answer then?

'Just being close to me will cause bothersome issues. He said his mother and brother subtly pressured him, asking if he had nothing to hide even after I made such a fuss and left Chairman Han.'

Seung-hyun recalled Jae-young frowning, saying his mother and brother were worried unnecessarily. If they reacted like that just because Seung-hyun was by his side, it would be even more so now that he had become juicy gossip.

The current Seung-hyun not only couldn't fulfill Jae-young's wish to continue a peaceful life as long as possible, but he was also an existence that could disrupt the human relationships Jae-young had built up until now.

Considering the present and the future, it was truly the right thing to end it now. What was the point of struggling to stay by each other's side while losing things big and small? Flailing to gain a fleeting moment compared to the long time the person left behind had to live was clearly a foolish act.

'No matter how much I want to be greedy... this won't do.'

Seung-hyun looked down at his hand, cutting off the thoughts that kept extending one after another. His nails that he had bitten in a short time were messed up to the point of being unsightly. Seeing his fingertips that had been neat for a while return to their familiar appearance, Seung-hyun sighed.

This was the right way to distance himself, Seung-hyun made up his mind. If they met again, he would truly say hurtful words then, but to do that, it seemed he needed a little more preparation.

Starting tomorrow, he truly had to act as if he had become "Han Seung-hyun". So at least until today, he wanted to indulge in sentiments. Seung-hyun took out the cat doll from the display case with the shabby decorations.

It was a doll that had nothing to do with winter, and although it was well-maintained, it was clearly an item that had been cherished for a long time at a glance.

'Didn't he say he brought it because it resembled me?'

Seung-hyun fiddled with the doll and examined it. The small doll that could fit in one hand had upturned eyes.

But it didn't feel threatening at all. Rather, the large upturned eyes made the doll look cuter.

Did he look like this in Jae-young's eyes? Seung-hyun grabbed the doll's tail and shook it for no reason. The cute cat character with a sullen expression swayed and met his gaze.

It had a highly wary appearance, but it was visible at a glance, so it wasn't a threat and rather looked cute. Quietly mulling over the fact that this was how he looked to Jae-young, he felt a strange feeling.

He had tried to push him away in his own way, but he couldn't push him away completely in the end. Even though he couldn't cut him off decisively. He felt pathetic. Jae-young must have also found that behavior frustrating to see.

"He's head over heels. Someone would curse if they saw this."

But to think the item he brought saying it resembled him was something like this. Seung-hyun chuckled and carefully placed the doll back on his palm.

"...I can't be seen like this."

He could no longer remain a cute existence that wasn't even a threat to him anymore. He had to become a bad relationship that was so detestable that it could be cut off without any lingering feelings.

"....."

After staring at the doll for a while, Seung-hyun put it deep inside a drawer. It was because he felt like he would recall this moment every time he saw the doll in the future.

'It's time to stop imagining things that can't happen and tormenting myself. If I truly care about that person, it's right to end it here.'

When he turned off the light, only the shape of the display case was faintly visible in the pitch-black room. Seung-hyun tried not to think about the small objects inside it and returned to the bedroom.

It was still too early to fall asleep, but he didn't want to stay awake. If he stayed like this, thoughts that were worse than not thinking at all would surely haunt him one after another. Seung-hyun covered himself with the blanket and curled up tightly.

'There's no such thing as what if. So don't think unnecessary thoughts and let's sleep. It will truly become difficult starting tomorrow.'

As he repeated to himself, a sharp pain was felt in a corner of his heart. It was a bit different from the pain he felt from time to time.

If it were physical pain, the painkillers or sedatives he had kept within reach could have helped, but Seung-hyun, who curled up a bit more from the pain without medicine, tried hard to close his eyes and fall asleep.

A droplet that had flowed down his cheek wet the pillow. It was long after the mark left on the pillow had completely dried that Seung-hyun fell asleep.

Episode 99

“You seem to have lost more weight.”

Seok-hyung said, staring intently at Seung-hyun’s face. At a glance, it sounded like he was very worried, so Seung-hyun chuckled, thinking it was a quite contradictory situation.

“For someone who wishes for me to live comfortably, your actions are quite extreme.”

“.....”

Seok-hyung frowned without answering. What he was probably worried about wasn’t the Seung-hyun in front of him, but Seung-hyun’s shell. Seung-hyun chuckled thinking that.

The last remaining string of reason made him not say it out loud, but he had already realized that the current Seung-hyun was a different person from the one he knew.

If he were a bit more emotional or unrealistic, he might have confronted Seung-hyun, asking “Where did the real him go?”.

“I’m joking. Losing weight... it’s not something I can control with my will anyway.”

Seung-hyun spoke, shrugging his shoulders as if it were no big deal. Except for Seung-hyun himself and Professor Kim, Seok-hyung was the only person who knew about his physical condition, so there was nothing to hide.

“Still, please take good care of yourself. Without physical strength, nothing can be done.”

Seok-hyung, who said that, made a slightly subtle expression. Seok-hyung was always in a position to listen to Seung-hyun, not someone who

demanded something. However, he remembered having this conversation a few times.

Seung-hyun originally didn't really like moving his body. There were often situations where physical strength was needed due to a lot of work, but in the end, he never made an effort to increase his stamina.

'I know you're busy and tired... but still, nothing can be done without physical strength.'

'You're lecturing me now. That's new.'

'...!! That wasn't my intention...'

'I know what you mean, so there's no need to make excuses. I'll take care of it myself, so you don't need to worry.'

In the eyes of others, it might seem like he was embarrassing someone who was concerned about him, but as someone who had observed Seung-hyun for a long time, Seok-hyung knew that he was treating him more leniently than others. He sometimes thought he was doing well, feeling like he had become a bit closer to Seung-hyun than others due to that attitude.

'Is it meaningless now?'

The face that had relaxed for a moment, recalling that feeling, quickly hardened again. Seung-hyun had definitely changed. Even while thinking it couldn't be, to the point where he had no choice but to think an absurd thing had happened.

"If you're going to do as you please anyway, I'm curious why you even came to see me."

Seung-hyun said, leaning back on the sofa. He was curious about what Seok-hyung had come here for.

For him, there was no way to stop Seok-hyung, which he could tell just from their brief conversation last time. He would be like a horse with loose reins. So he had just thought Seok-hyung would spend the remaining time peacefully on his own. He couldn't let go of the happy time himself, so he had chosen him as the person to cut off this time.

At the same time, he had thought he wouldn't meet Seok-hyung again. After all, it was certain that Seok-hyung would act as he and "Han Seung-hyun" wanted.

'Did he want to confirm it?'

Even now, did he come here grasping at straws, wondering if he had returned to the original "Han Seung-hyun" that Seok-hyung knew?

For whatever reason, Seung-hyun wasn't in a position to warmly welcome him and have a conversation, so he just looked at Seok-hyung with a slightly tired face. Seok-hyung couldn't take his eyes off Seung-hyun and silently stared at him for a long time.

"....."

Seung-hyun was the first to look away. The gaze that he couldn't tell what he was thinking, persistently looking at one spot as if trying to look into his soul, felt uncomfortable.

"...I've always reported to you."

Seok-hyung opened his mouth with difficulty. Because reporting was familiar to him. Even though he noticed that it wasn't the Han Seung-hyun he knew, but a completely different person acting as him, he treated him the same as before. It felt strange, even though it might be because it was a familiar action.

"Then you can go now."

He had been nervous about what he had come for and what kind of conversation would take place, but it was a bit of a letdown. Seung-hyun gestured for him to leave quickly without getting up from the sofa.

But Seok-hyung didn't seem to have any intention of leaving this place. Far from turning around, he approached Seung-hyun a little closer and examined his face.

"I heard roughly from Professor Kim... Even if you don't have an appetite, you should eat well. Since taking medicine on an empty stomach can make you feel worse, please eat even a little."

Seok-hyung, who finished speaking, carefully examined Seung-hyun's face for a moment and headed to the kitchen. Come to think of it, Seung-hyun hadn't eaten anything since Jae-young had left like that.

He couldn't have lost weight in that short time, so the reason Seung-hyun looked thin to Seok-hyung was probably because he was overly worried about him, or because of the shadow cast on Seung-hyun's face.

Seung-hyun didn't like that concern. Since it was a relationship he couldn't sever himself and had used him to cut it off, he had no right to blame him in the first place, but he just didn't want to see his face.

"You must have a housekeeper, so when do they come? Or I can make something simple..."

"If you're done talking, I'd like you to leave now."

Even though he knew it wasn't concern directed at him, the way Seok-hyung treated him and his gaze all seemed cautious to Seung-hyun. He disliked the attitude that shook his resolve, having barely accepted the reality that he would truly be alone now.

"What's important to you is just informing me of what happened and confirming that I'm not dead yet, isn't it? You've confirmed it, so there's no need for you to stay in this house any longer."

Even though he said words that clearly separated the original Han Seung-hyun and the current Seung-hyun, Seok-hyung didn't show much reaction. They both knew what each other had noticed to what extent without directly mentioning it, only avoiding it.

"...It's not like I want to die tomorrow either. I'll take care of my own health. So stop pretending to care and just go back."

Seung-hyun said, turning his gaze away from Seok-hyung. If there was no significant conversation to be had, there was no reason to continue this uncomfortable exchange. He was probably just habitually taking care of "Han Seung-hyun" without any significant reason.

"No."

But Seok-hyung didn't back down and took out ingredients from the refrigerator. Was he really going to cook? His appearance examining the kitchen looked quite serious.

"Ha."

Do as you please. Even though his health had deteriorated and there were many restrictions on what he could do, he wasn't to the point of not being able to walk yet.

"If you won't leave, I'll leave."

"Where are you going?"

"Well. I'm thinking of having a daytime drink."

It was half out of spite. He knew he shouldn't drink. But today, he really wanted to escape reality somehow. He didn't care if one drink reduced his remaining time by a week or a month.

'There were so many things I wanted to do, definitely...'

He had thought that even if the given time was as short as a trial period, it would be a hundred times better than dying without a single happy memory, even if it was the dream of the masses to be a rich unemployed person. How did it end up like this?

'I shouldn't have been greedy for nothing. Then I would still be spending leisurely time in my room or wandering around places I could go without any thoughts.'

Everything had been a mess since he had started wanting and cherishing something. These days, he lacked the courage to end something himself, and he just wanted to run away.

"No."

Seok-hyung grabbed Seung-hyun firmly with a stiff face. His large hand was holding Seung-hyun's thin wrist carefully yet firmly.

"I'm going to live as I please, what does it have to do with you?"

“It’s not something to say in that way, especially by someone who knows better than anyone.”

“...You should say that to someone else, not me.”

Seok-hyung’s gaze was burning calmly. Why did he think lightly of it?

He was the person who stayed by “Han Seung-hyun’s” side until the end. There was a bond between the two that couldn’t be summed up simply with the title of a loyal dog to Director Han.

It wasn’t mentioned, but he definitely loved Han Seung-hyun. Whether it was in the sense of respect or sexual love was unknown. But there was tremendous loyalty and love directed towards Han Seung-hyun that he himself couldn’t even imagine.

“I’m saying this because it’s you, Director Han, not someone else.”

“...Even though you don’t think of me as Director Han.”

“Why not?”

Seok-hyung pulled Seung-hyun’s wrist. Seung-hyun instinctively tried to back away from the distance that had become close enough to not avoid his gaze. However, he couldn’t do so because his wrist was gripped so strongly that it hurt in an instant.

“The eyes looking at me now, the lips speaking words unlike Director Han, the heart, and even every breath, all belong to Director Han. At least that much will never change no matter what happens.”

“.....”

“The person who taught me not to give up on what I can do until the end was you, Director Han. Even if your head doesn’t remember... your heart, no. At least some part of that body will remember. Because that’s the kind of person you are.”

Listening to his words pouring out without hesitation, Seung-hyun felt that he had judged the relationship between the two too lightly. Suddenly, he felt a pain in his chest for no reason.

It was a slightly different feeling from his usual poor physical condition. It was a strange pain that resonated through his body, as if his heart ached, something the current Seung-hyun couldn't possibly feel.

Episode 100

"...So don't think I'm grabbing a random person and saying meaningless things."

Seung-hyun frowned slightly at the sound of his rapidly beating heart.

Seok-hyung looked at his pale face for a moment, sighed, and finally let go of Seung-hyun's wrist.

"...If you stay like this, you'll get indigestion no matter what you eat. I'll be going."

He only said that, but his expression showed that he didn't care about the discomfort he felt at all, but he couldn't tolerate that discomfort having a negative impact on Seung-hyun's health.

"Don't say you'll do something to harm your body even out of spite. It may be a light way to vent your anger for you... but it's not light for me."

As expected, he seemed to have known from the beginning that the words about having a drink were said out of anger.

"...I'm going to die anyway. Maybe I can endure half of this year."

"You're not dying right now. At least until the moment you take your last breath, you are clearly Director Han."

With those words, Seok-hyung left Seung-hyun's house. Seung-hyun, drained of energy, fiddled with his wrist that had a handprint on it.

"Haah..."

As much as Yiseok-hyung was the closest person to Han Seung-hyun, he never thought he could deceive him for a long time from the beginning. He had simply thought it would be fine if they didn't meet again.

'At least one person in this world... truly loved Han Seung-hyun.'

Even Han Seung-hyun's family didn't pay much attention to his change. He didn't have anyone he could call a friend either, but at least to one person, he was deeply loved.

Seung-hyun, thinking of the original Han Seung-hyun, let out a small sigh. Perhaps it was because the longer he lived in this body, the more pitiful Han Seung-hyun seemed, but he felt strange.

“Haah.”

The tension was released, and his body went limp. He was upset and put on a pointless show of force, but as expected, he didn't want to shorten his remaining time or bring illness upon himself.

So even if it wasn't because of Seok-hyung's words, he had to eat. No matter how suffocating he felt and wanted to lose his mind, he couldn't avoid the situation he was in now in that way.

Last time, he even wanted to exhaust his body and forget everything, but now he didn't feel like it.

For Seung-hyun, sexual relations were initially just something he wanted to try at least once before he died. After that goal was achieved, he had considered it just a means of escape to temporarily forget the painful reality.

But he couldn't do that now. The days he couldn't remember, the days that were so good it was embarrassing, the days that were painful but just being in contact was comforting.

They were all memories of being in contact with Jae-young, so he didn't want to cover them up with other memories. It wasn't a feeling that could be easily erased by recklessly using his body now.

Seung-hyun, who had rolled the words he could never say to the person himself in his mouth, was blankly staring at the wall when he suddenly felt a presence and turned his head.

Did Seok-hyung come back? Seung-hyun's face instantly hardened when he recognized who the person was at the end of his unconsciously directed gaze.

“.....”

He had thought he would come before long. But the timing was a bit uncanny. How long had it been since Seok-hyung left? How long had I been in a daze? Seung-hyun unconsciously looked at the clock.

He wasn't sure how long Seok-hyung had stayed here, but he knew when he arrived. Since they didn't have a long conversation and he left, he thought they might have narrowly missed each other.

"You said you quit your job, that it was boring."

The momentary hope was shattered before long. Jae-young's voice sounded a bit confused.

"The person I met in front said he was Han Seung-hyun's secretary."

Jae-young, who had barely fallen asleep long after the morning sun rose, opened his eyes around lunchtime. It was late, but he was tired because he hadn't slept much.

However, what made him more fatigued than the lack of sleep was the confusion and anxiety that had not been resolved since yesterday. While all the circumstances seemed suspicious, he also wanted to believe in Seung-hyun.

'I don't know why you think of Director Han that way... I may not know Director Han well either, but I think I know him better than you.'

He wanted to deny everything his family had said with certainty. To do that, he had to go directly to Seung-hyun and ask him, not just worry alone.

Although it wasn't a long distance, he had to stop the car several times because he had too many thoughts, and it took longer than usual because of that. Even after arriving nearby, Jae-young circled around the house aimlessly and could only head to his original destination after the third round.

"...?"

Jae-young couldn't get out of the car even after arriving. It was because an unfamiliar car was parked in front of Seung-hyun's house.

Seung-hyun's car would be in the garage, so did someone come to visit? Was there someone he could meet? While Jae-young was observing the car for a moment, the front door opened and the visitor came out.

'It feels somewhat familiar...'

It wasn't familiar, but it didn't feel strangely unfamiliar either. Jae-young got out of the car and approached the man. The man seemed to recognize Jae-young and frowned.

"....."

"What brings you here?"

"I don't think it's strange for a subordinate to visit his superior."

Although Seung-hyun had numerous subordinates, Jae-young could immediately recognize the man's identity.

Director Han's loyal dog, the man who was jokingly said to disobey even Chairman Han's orders if it wasn't his master's words.

"You're... Secretary Yiseok-hyung."

"We don't need to introduce ourselves, so we don't need to go through the trouble."

Seok-hyung also knew of Jae-young's existence. He had thought this man's influence might be the reason Seung-hyun suddenly showed an uncharacteristic side of himself. Therefore, for Seok-hyung, Jae-young was a man he didn't like.

"I heard you're working as Director Jeong's secretary now. Isn't it okay not to visit your former boss? I know you're quite busy too."

It was a well-known fact that everyone knew Director Jeong Hyeokjae, who was put in charge of a big project, would become busy as it became a foregone conclusion that this case would be passed on to him.

So his secretary, Seok-hyung, should also be busy because of that, right? Jae-young said sarcastically.

“Seeing that you have time to hang around like this... I wonder if the business Director Jeong took on will turn out well.”

“He’s just someone I temporarily worked with because our interests aligned, not my master.”

Even though Jae-young was blatantly being sarcastic, Seok-hyung answered without paying any attention. It was Jae-young who flinched at the calm tone instead.

“Then, are you saying... Han Seung-hyun planned this situation?”

“I only act as Director Han wishes.”

Seok-hyung threw out those words and passed by Jae-young, who had a dazed expression. The car started, and even after Seok-hyung left, Jae-young stood there as if nailed to the spot for a long time.

‘He said it’s what Han Seung-hyun... wanted.’

It was a statement that didn’t suit the Seung-hyun he knew at all. The person who clicked his tongue, saying work was bothersome and he just wanted to rest. The person whose eyes sparkled with joy at a short trip or trivial sights.

Those eyes, those lips that drew a beautiful arc, were all lies. Even though he thought there was no way, Seok-hyung’s calm attitude kept bothering him.

“But...”

Although Jae-young wasn’t interested in corporate politics or the power struggle of a chaebol family, Yiseok-hyung’s loyalty was extraordinary enough to reach even his ears. He had heard a few times that there were people who laughed at the two of them but inwardly wished they had such a blindly loyal subordinate.

He had to go in and ask directly, that’s why he came all the way here, but his feet wouldn’t move. Jae-young hesitated like that in front of the door for nearly 30 minutes before finally opening the front door.

However, contrary to his heart, the words that came out as soon as he saw Seung-hyun were as sharp as could be. His confused heart couldn’t figure out what the best way to treat Seung-hyun was.

“...That secretary said he only acts as Han Seung-hyun wants. He helped Jeong Hyeokjae because of that, not because he went under him.”

“.....”

“...Is it true?”

He hoped Seung-hyun would say no. Even if everyone said Seung-hyun was that kind of person. Even if all the circumstances pointed to their words being the correct answer. If Seung-hyun said it wasn't him, it would be fine no matter what.

Even if he was called an idiot or a pushover, if he just said it wasn't him, that he preferred a small decoration in the display case over the boring and bothersome corporate politics. If he just said that, Jae-young was determined to believe only his words without questioning anything.

But there was no answer. Seung-hyun had a face that looked both surprised and contemplative, unable to meet Jae-young's eyes.

His wavering eyes, his constantly changing expressions. He had thought he was a person whose inner thoughts were transparently revealed on his face. But for the first time, he couldn't even gauge what Seung-hyun was thinking. Unable to wait long, Jae-young asked again.

“Answer me. Did Han Seung-hyun really get involved in this matter? To deal a blow to Executive Han?”

“.....”

“Why? Didn't you say you had no intention of returning to the company? If there was some... misunderstanding, or if something happened, at least say...”

Seung-hyun, who had been looking down for a long time, met Jae-young's eyes as if he had made up his mind. Please say it's not true, Jae-young desperately hoped inwardly, but the answer that came back was completely opposite to his wish.