

## Once Again 891

### Chapter 891. Sequence 14

"Listening to you, it sounds like Miss Hamin must have a lot of worries too. Kang Giwoo is always the problem huh? It'd be great if he could just stay still."

That guy seemed like he was enjoying toying with others using vague words. Or, that was the only way he could form relationships with others. At this point, whether genuineness and conscience existed inside him was debatable.

"I told her not to show any signs, so there shouldn't be any problems for a while. I don't think she's naive enough to be fooled twice."

"We should create a social circle later; a group of people who are acting in front of Kang Giwoo. Who knows, there might be a lot more people like us."

"The way he acts is actually filled with holes, so that's a possibility. I'm sure if such people exist, they are just staying still because like us, many things would go awry if they made enemies with him."

"This is why public image is important. I want to give him a big blow, but I can't."

"Geez, you're saying the exact same thing Joohyun-noonim did."

The cold can of beer touched her forehead. Gaeul shivered slightly as she received the can. Maru was sitting on the floor, leaning against the sofa. He said everything went smoothly, but it must have been exhausting for him to talk for hours in an environment that was different from a drama shoot. From the sofa, she massaged the back of Maru's neck. It was stiffened up like a nervous person. She pulled Maru towards her when he groaned and tried to pull away.

"Stay still. You're an adult, yet you can't even endure that?"

"You're just way too spicy with your hands."

Hearing the word spicy, she exerted even more force. Maru shut up. He seemed to have realized that talking wouldn't do him any good here.

"Miss Hamin found out that we are dating. When I talked to her, things just inevitably flowed to talking about that."

"I'll try to reach out to her first when I meet her later."

"Also, she says she's a friend of Yoojin."

"Yoojin? You mean Lee Yoojin?"

Gaeul took her hands off Maru's shoulders.

"You still keep in touch? I've never seen her since high school."

"Of course you didn't. You didn't keep in touch with anyone around me ever since you graduated, like some kind of monk who became detached from the world."

“Did I now?”

“You did. Just look at Chaerim-unni.”

Gaeul brought her phone from the bedroom. She opened her photo gallery and pulled up a photo she took with Yoojin. It was from May of this year, when she came back to Korea for a little while.

“She’s gotten a lot prettier, hasn’t she?”

“She hasn’t changed at all. She still looks nosy and like she would peek at other people kissing.”

“When was that?”

Gaeul thought back to what happened on Christmas a long time ago. After a stage, she received a matching ring and a bottle of perfume from Maru as a present. It remained as an intense memory in her mind that still made her heart flutter when she thought about it to this day.

“It was a rather bold first kiss, wasn’t it?” Maru said as he jutted out his lips.

Gaeul pushed away those lips with her palm. She only wanted to remember that she had received his heartfelt gift. Pulling Maru down and kissing him was something really daring even when she thought about it now. Back then, she must have had an abnormal amount of courage to go skydiving without batting an eyelid. Would she have given him a kiss if he gave her presents and confessed like that but it was another boy? Definitely not.

She pulled the cheeks of the grinning Maru. He seemed to have found a point to tease her about. While it was true that it was one of her cherished memories, she was going to have a hard time sleeping because of the embarrassment at this rate.

“What does she, who has witnessed our first kiss alongside mother-in-law, doing right now?” Maru asked as he swiped over the photos.

He was looking at photos that they took together in Seoul during the ten days she came to Korea. Gaeul spoke as she looked at the photo they took while eating an annoyingly spicy tteokbokki,

“She’s in Japan now.”

“Traveling?”

“No, because of work. It’s been about two years. These are the photos we took at the beginning of the year. It’s almost been half a year since I haven’t seen her. We were both busy, so we haven’t been messaging each other that much either. Maybe it’s because of that, that we stay up all night chatting every time we meet each other. It was the same when we took these photos too.”

“Is she acting in Japan then? From what Miss Hamin said, she seems to be continuing her acting career.”

“She is. She’s continuing to shoot many pieces in collaboration with some college circles there too. But you know how meticulous she is. She says she has to prepare in case she doesn’t succeed as an actress, so she’s working under her mother. You remember that Yoojin’s mother runs a hair shop in Cheongdam, right?”

“I do remember that fancy hair shop. Joohyun-noonim said that she wanted to meet Yoojin. Apparently, she and Miss Hamin went to Busan to meet her during middle school. They must have been young, so it’s quite incredible. I’m sure she didn’t even imagine that she would be working together with a young girl who went to get an autograph from her.”

“Yoojin was her daughter in *Twilight Struggles*, wasn’t she?”

“Yeah. She liked it a lot back then too.”

“She was the actress that Yoojin admired. So I’m sure she liked it a lot.”

Gaeul gestured to Maru to come closer. She put her face against his and took a photo.

“Why are you taking a photo all of a sudden?”

“I feel like I should report this. She was my number one conversation partner back when I broke up with you. We talked trash about you for days. I forgot about her because I hadn’t messaged her for a while. It’s almost November, so she’s coming back home soon. I was thinking that I should tell her when she comes, but since I remembered, I might as well report to her now.”

“Considering Yoojin’s personality, I think my safety is at risk here.”

“If she says she wants to hit you, then just endure it. You deserve it.”

“I can’t even defend myself, huh.”

After taking a few photos, she sent one that looked good and one that looked funny through the messenger. To Gaeul, Yoojin was someone that provoked her competitive spirit. They competed for the same spot during the amateur acting class but she lost, and even after they turned 20 and they started going down the path of acting, Yoojin was a step ahead of her. Right now, she had gotten famous first, but she believed that Yoojin would follow her sooner or later. She knew this because they had been running side by side while looking towards the same objective. Ever since she left for Japan, they talked a lot less than before, but no matter how long she didn’t talk to her, she felt as close and friendly to her as ever. This would not change even in ten years, or in twenty years. She wasn’t simply a friend; she was a competitor she had been fighting with for a long time.

“If she’s working under her mother, is she doing hair-related stuff?” Maru asked.

She shook her head and showed him some photos that Yoojin sent her before. The photos contained a large concert stage and photos taken backstage.

“Yoojin’s mother actually runs a lot of businesses. When we were young, she was already involved in investing in film production. Did you know that TTO is doing concerts in Japan right now?”

“TTO? I saw one of the members during the shoot today. He apparently came back to Korea after doing all the concerts.”

“Once they’re done with the group concert, they hold individual concerts as well. They’re hugely popular in Japan after all. Yoojin’s in charge of their concert outfits. She’s not doing everything by herself, though, she’s just one of the team. From what she says, she’s the one leading everything, but I don’t know if that’s true or not.”

“So that’s why she’s staying in Japan.”

“It’s not just TTO. A lot of the idol bands who go to Japan seem to leave their styling to that team. I’m sure it’s a result of her mother’s great business skills. I heard she launched a premium hair shop in Aoyama, and apparently, the reservations are 4 months long. The shop she’s running in Cheongdam is still doing great too. You’ve seen senior Joohyun when I took you to that hair shop in high school, right? Apparently, she has been going there ever since that time. I go there from time to time too.”

“I do remember. She looked like she would be quick on the calculator.”

“Putting it like that makes it feel strange. She’s a good person.”

Just as she smiled back at Maru, Yoojin replied. It was an emoticon of a cute dinosaur breathing fire and stomping on the ground. She spent ten of those in a row. It meant that she was extremely angry and would punish her if she did not explain things properly.

-It’s been about two months since we got together.

She got a reply as soon as she sent it.

-Don’t you have any pride!? After all that crying because of him!

-Sorry. But both of us had a misunderstanding. A lot of it was my fault.

-Shut up. I’ll see you when I go back to Korea. Both of you are so dead. Also, tell Han Maru this.

Gaeul read the latter part of Yoojin’s text.

“What did she say?”

“Yoojin wants me to tell you this: you damn prick. You cut off contact and escaped to the military, yet now you reached out to me saying that you’re living a sweet life? I’ll kill you when I see you.”

“I don’t think her mouth was so rough before. No wait, was it?”

“We should kneel and beg for her forgiveness once she comes.”

Gaeul sent her a message again, asking when she was coming.

-As soon as possible. I need to see if this is true or not with my own eyes.

-Sorry.

-Then don’t do things that make you feel sorry. Tell me honestly. Are you seeing him because of sympathy or something?

-Absolutely not.

-Then you like him? You love him?

Gaeul looked at the side of Maru’s face through her peripheral vision and moved her fingers.

-Yeah. A lot.

-Then fine. Just, you have to compensate for all the time I consoled you. You're going to have to play around me this time when I go back to Korea, alright?

-Don't worry about it. I'll leave my schedule empty as much as possible.

-Geez, you're a popular actress, so I can't take you around all day either. Anyway, I'll talk to you when I get back.

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Lee Yoojin put down her phone. It was absolutely absurd. Han Gaeul was someone who bawled her eyes out after looking like her soul had packed up its stuff and left her body on the day after Han Maru went to the military. For a while after that, she acted like she was going to die soon. She even felt worried that she had to leave Gaeul behind and go to Japan. She felt relieved whenever they met in Korea and saw that she was becoming better. But now, that girl was meeting the very man who made her suffer through all that.

"What a tenacious bunch."

Yoojin picked up her phone again. Gaeul and Maru could be seen in the photo, and Gaeul was smiling in delight. It was that clear smile that she saw for the last time when in high school six years ago. It was a smile that made her hold back from asking if she was crazy. She couldn't say anything when she looked so happy. Although, she felt a little relieved because it felt like the soul that had left her had finally returned because her partner was finally by her side.

Still, it was unforgivable. She decided to bully the two of them as a price for making her suffer all this time seemingly for nothing. It seemed that beer was a must on her trip to Korea this time.

"Yoojin, you inside?"

"Yes. I'm here."

"Come down and say hello. We have an important guest."

Yoojin dressed up. The fact that her mother had invited a guest to the house in Tokyo meant that the guest was truly important. She met most of her guests in her shop. She went down the stairs and saw the guest sitting on the sofa.

"Hello. My name is Lee Yoojin."

"She's my daughter."

Her mother's voice could be heard from the kitchen. The guest sitting on the sofa stood up. His neat hairstyle and artistic fit of the suit were quite impressive. Was this what they call a middle-aged charm?

"As I heard, you are one lively lady. I'm Hong Janghae. Nice to meet you."

## **Chapter 892. Crank Up 1**

"I'll be going outside then, so that you two can have a talk."

Park Okhwa apologized to her daughter who left the house after greeting the guest.

“A lot has happened recently. It’s been a while since she got to rest, so she must have been sleeping.”

“She does look tired.”

Okhwa offered Janghae some tea. It was Japanese matcha. Looking down at the slightly foaming tea, Janghae lifted up the cup and put it against his mouth.

“It’s bitter and yet savory.”

“I brought it from Hoshino. I’ve been tasting a lot of traditional tea I could give out to customers at the shop, and this one was the most suitable for Korean people’s tastes. It’s moderately bitter, so it’s easy to drink, and it’s a brand-name product, so it satisfies the vain desires of my customers. As you know, the main customers of our shop have a slightly different perception of money.”

“Looks like I must not leave it unfinished.”

“If you’d like, I’ll give you some as a gift.”

Okhwa drank some tea as well. Beauty and styling techniques definitely had their limits. Even the most well-known stylists had no special skills when observed closely. There might be a difference in speed or the talent of touching the hair, but after a certain level, the difference was trivial. Winning against the competition required putting effort into things that weren’t just techniques with the hand. Okhwa realized this twenty years ago. The shop she opened in Cheongdam-dong was the start of that. She didn’t create a shop that just touched someone’s hair; she raised the entire person. While many of her competitors who believed that hair stylist shops simply needed to focus on doing the hair well started closing down, she managed to increase the number of her stores. One thing she realized while managing those shops was that there were unexpectedly a large number of people who wanted to spend their money in ingenious ways.

“I heard that you are going to open a shop in Ginza soon.”

“How did you know?”

“Just some rumors here and there.”

“You must have a lot of ears, president.”

“The nature of my work requires me to be sensitive to rumors, so I can’t help but put a lot of ears everywhere. In any case, congratulations. I have heard that yours is the first brand to have opened a shop in that field in this country, director. No, should I be calling you president now?”

“Just call me director. I’ve been using that title my whole life, so being raised in status to president or whatnot is not of interest to me.”

“Understood.”

Janghae put down the cup. As for his teacup, it was empty.

“Looks like we should get straight to business. I’m here to talk about the hotel in Omotesando.”

“I thought it would be about that. There’s nothing else that might bring you to me after all. I have heard about it too. The situation seems complex.”

Janghae nodded and reached into his inner pocket. What came out was a cuboid case, and it seemed to be an electronic cigarette. It seemed he had done it out of habit as he put it back inside his pocket.

"It is okay to vape. Vaping doesn't smell that much, does it?"

"Thank you. I had quit smoking for a while, but ever since I got this as a present, I started smoking out of habit. Especially when it's a matter that's hard to deal with."

Janghae turned on the electronic cigarette and waited. Okhwa spoke as she looked at the blinking LED on it,

"I apologize from the bottom of my heart. It is rare for one of ours to cause trouble. I wonder how things turned out like that."

"From what I hear, she needed some quick money. It seems she has gotten involved with private gambling organizations. Apparently she persuaded the man who was in charge of delivery that she would marry him if he helped her out this time."

"What a typical and boring story. So the middle man and that girl are trying to pull off a joke with the photo she took?"

"That's how it is."

"Did you get her?"

"I've sent my men out to search for her. They'll be looking around places she might go to, and we've also got her close contacts, so it won't take long."

"What a pain. I didn't know she would do something reckless like that. And to you too, I can't begin to imagine how to apologize to you."

She felt a headache. He was a guest when they were on good terms, but he would become a very annoying enemy if their relationship went bad. Her customer this time was an old man nearing his seventies, so he valued his pride a lot, but if a photo of him rolling around in bed with a woman in her twenties was exposed to the media, then he would very likely cause a ruckus while foaming at his wrinkled mouth.

"Did you get them?" Janghae said as he picked up his phone.

From how he leaned back as though he could sigh in relief, it seemed that the daring runaway couple were caught.

"Take their phones away immediately and check if they uploaded anything on the internet. You can take the man to your office and explain to him so that he can understand, and as for the woman..."

Janghae gave her a look. Okhwa asked if she could take the phone for a moment. Janghae spoke a few words to the people on the other side of the phone before giving her the phone.

"Hello? Is this Mari?"

-Unni.

“Just what were you doing? You aren’t the type of girl who would do this.”

-I’m sorry, unni. It looks like I had gone crazy for a minute. Oppa told me that we just needed to do it this once. I’m sorry. I won’t ever do it again.

“Mari. You know how much I cherished you. You possessed a large sum of money that other people your age couldn’t possibly have. Did you graduate from a good college? Do you have a great background? You have neither, and the only thing you could trust in was your decent-looking face and your body. Why can’t you understand that? I told you, didn’t I? Don’t try to use your brain in cunning ways. I told you that keeping secrets is the number one priority when it comes to our jobs. Did you think that all the money was yours after taking on chaebols all this time? Did you think that the money in your hands was small?”

-Unni, I’m sorry. I will never do it again.

“Mari, you don’t have to be sorry. The ship has sailed, and there’s no turning back. How old are you this year again? Twenty-five?”

Mari replied ‘yes’ in a small voice.

“What can a twenty-five-year-old do without a degree? In the end, you’ll go back to being a call girl again. But do you think you can sell your body in Korea after getting three to four million won per session all this time? Probably not, I think. Mari, I always told you, didn’t I? That we are high-class, premium products.”

-Unni.

“Snatch a good man and get married. That’s the only method you have now. You don’t have the persistence or the ambition, and you don’t even have the right mindset, so that’s the only way out for you.”

Okhwa turned off the phone. Janghae was putting his electronic cigarette inside the case after turning it off.

“Fortunately, things worked out. It would have been a pain if this dragged on.”

“It is a result of taking action early. Nothing seems to have been uploaded on the internet, so it seems like there will be no further trouble.”

“I’m glad that you took care of it well, president.”

“It looks like you must give them a warning. I get that letting them walk around freely is easier to control, but as things have gotten to this point, I’ll have to ask you to be more mindful about it.”

There was no room for excuses. Janghae was the one who created the bridge for her to take charge of VIPs’ trips to Japan. Only livestock would return grace with harm. Okhwa did not want to be one.

“I’ll tell the head manager about it. I’ll also check them again when I bring them to Japan.”



“Anyone can make mistakes, and that includes me. What’s important is to not repeat them. You’re someone I trust, director, so I will not worry about this again. Let’s close the case here on our end this time as well.”

“I’m grateful for your words.”

Okhwa brought out a tea set gift. It was something she had prepared when Janghae had contacted her.

“It’s the matcha you drank before.”

“I appreciate it.”

“Don’t drink it too fast. It is quite thick.”

Okhwa did not explain that there was something other than tea inside the packaging. Janghae did not say anything either even though he must have known that he wasn’t just getting matcha tea. Okhwa liked Janghae for this. He was neat and clean in the way he worked. She sighed in relief after hearing briefly about the customers that would visit next month as well as a list of people to manage. Things had ended. Janghae also smiled comfortably and ate a senbei that she had brought with the tea before.

“I heard that your eldest son is starting another movie. It must be good to have a son that many people want. I saw that my child too seemed to have talent in that area and brought her around a lot when she was young, but it seems like not anyone can become stars.”

“I don’t boast about my children because it makes me look foolish, but I do feel rather proud when I hear about them. Geunsoo, that boy. I knew he had it in him.”

“He must take after you a lot, from how he’s on his path to success.”

“His skills are one thing, but I believe that there was a lot of luck involved as well. As you know, becoming a popular actor doesn’t happen through skills alone.”

“It’ll be great if he can join his father’s agency. How long is your eldest child planning to stay in JA?”

“He’s very independent, so he will probably try not to come into my wing. It’s a bit of a pity, but I intend to be content watching him grow.”

“What a reassuring son. I’m envious. Is your second son also preparing to do something in that area?”

“No, my second son has talent in studying, so he went to Soohan university.”

“Your eldest son is a famed actor, while your son goes to a prestigious university. I want to boast about my child as well, but you’re children are too great that I can’t.”

“Your daughter seemed like she could splendidly take care of herself from what I saw before.”

“I still need to watch out for her. These days, we get into fights a lot. She was very obedient when she was young, too. How is it for you, president? Are you getting along well with your children?”

Janghae brightened up as though he felt good just thinking about his sons.

“Both I and their mother weren’t able to look after them a lot because of work. Maybe because of that, there was a chasm between us by the time they matured. It’s all because of my shortcomings. I wasn’t

even able to fight them. We were just indifferent to each other. But I thought that it wasn't good like this, so I tried to reach out to them and understand them first. Things got resolved rather easily. My boys accepted me as though they were waiting for it as well. Right now, they are my best drinking buddies, whether it's the eldest one or the second one. Sometimes, they act so close that it's a bother."

Janghae laughed as he stroked his hair.

"Sounds great. I'd love to talk it out with my daughter."

"It's the first time that's difficult. Once you get through to her, parents and children will become like friends. That's just how things work."

"I hope it's like that."

After conversing for a while, Janghae checked his watch.

"Looks like you have business to attend to."

"I'd love to stay here and talk about my boys with you, director, but yes, I do have something to do. Thanks for the tea today. I'll give you a call once the matters in Korea are settled."

Janghae stopped as he was standing up with the tea set.

"Should I just let the girl known as Mari be? We'll take care of the man, but the young lady worked under you."

"If it's possible, can you just let her go? I'll reach out to her later."

"That young lady must be blessed to meet a good person like you."

"Just as you said, president, anyone can make mistakes. She must have learned her lesson, so she will listen to my words now. It's such a pity to let go of someone like Mari. There are a lot of customers who look for her."

"Then we won't touch her for the time being."

"Thank you."

Okhwa saw Janghae out and closed the door. There were many things she had to take care of in a short time. The first thing was to contact the head manager and reeducate the girls.

"Head manager Oh? Have everyone gather up."

### **Chapter 893. Crank Up 1**

Choi Miyeon found an unfamiliar man standing in front of her store. He loitered around in front of the store before sticking his face against the door and looking inside. She couldn't easily approach him. She stood at the bus stop in front of her store, pretending to wait for a bus as she watched the store. The man called someone on his phone. She felt like she was going to start sweating coldly. She thought that everything was over since it had been quiet for a while, but was it going to start all over again? Was he a detective? Or a person related to Lee Miyeon and Hong Janghae? Her lower stomach started aching. She felt like she was going to vomit if anyone tapped her slightly. She forced down her unease and anxiety

and watched the man in front of her store. She was so focused that she didn't even realize a bus had come. The driver had opened the door and stared at her. Are you not getting in? – he asked with his eyes.

“Sorry.”

The driver rubbed his nose and closed the door. The bus went off, leaving behind a cloud of dust. Miyeon took out her phone. She needed help. She checked the names in her contacts lists, but eventually, she clenched her teeth and let her hand loose. There was no one to ask for help. She had painfully realized that the police were on the side of the wealthy, and she did not want to cause her family any worry. Other than her family and the authorities, there was no one left. The friends she had made during her journalist career all distanced themselves from her while giving her glares. A thirty-five-year-old workaholic woman had only a handful of friends not made through work, and even those people all had families or children, so she did not want to inconvenience them. Above all, those people couldn't give her any practical help.

There was one name that caught her eyes. He would come at a moment's notice if he called him now. She found it hard to call him precisely because of that. Her finger swayed on top of the name 'Kim Dongwook' before she folded her finger.

Then, her phone started ringing. She shivered like she had seen a horror scene during a horror movie. The people standing at the bus stop gave her strange stares. Miyeon shrank her shoulders and left the bus stop before picking up the call.

“Hello?”

-Uhm, am I speaking to the owner of the flower shop? I'm in front of the shop, but the door is locked. It says the opening hours start at 9. Are you perhaps on holiday today?

Miyeon looked at the man in front of the store. He was on his phone. She felt her energy drain. It was just a customer who had come early.

“I'm on my way. I'm basically there.”

She hung up and started walking. The man discovered Miyeon and lowered his head.

“So you were right nearby.”

“I was just about to arrive. Let me open the door.”

She unlocked the padlock on top of the door and entered the passcode on the electronic door lock.

“Come on in.”

She felt sorry. She had doubted a customer who had come to look at flowers. The man looked around.

“There are a lot of small flowers. They look great to give as presents.”

“Yes. The vases on this shelf here are usually sold as visiting gifts. The big vases below are usually bought for verandas. If you want any specific size or shape, then you can tell me about it. I put a lot of thought into interior design at my shop.”

“Did you create all of these small vases by hand?” The man had asked as he looked at the pink aloe in the pink vase.

“Yes. Many customers look for those. Since it’s a cactus, it’s easier to look after. It’s small and cute too. The gold-tooth aloe and the short-leaf aloe next to the one you’re looking at have slightly different shapes, so you should choose what you like after considering that.”

“They’re all quite nice. What do you think about these bright colors?”

“The pastel-tone vases, you mean? Many people do prefer that.”

“We were looking for gifts, and we decided to hand out cacti this size with a small saying printed on it. Can I order in large quantities?”

Miyeon smiled and said yes.

“Can I do about a thousand?”

“A thousand? Of those mini vases?”

“Yes. I don’t need them all at once. For now, I’m thinking about two hundred per month.”

“If it’s like that, I can do it. A thousand all at once is a bit too difficult for me since I run this shop by myself.”

Imagining herself being busy making new vases, Miyeon realized that humans were so simple-minded. Just ten minutes ago, she was hyperventilating because of her anxiousness, but now she was smiling because of the stable sales. The fact that she could feel happy probably meant that she was doing a lot better.

“What kind of cacti would you like?”

“It’s fine for you to decide. It’s also fine if you just use the remaining inventory.”

“Eh?”

“Just make whatever you want. You can also switch up the vase colors, or just make them with whatever inventory you have left.”

“That’s good for me, but the company must want something specific. It might become a problem later.”

“It’s fine. I run the company. The president said something, so who would say no?”

“I see.”

Miyeon took a memo on the whiteboard she hung up on the wall. When it came to the important stuff, she would become nervous if she didn’t write it down immediately. It was something she gained because of her career.

“I’ll pay for them all in bulk.”

“It’s fine even if you pay monthly though.”

“Paying in advance will put your mind at ease, and I can forget about it too. Please tell me your bank account number.”

Miyeon told him her bank account number. The man sent her the money on the spot using a banking app on his phone.

“Tell me your corporate registration number. I’ll issue a cash receipt.”

“It’s fine. You don’t have to. Just write a hand-written receipt that I can give to the finance department. My finance department is quite picky even when the president is spending, so I have to be sure about proving where I spend my money.”

“But you can only get your tax deducted if you get a proper receipt for it. It’s not a small sum of money.”

“Getting that amount deducted won’t even leave behind a mark. You can handle it however you want. Rather than that, as senior said, they seem perfect for gifts.”

Miyeon, who was hesitating in front of the terminal, stared at the man when the man mentioned the word ‘senior.’ The man’s mouth, which had been moving non-stop ever since he had come inside the store, stopped for the first time. He awkwardly rubbed his nose and switched the topic, saying that a vase looked pretty.

“Uhm, did you come here on someone’s introduction?”

“Eh? No, not really. I just saw it on a blog somewhere that this place was good.”

“You mentioned a senior just now, didn’t you?”

“I must have made a mistake while thinking about something else.”

The man clearly seemed like he was making up lies. Miyeon asked him for his bank account number.

“Why do you need my bank account number?”

“I’ll reimburse you.”

“Please, why are you doing this?”

“I have my own circumstances. I cannot accept this money until you tell me who that senior is.”

“I’m no one suspicious. I’ll even give you my business card. How could you back down on a good business deal like this?”

Being able to handle a thousand items as she wished was certainly a good condition. The speed at which she would have to work was also suitable as she would not have to overexert herself. It was a deal that she would regret if she missed it, but she could not proceed with it now that she had heard a suspicious word.

“Okay. He told me to keep it a secret, but I guess I can’t help it. I’m acquainted with senior Dongwook. We met recently and talked about some things. It was during that talk that he asked how possible it would be for me to make a deal with this store. I told him I’d decide after seeing the items, so I came here myself. No matter how close he is to me, I can’t accept flawed items. But now that I had a look at

them. They seem perfect to hand out as gifts, and the price didn't seem so bad, so that's why I'm trying to make a deal with you. I came here because of an introduction, so I can't really ask for a discount for paying in cash, and I thought I should make it a good deal for you."

The man stroked his hair with his palm, asking her not to cancel the deal now that she found out who he was.

"Honestly, this was the first time he asked me something so cautiously, so I came here because I was surprised. That man is the kind of person to ask outright, not the kind of great man who would take caution. I tried not to talk about it because I thought there were some circumstances behind it, not because of some other suspicious reason. Well, I believe I have explained myself enough, so I'll be taking my leave."

"Um."

She tried to call out to the man who left, but the man left after asking her to take care of the items. Miyeon spat out the stuffy breath stuck in her throat and sat down.

"I made him worry."

She felt thankful and sorry at the same time. Miyeon grabbed her phone and called Dongwook.

\* \* \*

"Geez, why did that guy act suspicious and put me in a difficult position."

-I just must have been too suspecting. Thank you, senior, for looking out for me.

"Nah. I only mentioned it because I remembered. It's nothing amazing, so you don't have to keep it to heart."

-Thanks to you, I can make a living.

"What has gotten into the almighty Choi Miyeon? You should be a little more confident. You sold your items because they were good."

Dongwook threw away the cigarette he took out to smoke. Hearing his junior's voice filled with vitality made him quit thinking about smoking.

"How's business going? Is it hard since it's winter?"

-It's doing a little worse than spring for sure. But I didn't receive that much damage because I don't just deal with flowers. These days, air plants are selling well, so it's fine.

"That's good. I'll introduce people I know to your shop, so accept them without worries. If you're so uncomfortable with it, you can pay me rebates. How about 10%? That doesn't sound bad."

-I'll think about it.

He could hear a chuckle on the other side. This would be unthinkable just a few short months ago. Dongwook leaned against the car and spoke,

"You've become a lot better. You're still going to the hospital, right?"

-I am. I don't go as often, and I don't take as much medicine either.

"Looks like you'll cheer up soon. It's about time you revived."

-Even if I do revive, I'll just be a lady at the flower shop. I can't go back to that world.

"Don't even think about coming. You look good there. Maybe you finally found your dream job."

-That's a good thing to say to someone who's been in the media for over a decade.

"Looks like you really feel better since you're grumbling and all. Just buy me some drinks later."

He scratched his tire with the heel of his sneaker. They didn't talk about anything for a while. He stared at the white cigarette that he had thrown on the ground.

-Senior, I'm asking just in case, but you aren't still investigating that, right?

"That? What's that?"

-Hong Janghae, Lee Miyoon

"I told you many times already. I'm at the peak of self-preservation. Did you already forget that I rejected you several times when you asked me? I don't want to say this, but I took my hands off it after seeing what happened to you. I don't even want to think about it now."

-Good. Forget about that thing. It's better that way. They were enemies I shouldn't have gone against. It would be great if I listened to your words before.

"There you go again, thinking about bad things. Don't worry about that and just focus on running your shop. You should do your best if you want to keep running it. Earn a lot of money. Money is the best."

-I'm saving up even if you didn't tell me. I'm going to pay back the man who gave me this shop.

"Pay back? Don't. That shop is a speck of dust compared to what you went through. Just accept it. You shouldn't consider cleanliness when it comes to money. Even if a dirty man gives you money, it's clean money, okay?"

Just as Dongwook spoke with a smile, someone caught his eyes.

"Alright then, good luck with your shop. I'll visit you again."

-Okay. Don't ever get involved with that matter.

"There you go again. I prioritize my safety above everything else."

After hanging up the call, Dongwook picked up the cigarette he threw on the floor and put it in his mouth. In front of his eyes, a woman with a short haircut was walking past him with a bag of groceries. Dongwook pushed the cigarette to the end of his lips and muttered,

"I hope this Mari is that Mari."

## **Chapter 894. Crank Up 1**

"Unni, your eyeshadow got a bit smudged. Wait a sec."

Gaeul closed her eyes and waited. It was a scene where many people were running down the corridor, and the director seemed dissatisfied and was increasing the number of cuts.

“Unni, would you like some water?”

“I was just about to ask. Do you have anything cold?”

“I do. Look at you sweating despite it being winter. Looks like the director has set his mind on it today. The reversal in viewing rates really hits big, huh.”

She drank some cold water given to her by Mijoo. Doctor’s Office ended up yielding its first place to Doctors. The staff members of Doctor’s Office whispered to one another that it was the rebellion of the side characters. Doctors received a strange amount of attention starting episode 8, caught up to Doctor’s Office at a steady rate, and ultimately passed it.

“Lift the reflector properly,” the director shouted.

From what she heard, it seemed that he had gotten an earful from the head producer. Apparently, he was laughed at by a fellow producer he was discreetly competing with, in the department. He usually preferred using gentle words of consolation even when someone made a mistake instead of chiding them, but today, he was properly getting angry. It seemed that he had a very high-stress level. Gaeul also did her best not to create NGs and focused especially harder than before. After all, the more delayed the shoot became, the tighter the schedule would become, and the stricter the director’s voice would be.

“I watched Chatterbox yesterday. Maru-oppa was pretty amazing, yeah? Even my friends are talking about it. I told my friends that someone I know is going to be on it.”

“Well done. But what did your friends say exactly?”

“Apparently, he’s so cute because he’s weirdly cute. He looks cold at a glance, but he looks interesting.”

“Cold?”

“Yes.”

“Popularity sure works wonders. If it was before, people would have said that he gives people a bad impression.”

“Maru-oppa does have quite a cute face if he smiles. Though, he is a bit menacing when he glares. Chatterbox has gotten more viewing rates than usual, so I’m sure your boyfriend will become popular now.”

“I wish that would happen.”

Mijoo, who was smiling, suddenly turned rigid.

“Kang Giwoo’s coming.”

Mijoo organized the cosmetics and left the place. Gaeul had told her to leave the place naturally once she caught sight of Giwoo. In cases where she couldn’t help it, she just told her to stay smiling.



“It’s not cold at all today.”

“I’ve been running since morning, so there was no time to feel cold. I can’t even feel that it’s winter.”

They say you get used to smelling disgusting things, and indeed, it had gotten a lot easier to talk to Giwoo. It was much better compared to before when she had to put her mind into acting every time she faced him.

“So I kept thinking about it, and I think I’ve done something wrong after all. If not, I just can’t understand why you’re acting cold towards me.”

She felt that what was coming had finally come. Last time, when Kang Giwoo invited her out to a meal, she had hammered the final nail in the coffin, saying that she had no leisure to date anyone right now. After that, he did not talk to her for a while, but his gaze became a lot more persistent. She held out well until now with minimum conversations because she had to act with him, but it seemed like this was the end of that. Gaeul reminded herself that she had to respond calmly before speaking,

“I told you. I want to focus on acting for now. I’m not saying that I hate you or that you made some mistake that made me want to distance myself from you. I’m saying that I want to invest more time into myself.”

“Then alright. I know better than anyone that your desire for achievement is strong.”

Her lips twitched. You know me well? – she almost urged him to recite all the things he knew about her. If she hadn’t remembered Maru’s obedient smile when she parted her lips halfway, she would have caused a ruckus in the set. She couldn’t just shout at him and regret it later.

“It’s as you say. I’m a lump of self-improvement, so I don’t plan to do anything else for the time being. So let us each focus on the piece we’re doing. The director’s already on edge since we got overtaken.”

“I was surprised after seeing the viewing rate chart last time. I thought that we would be in the lead even though they caught up, but it was reversed. Maru is amazing after all, isn’t he? He was the start of it all. He’s getting more spotlight than the lead characters. He seems busy with interview requests and all.”

“You seem quite knowledgeable on what Maru is up to recently.”

This guy was way too cautious. Despite ‘knowing’ that they had broken up, it seemed that he had not excluded the possibility that they were still dating, from how he kept bringing up Maru every time they talked. Gaeul responded with indifference. After all, not many people would be interested in talking to a wall.

“I saw Maru on Chatterbox last night. He was good in TV shows too. I’m sure the entertainment program producers will want him now.”

Gaeul also watched Chatterbox yesterday, alongside Maru in the living room. The ‘insane’ self-introduction that Maru showed her on the day he recorded the show came out on TV without a single edit, alongside funny subtitles and sound effects. It was something she greatly enjoyed watching, but she couldn’t express that in front of Giwoo.

“I didn’t watch it because I was sleeping. It’s not a program I enjoy watching anyway.”

"I have always wanted to know, did you two get into a fight? These days, you two don't seem to be talking to each other."

"I could say the opposite to you. You always seem to be talking about Maru recently. It's like you're Maru's newsletter."

She retorted because it felt like there would be no end to this if she just kept listening. It was something that would make Giwoo's eyes flip with all the hostility he had towards Maru. Just as she expected, Giwoo smiled. It wasn't the relaxing smile that he made out of habit. It was a defense mechanism that hid his discomfort. Now that she had experienced it from up close, she could tell the difference easily. She understood what Maru said when he talked about how Kang Giwoo was still too immature. Gaeul could easily see the errors that normal people would not find if they look at him with goodwill.

"I just want you two to make up," Giwoo said.

He seemed to have gotten himself together in that short while, and the uncomfortable smile had disappeared.

"We never fought in the first place. We're just both busy and don't contact each other that much. Also, I have no reason to monitor each and every single one of his TV shows. It's fine as long as we know that we're doing well, isn't it?"

"If you say so."

"Done talking now?"

"I said everything I came here to say. So, I'm thinking if there's anything else I should talk about. Also, I'm wondering if eating with me without any ulterior motives is such a hindrance to you."

"It's because you act like that that I have no choice but to act like this. It'd be a pain for both of us if we got awkward. If you need someone to date, why don't you look for someone else? I'm sure you have a lot of women in your contacts."

"I don't have anyone I contact in private. I'm quite awkward when it comes to things like that. Do you know what made me flustered the most? It was when someone called me a playboy."

"You aren't?"

"You are seeing me like one too? Is that why you're distancing yourself from me?"

"No, I said this many times already, but I just think that now's not the right time to be in love. You might think differently, but love is something you can do anytime. But as for my career, it will be over for me if I don't get as much as I can now."

"Isn't it tiring to just keep working?"

"It is. I mean, what isn't tiring work in this world? I'm just doing it because I enjoy it to the point that it doesn't matter if it's tiring."

"I understand you."

Giwoo nodded, seemingly in agreement. He was being obnoxiously persistent today. Was he getting the misconception that she was just pushing him back and not actually rejecting him? Or was he a pervert who gained joy from being excluded? Regardless of which, it was a pain in the head that he wasn't leaving and was sticking around. She stood up and changed spots. The rest was becoming long because the camera was being put onto a different rail. She left the hospital because she didn't like the stuffy air. She saw people who had come to watch the set. It was natural for people to be here since there were bright lights on at 9 in the evening.

"Gaeul-noona! I love you!"

A bunch of loud shouts could be heard. It was a bunch of high school boys. Gaeul waved his hand. The bunch of boys, who were taking photos of her and creating heart shapes in the air, suddenly stopped and looked to the left. She had a bad hunch about it. Just as she had expected, Giwoo was approaching. When she tried to leave because she didn't want to get involved, Giwoo blocked her way.

"You should give them a little fan service."

She subconsciously frowned. Did he set his mind on it today? She seriously considered if she should tell him to get lost and wondered if that would wake him up a little. Just then, Giwoo grabbed her wrist and raised it in the air. She was about to shake him off when she caught sight of the people who were taking photos. She forced herself to smile and waved her hand. Journalists had latched onto the drama because of the falling viewing rates. If she gave them any more sights, they would use their blabbermouths even more.

"Tell me if you want to fight with me. I like fighting," she whispered to Giwoo in a small voice.

Only then did he let go of her hand and apologize. She rubbed her wrist as she returned to the hospital. She was originally going to get some fresh air, but she ruined her mood instead.

"I didn't know you'd hate it so much. I'm sorry."

"Are you a kid? Or what, were you annoyed that things didn't go your way? I told you, didn't I? I want to focus on work right now."

"I just wanted to show our fans something good."

"If it was like that, then you could just wave your hand. Or at least, tell me about it in advance. If you think that you can grab my hand without permission, then you'd better fix your thinking. I'm telling you, there will not be a next time."

She wanted to vent her anger, but she held back because it might impact the shoot. This guy was truly more annoying than Lee Miyoon. Seeing him smile with a pretense of goodwill, she might as well have an easier time fighting it out with Lee Miyoon.

"Gaeul, are you upset?" Giwoo approached her and asked.

Gaeul did not want to reply. She desperately wanted to go home. She wanted to hug Woofie and lie down on the sofa without thinking about anything. She wanted to hear Maru's humming.

"I'm sorry. It looks like I was too immature. I made a mistake because I've never truly liked someone before."

She suddenly felt like a pair of cold hands touched her. She felt a chill running down her back. Gaeul looked at Giwoo. He, who she thought would look nervous or apologetic, was instead looking at her with sharp eyes. There was a smile that she had never seen before on his mouth. It was a smile that made her guard go up the moment she saw it. Gaeul intuitively realized that Giwoo was seeing her as a 'toy.' He had been watching from the side cautiously for months and must have finally made the decision today. That would also explain why he was being so persistent. What she found the most detestable was that the affection Giwoo showed seemed genuine. What could be more freaky than that man loving her?

"I'm sorry, but I will not harbor romantic feelings for you."

"I know. But you never know what will happen when it comes to love."

"That's not true, I think. Most of the time, love is clear-cut. It's so clear in fact, that you can't possibly be wrong."

"Maybe. But I still don't want to give up. You still have a lot that you don't know about me."

"Just because I get to know something I didn't doesn't mean that my feelings towards you would change."

"But that means that there is a possibility for change. I understand. I respect your decisions. And I did go too overboard. Let me apologize."

He was a spiteful guy. He actually pulled out at the most decisive moment. If he was just a little more persistent about it, she would have walled him off properly so that he would never be able to talk to her in private again.

"But seeing you annoyed looks fresh and new. I like it."

Giwoo walked past her. Her jaws felt tired. It was probably because she did not get to say what she wanted to say. Would she be able to get through the shoot properly? She clutched her aching mind when she saw the face of a woman that wasn't too welcome in the distance.

"What a day."

Gaeul looked at Lee Miyoon, who entered the hospital while hanging her coat on her arm. It would be great if she could just walk past like she didn't see her. Maybe it was because she looked for God, who she usually didn't look for, that made Miyoon, who was walking forward boldly, suddenly turn her head. They locked eyes. God, Buddha, whoever, isn't this too harsh? – Gaeul smiled brightly and nodded.

## **Chapter 895. Crank Up 1**

Wrinkles were bound to increase with age. She rather liked the small wrinkles at the end of her eyes that resembled snowflakes, and laugh lines were one of her charms. Wrinkles on her neck looked hideous, but she could understand as it was a result of time. Lee Miyoon touched her forehead. She could feel the crease of her forehead on her fingertips. She pushed her finger straight up. She could feel multiple wrinkles that stretched out like rivers. In her prime, she was called the 'forehead beauty.' When she first heard such a thing, she felt really taken aback, but she eventually took a liking to that name. The smooth forehead was her symbol. Even now that she was nearing her seventies, she did not have a

single wrinkle on her forehead. After all these years, it had turned into her pride. Lee Miyoong's forehead had to be smoother than the young ones.

"You're here, madam."

One of the staff members working at the TV station bowed 90 degrees and greeted her. She was a young woman. Her fingers stroking her forehead suddenly trembled. The forehead of the young one in front of her caught her eyes. She could feel her wrinkles deepen.

"Can you put away your ugly face?"

That staff member quickly made way. She tensed her stomach, pulled her chin and started walking. She gave a glance at the people watching the set before entering the hospital. She felt extremely displeased. She rolled her eyes around looking for the bathroom. When she found it, she went inside the bathroom and stood in front of the mirror. A thin snake was crawling on her forehead. Miyoong took out her BB cream from her bag and applied it on her forehead. The tube of BB cream that she had bought merely days before had become thin. She applied the BB cream along her wrinkles before throwing the tube on the floor. Applying cosmetics on top of her crumpled pride was a fruitless endeavor.

"Hong Janghae that bastard."

It was already too late by the time she became suspicious. Hong Janghae had already finished his preparations to change ship. She should not have ignored Hong Janghae's brief smile six months ago. That was when this started. Valleys of wrinkles started forming on the pride that was her forehead. They were at odds with each other, but she thought that they were business partners who would not betray each other. She believed that they could not afford to betray each other as they held each other's weaknesses. Oh how wrong she was in her judgment of Hong Janghae.

She washed her hands and took out her phone. She had sent dozens of text messages to Hong Janghae without a reply. It seemed that the other party decided to thoroughly ignore her. She raised her forehead. Anger fumed inside her. She could not stay still. She had to show that Lee Miyoong wasn't such an easy woman. She was gnashing her teeth while looking at her phone before suddenly becoming extremely shocked and immediately loosening her forehead. The BB cream had clumped up into a white line along her wrinkle. Miyoong screamed at the mirror. The scream seemed to be loud enough to reach outside the bathroom as a staff member peeked inside. She seemed surprised.

"Fuck off."

She did not want to say more than two words. The staff member paled and turned around. She was aware that the more complicated a situation was, the calmer she should be, but she was out of her mind because she had been hit too strongly on the back of her head. A week ago, when she had just found out about the change in situation, she almost passed out. It had taken a week just to get herself together and start taking action. She thoroughly felt that she had gotten old.

It was ten years ago when she started trafficking people together with Hong Janghae. Before he became the president of Soul, they only saw each other from time to time as managerial positions, but ever since he settled in Soul, they started talking deeper about their business. What consolidated their mutually beneficial relationship was when he prevented The Five's prostitution scandal that almost got exposed to the media six years ago. He turned the public's attention on the 'actress prostitution

scandal,' and brought in the idol band, who had relations to high-level mistresses, effectively stopping it from becoming an issue. Seeing Hong Janghae's way of doing business, she thought that they weren't compatible as fellow humans but were good as business partners. Never could she imagine that the result of that would be her losing all of the powers she had.

Hong Janghae had opened up a new business route. He had attracted all the people under her management in the country behind the curtains and gave them to a new business partner he made in Japan. It was someone she knew as well. The shop owner of a famous stylist shop in Cheongdam-dong. She should have realized it when that woman flew around from people to people like a tweety bird.

The middleman that she had been working with for years had notified her of their resignation just a week ago. The hunting dog that returned with good items with some good feed had gone to a new owner who gave them better feed. She lost all her contacts overnight. It made her laugh due to the absurdity. This was way too clean of a job. The president of a small business owner that called her 'madam' just until a little while ago actually moved his entire business to Japan. The good-looking kids that she had under her wings had all cut contact as well. Had she known that this was going to happen beforehand, she would have gotten the numbers of all the trainees who introduced her to all of them. She never knew that having her middle man take care of the communication out of fear of getting caught would lead to such a problem.

She had lost all of her limbs. The castle that she had built while rolling around in the dirt that was the entertainment industry, dabbing her hands into all sorts of dirty business, had all collapsed overnight. The bigger problem was that she could no longer contact anyone high up, whether it was that member of the city council who preferred busty ones, that business owner who always wanted a good suck, or that politician who said that the taste of a girl around his granddaughter's age was better than those around his daughter's age. None of them picked up her call. It wasn't just trainees that she had connected those men and women to. She had stacked bills of 50,000 won in drink boxes and handed some to them discreetly on multiple occasions.

Miyoon liked controlling people. She felt proud of her life when she looked at people moving as she willed. The money that she gained secondarily, as well as the sense of power that she could smell right next to them was good as well. She was fine with giving up the money since she had earned more than enough, but she could not give up on the hierarchy that she had rummaged through as she wished to until now. That was her lifeblood. She gave her body and soul in order to create that business route. What was stolen was not just people and money. She was robbed of Lee Miyoon herself. It was utterly unacceptable.

"Head prosecutor."

She finally reached someone. She had only reached this person after several attempts. The head prosecutor coughed dryly.

-I was expecting another call. Madam Lee, I'd like you to stop calling me now.

"Head prosecutor. You can't do this. You'll be in trouble if you do this to me."

-What are you on about? Trouble? What an unpleasant word. Madam Lee, no, Ms. Lee Miyoon. Do you even know who you're talking to right now?

Miyoon fell silent. She had briefly lost her reason because of her fuming anger.

"I apologize. Excuse my rudeness. But head prosecutor, you know why I've called you."

-I have nothing to say on that matter. I hope you don't call me for personal reasons in the future. We will not be seeing each other.

"Is it because of Hong Janghae, that man?"

-Geez, you should already know what happened. Since things have reached this state, you might as well humbly accept everything. Don't get reckless and bring yourself misfortune. I'll help you once considering our relationship until now. Just make do with that. Now, if you'd please excuse me.

It seemed that Hong Janghae had thoroughly played his hands. One of her VIPs, the head prosecutor, had clearly drawn the line. The other customers should have similar reactions, and that was probably why they weren't picking up her calls.

She couldn't just let this slide. Hong Janghae was the one who would rejoice the most if she just humbly accepted everything like what the head prosecutor said. It was time to show him how tenacious she had been to climb up all the way here from her moldy semi-basement house.

Miyoon took a deep breath and neatened her hair. She had lost her first move, so she could not afford to hesitate. It was impossible to duke it out with Hong Janghae, so she had to go above that line. That was the reason for her visit to the set today. The bridge was here. The one who was connected to the chairman who sat in a place that oversaw the entirety of Korea.

She was just crossing the hospital when a detestable face caught her eyes. It was Han Gaeul. It was that pigeon-like bitch who did not know fear. Usually, she would talk to her as a refresher, but she was rather busy today.

"Not doing anything today, huh?" Han Gaeul said as soon as she tried to go past her.

The muscles around her eyes squirmed. She turned around and glared at Han Gaeul.

"Finally got something to say?"

"Just how do you never change, girlie?"

"Thanks to you, senior, I became someone who can hold my ground. But hey, you look like you're in trouble. Your face is seriously no joke."

She ended up showing her wrinkle to the last one she wanted to show them to. She felt like she had been stabbed. Hong Janghae, the head prosecutor, the rest of the customers, as well as all of her subordinates - the stress that she had received during the past week suddenly smashed her head all at once. She couldn't stay still. She felt like she had to chide this girl no matter how busy she was. She might die of anger if she just let this pass by. She swung her hand with all the impulses that occurred within her body gathered in her hand. She would feel better if a crisp slap tickled her ears.

"You're gonna hit me?"

The hand that had slapped the cheeks of dozens, if not hundreds, was caught in midair. Miyoon groaned in pain. Why was that feeble-looking arm so strong? Miyoon tried to shake her hand off with all her might, but Han Gaeul did not let her go. Her hand felt like it was going to break.

“Let me go! It hurts! I said it hurts!”

Only after she screamed did she realize that there were many eyes around. She looked so terrible right now that it was to the point that she had to mind other people’s gazes. Not only was her hand caught by a junior decades younger than her, she even whined like a little child.

“You’re quite strange today. You don’t have any power in your hand either.”

She could see the producer rushing over as though he heard the scream. Han Gaeul politely bowed to her before turning around. She gnashed her teeth to the point that her golden tooth was getting stripped.

“Madam, what brings you here?”

“You!”

She was about to chide the shocked director but decided to hold back.

“It’s nothing, so just go about your business.”

“What has Gaeul done wrong to you ag...”

“I said it’s nothing!”

“Yes, madam. I was wrong. Please calm down.”

“Forget that. Where’s Giwoo? He’s in the shoot today, right?”

“Giwoo? Yes, he’s inside. Shall I call him over?”

“I’ll go there myself.”

She glared at the staff members who were watching. Only then did they avert their gazes. Only the bold outsourced members were laughing. She engraved them into her memory so that she could later tell them that their unwitty mouths would be the downfall of their main source of income.

She looked at her wrist while walking. A handprint – red and blue – had remained on her wrist. The squished flesh did not spring back up in a short time. It meant that she had gotten old.

So without my subordinates and my guests, all my customers, only this wrinkly skin and useless acting skills are all I have? – she came to herself. It was terrifying just thinking about it.

“Madam.”

Giwoo greeted her with a smile. It was the smile of an angel. Her guide to heaven was here. Through him, she could reach the man at the apex of power who could squish a mere Hong Janghae with a finger.

“Yes, Giwoo. How is the shoot going?”

“Not bad. But what brings you here?”



“The thing is, I have something to ask of you.”

“Please speak comfortably. I’ll listen to anything you have to say.”

It was her lifeline; one that shone in gold. No matter how greedy Hong Janghae was, he would have to cough out everything he ate with one word from YM’s chairman. She was acquainted with the chairman as well. If she explained everything, he would probably give a word to Hong Janghae, his subordinate, as a token of consideration of their relationship until now.

“I have something I need to talk about urgently with the chairman.”

“Are you talking about my grandfather?”

“Yes. It’s something extremely urgent.”

She grabbed his hand. She had to get a clear answer here. Giwoo, who looked at the floor as though in hesitation, slowly turned his head around. Miyoon followed his eyes. Han Gaeul was approaching.

“That damned bitch can’t read the mood.”

She glared at Han Gaeul, who walked past, before looking at Giwoo again. Giwoo was smiling.

“Thinking about it now, you always hated our Gaeul.”

“She is one bad bitch. You should watch out as well. She’s one thieving fox. Rather than that, can you listen to my request?”

“Yes. I’ll ask grandfather about it.”

She sighed in relief. Just as she was about to thank him, Giwoo let go of her hand first. Then, he dusted his hand off as though he had got some dirt on it. She had to be mistaken. Miyoon pulled her awkward hand back to her waist.

## **Chapter 896. Crank Up 1**

The queen of the set was waiting nervously. Gaeul stared at Miyoon. Miyoon had never not made herself public. Regardless of which set she went to, she would sit down on the chair that the producer would provide for her and would watch the shoot with one of her legs on top of the other, taking a big spot in the middle as if she enjoyed seeing the staff members being displeased with her. Unless she entered the camera angle or something, there was no one who could stop her or express any complaint.

Miyoon, who stood in a corner of the hospital, stared at Giwoo endlessly. It had been an hour already. Even the staff seemed to find her rather curious for standing still without a word for a long time as they were whispering to each other. Truly, what has gotten into that woman that was making her stay still?

“Okay. Prepare to pull out.”

The scenes they needed to shoot at the hospital were done. She could see Lee Miyoon moving among the busily moving staff. Her target seemed to be Kang Giwoo. The two of them spoke for a long time. It was a rather common scene to see her talk to Giwoo with a smile whenever she came to the set, but her expression was rather different today. Even from afar, she could feel Lee Miyoon’s sense of urgency. The two were a duo that got on her nerves. Kang Giwoo and Lee Miyoon - both of them were those that

threw their morals into the trash. When Giwoo called somewhere with his phone, Miyoong's expression turned visibly brighter. As if they were conscious of the attention of those around, they walked out of the hospital. She wanted to follow them out. She wanted to know what kind of schemes they were concocting to be rest assured on her way home.

"Gaeul, wait a little."

The producer called out to her. Gaeul had to turn around. She walked over to the producer and looked behind. She could no longer see the two of them.

\* \* \*

"Grandfather wants you to come to his house."

Miyoong spat out the breath she had been holding back. A way forward had been granted to her. Since the issue of meeting the chairman had been resolved, she had confidence in taking care of the rest.

"Giwoo, thank you so much."

"I don't know what this is about, but please, take care of this well. Also, you'd better set off quickly. He does not like sudden appointments, so you'll be in trouble if you're late."

"Of course. It's an appointment with the chairman, so I dare not be late. Giwoo, I will pay you back for this later."

"Don't mention it. We should help each other out in this world."

Miyoong grabbed Giwoo's hand before turning around. She had to hurry. She told the manager waiting at the van the location. The van darted off.

"Be as fast as possible. If we're late, both you and I are dead."

She organized her thoughts as she looked at the whizzing outside scenery. She couldn't show her tears to appeal to the chairman. In front of a merchant, emotions were worth less than a single coin. She had to prove her worth. She would report to the chairman about what kind of profits he would stand to gain when she regained her subordinates that Hong Janghae had taken from her through malicious methods. Since that old man despised wasting time, she had to persuade him with just the main points. The van jerked up and down. The manager was looking through the rearview mirror in fright. It seemed that he had made a mistake at a speed bump while trying to speed up.

"Forget it. Just make sure you're not late."

She could see the manager being relieved. There was probably no need to tell him that he had just been fired. They entered a neighborhood where the tall walls were reminiscent of old castles. Whenever they turned around a corner, cars costing hundreds of millions of won were lined up on the side of the hill. This was a place where people who controlled this country since its militaristic days through their pens, money, and politics. When the van went past the house of the president of a news agency, she could see a wall painted blue. That was the place where the owner of the YM Group resided. She had been here a couple times before, but it made her shrink back every time.

"Go back down and wait. Don't block traffic here."

After sending off her manager, she stood in front of the metallic door. The chairman's name was engraved on the old nameplate. Miyoon touched the crease on her forehead once before pressing the bell.

"It's Lee Miyoon. I have an appointment with the chairman."

\* \* \*

While looking through some documents, Hong Janghae's eyes moved to his phone on the left. The lights were blinking, as he had turned it on silent. Usually, there was no one who would call him at this hour on his personal phone, not his business phone. He reached out and grabbed his phone. The moment he saw the name on the screen, he put down the papers and picked up the call.

"Yes, chairman."

-Little Hong. Are you busy?

"Not at all."

-Where are you right now?

"I'm still at the office."

-You should come to my house for a bit. There is something you need to resolve.

"I'll depart immediately."

-Take your time. Don't run into accidents.

Janghae told the head manager outside that he would be leaving for a little. It was rare for the chairman to call someone without warning, especially when calling someone to his house. The light turned from orange to red, but he did not take his foot off the gas pedal. He couldn't really take his time just because he was told to. He shrank the distance in one go before arriving in front of the bluish-white wall. He saw the door to the garage open slowly. It seemed that the security team had seen him through the security cameras. He parked his car in the garage connected to the garden. He walked past the pond that had a golden koi fish in it before standing in front of the main door.

The secretary opened the door for him. Exchanging short greetings with the chairman's closest confidante, he walked inside.

"The chairman is in the study. There is another guest."

"Is it junior director Kim?"

"No, it is Miss Lee Miyoon."

"Lee Miyoon? Okay."

He rubbed the watch that the chairman had gifted him and stood in front of the door to the study. The secretary knocked on the door, opened it, and stepped back.

"I apologize for being late, chairman."

He could see the chairman reading a book at the table and Lee Miyoon who was sitting in the chair in front of him. Miyoon rubbed her forehead before placing her hand on top of her knees.

"You're not late. I can see that you came here right after I called you. You'll run into an accident if you do that, so take your time next time."

"I will."

"Sit down first," the chairman said while flipping over the page.

Janghae sat on the chair next to Miyoon.

"The two of you talk to each other for a bit. I'll talk once I'm done reading this. You two both know your stuff, so I believe you'll sort this out quickly."

The chairman put some earbuds in his ears. The book in his hand was Don Quixote.

"You were quite reckless this time," he said to Miyoon.

She chose the wrong person to drag into this. It seemed that her last resort was the chairman since all of her subordinates had been lost, but this woman didn't seem to know who the chairman was at all.

"Who told you to touch my food bowl?"

"How unsightly. Are there owners of food bowls in this world? The food bowl goes to whoever has the most smarts. It seems you didn't think it through that far since you're a woman who only knows how to make young kids sell their bodies."

"And you're just like a man who stole others' achievements through your tongue alone. Put the net I released back the way it was while I am still telling you nicely."

"And why should I? Those people walked over to me on their own accord because they didn't want to work under a certain incompetent woman."

"Hong Janghae. Don't look down on people. You might get hurt."

Miyoon frowned. Janghae pointed at her wrinkly forehead.

"Your already unsightly face has become even more hideous. You don't even have any more value as an actress. How are you going to live with a face like that? Smoothen up a little. Don't make others pity you."

Miyoon raised her hand. Janghae also put his cheek forward in provocation.

"There, there. You aren't children."

Janghae turned around to look at the president. The chairman closed the book after taking his earphones off.

"Little Hong."

"Yes, chairman."

"When was it that I tasked you with human business again?"

"It was twenty years ago, chairman."

"So it has already been that long. I miss those days. You were a daring salaryman in your thirties back then. I was a little younger too. Miyoon."

Lee Miyoon sat up straight and replied, 'yes.'

"You did work pretty well. People from businesses liked the kids you selected for them. For chairman Park, that fellow, he would start off without even checking if he knew you were the one who picked. I'm not sure about anything else, but your choices were definitely exquisite."

"I shall do better in the future. I wish to provide you support even from afar, chairman."

"Support is good. You never made any mistakes until now either."

"Then...."

Miyoon stared at the chairman, expecting a hopeful answer. The chairman inserted the book, Don Quixote, back into the shelf and spoke,

"Good work."

"What?"

"I said good work. Didn't you come all the way here to have me say that?"

"I instead...."

"Leave everything else to Little Hong now. Though, from the way I see it, there is nothing to leave to him anymore, but there might be something that he has missed. Little Hong. Is there anything else I should mind about?"

Janghae slowly clenched the fists he placed on his knees and replied.

"Not at all, chairman. I will cooperate with actress Lee and deal with the rest."

"Right. Both of you have gotten old enough, haven't you? Don't fight dirty like dogs and end it cleanly. Miyoon, you should take your hands off this matter and focus on your acting career. Also, I'll send you a token of gratitude through someone in a while so wait for that. I'm not such a cruel man. Little Hong, isn't that right?"

"I am only living like this thanks to your boundless graces. I'm sure actress Lee is the same."

Lee Miyoon picked the wrong person to ask for a request. In fact, the outcome would not be set in stone had she chosen to go with a dogfight instead. After all, there were people who would give up money out of emotions after all. Things were over the moment Lee Miyoon brought this matter to the chairman. The chairman detested waste, but he utterly despised incompetence. By bringing what she could not solve to the chairman, she practically shot herself in the foot.

"Chairman."

Miyoon desperately called out to the chairman. Janghae saw the chairman lick his lips while blinking his eyes. The chairman made such an expression the day junior director Park's head was smashed by a

baseball bat. He seemed to be wondering how to deal with a human who could not accept what was given to her and was instead dragging it on and on.

"I shall do better in the future. There were people who accepted the items because of my face alone. If I take my hands off this matter, they will turn their backs as well."

Lee Miyoon stood up. Janghae covered his mouth and sighed. It was rather boring to watch someone dig their own grave.

"I see. So there are people who accepted the deal in consideration of you, Miyoon. Am I correct?"

The chairman nodded with a smile.

"Little Hong."

"Yes."

"Just deal with Japan for now. Miyoon says she can do well."

"Understood. I shall restore all the men below."

"Yes, family members shouldn't go against each other. Looks like I was out of it for a moment. Miyoon, is that okay with you?"

Miyoon kneeled on the ground, seemingly touched.

"Thank you, Chairman. I will strive to do even better in the future."

"This isn't some Yakuza or anything. You shouldn't be kneeling down as an adult woman. Stand up. We're both getting old, so I'm sure your joints are getting bad. Little Hong, hold her up."

Janghae grabbed Miyoon by the arm. Miyoon glared at him before shaking off his arm and standing up with her own strength.

"Miyoon still knows how to persuade people. The report you gave me was clean and well done too. Right, if you're so desperate, I'll leave you to it. Miyoon, you can get going now. Little Hong, stay behind a little," said the chairman.

### **Chapter 897. Crank Up 1**

"The world sure has gotten good. Women and children can raise their voices. What a twisted world we live in. They're gravely mistaken. If it was before, she wouldn't have dared to make any noise. Little Hong. Am I too old-fashioned?"

"Not at all, chairman. Actress Lee is just someone who does not know her position."

"And yet, such a person came to my study, briefed me about her abilities, and even tried to persuade me while talking about all sorts of things. I wonder how I should describe that?"

"I was insufficient in my handling of her. I'm very sorry, chairman."

"No. Little Hong, you did well. You handled it too well that her eyes flipped. Next time, don't take away every last dreg from her hands. There's that famous idiom too: A cornered rat will bite a cat."

The chairman gave him a book. It was a hardcover wrapped in velvet. He dusted the dust off it with a brush before inserting it in its place. After cleaning and putting away about twenty books, the chairman spoke again,

“How is the woman in Japan?”

“She’s quick to calculate. She also knows just enough greed.”

“Not a woman who would reach out for the food she shouldn’t eat?”

“She’s very good at discerning her own position. I tried shaking her with a few of my men, and there were no responses. In fact, she even came to me and told me that there is someone who harbors ill will.”

“Women just need to know how to eat what men give them after all. Chairman Choi and chairman Son will go to Japan soon, alongside some prosecutors and lawyers who have connections to judge Choi. Their flights are all different, but schedule a nice trip to Japan for them.”

The chairman directly mentioning their names meant that the priority of these people was high. He now had to focus on Japan even if he had to delay some work for Soul.

“How’s Giwoo these days?”

“He’s doing well without causing trouble. The prankster nature of his has faded a lot, so there aren’t any problems.”

“How about women?”

“According to head manager Kim’s report, he is not in any deep relationship.”

“A man must meet multiple women so that he knows how to discern devious foxes. Don’t get involved too deeply and just tell me if there’s a girl he’s meeting for a long time.”

“I will.”

“Also, Park Joongjin, was it? That director who’s pretty good. Did the film he was going to do with my grandson fall apart in the end?”

The hand that was dusting a book stopped on the spot. The chairman was on a ladder, looking at the books on the shelves on the 2nd floor. Should he tell him properly that Kang Giwoo did not live up to the director’s expectations? Or should he say it in a nice, roundabout way?

“Little Hong. I want to see you for a long time.”

“Director Park found a new actor. His contract with us ended before it even started,” Janghae immediately stopped thinking and just replied.

“That means that that director fellow dumped my grandson because of his lack of skills?”

“Yes, that is the case.”

The chairman clicked his tongue. Janghae looked at the Sci-Fi novel that fell on the ground with a thud. The weight would’ve been enough to cause a bump or a concussion at worst if it fell on someone’s head.

“Little Hong. You do not need to think fast in front of me. You are only allowed to use your head when I tell you to. Otherwise, you just need to speak the truth as is.”

“I made a mistake.”

“Right, little Hong. That is what I like about you. Other people start making excuses if they talk about how things didn’t go well. I know and see everything, yet they bring up all sorts of excuses to shift the blame. How pathetic did I look to them that made them blatantly lie in front of me? Oh, put that one on my desk. I’ll read it again.”

Janghae put the Sci-Fi novel on the desk, the bottom perfectly parallel to the edge of the desk.

“Is Giwoo, that boy, bad at acting?”

“He’s known as the best among his peers. The directors I’ve met look at him in a good light as well. There are many offers I have rejected to work with director Park Joongjin. Now that things didn’t go well, I plan to take one of those.”

“In any case, that director Park is the best one right now, correct?”

“Yes. His ticketing powers are undeniable.”

“Maybe it was because there was not enough money. Why don’t you try raising the price?”

“I tripled the original contract, but he still refused.”

“What an upright fellow. Just the style I like, hating money, that is. Can’t we do this again? This grandpa wants to give his grandson a good gift.”

“I apologize.”

“From how you’re apologizing without a shred of hesitation, it seems truly difficult, eh?”

“He’s known as an oddball even in the industry. The director told me this: he has earned enough money, so he wants to do his own work.”

“His own work, hm. Does that mean he’s fed up with commercial films? This is why those art people are so unpredictable. They act weirdly even though they know that art still comes down to money in the end.”

The secretary came in with some medicine. The chairman came down the ladder and gestured to the ladder with his chin. Janghae folded the ladder and gave it to the secretary.

“This medicine is what makes me feel old. When I was young, I never put anything like this near my mouth when I was young because I didn’t want to lose against those pharmacists, but now I have a body that can’t do without. Little Hong, you’ll be sixty soon. You should look after your body then. Don’t suffer in your later years like me.”

“I have been doing exercises, and my wife has been handing me healthy foods as well.”

“Little Hong, you met one great woman. I usually don’t acknowledge women, but that little one is an exception. It wouldn’t be a disservice to call her a general.”



“That’s why I got married to her. We didn’t want to drag down each other’s lives.”

The secretary left with the tray and the ladder. The chairman sighed slowly and sat down.

“I keep getting more worried about my grandson with each day I get closer to my death. For my sons, they can just live off the foundation I have built, but Giwoo, that boy, he’s left my little garden and is creating his own world. He’s such a naive boy that I worry he can do well.”

“I will watch over him from the side.”

“You’re the reason I’m at ease. Giwoo seems to listen to your words too. I felt good since everything seemed to be going well, but that film is making me feel iffy. Do you perhaps know who the actor is that’s working with the director? I mean the actor who replaced my boy Giwoo.”

“I do. His name is Han Maru, and he’s the same age as Giwoo.”

“The same age? He lost to a peer? Now that’s making me feel shameful. So this Maru kid, he seems to be the best among the young ones? I mean, from the way this best director chose him instead of my boy.”

“For skills, I have not watched him too closely, so I do not know, but in terms of recognition, he cannot be compared to Giwoo.”

“Is he just that famous?”

“It’s the opposite. I have looked into it while investigating this matter with director Park Joongjin, and at best, he appeared in a few movies as a minor character, and in dramas too, he has only played minor characters until now. There was a drama that he played a lead role in during his school years, but that was a short series. Compared to Giwoo, his career can be considered shallow at best.”

The chairman nodded while listening to him and slowly stroked the desk.

“And yet the director took that kid instead. Are those two close? From how I see it, he has nothing better than Giwoo.”

“I will look into it.”

The chairman waved his head in dismissal.

“I’m not so shameless to ask a busy man to investigate such things. I’ll look into it personally if he keeps getting on my mind, so you can forget about him.”

“Yes, sir.”

The chairman looked down at his phone after putting on his magnifying glasses. Janghae waited standing up without a word.

“JA, so it’s where that fellow, Junmin, is.”

“Yes. Lee Junmin is president of that company.”

“Yes, yes. That makes more sense. The fact that the kid is under his wing means that he has long proven his worth. Now that I think about it, isn’t your son here as well? If I remember correctly, his name is....”

“Hong Geunsoo, sir.”

“It is him. Didn’t he shoot a commercial for our subsidiary company?”

“He has.”

“You must be feeling jealous now, eh? Your son is playing around somewhere else without being under his father. You should’ve beaten moderately. You kept beating them to death, so one of them became an empty shell with none of what makes him a man intact, while the other one became uncontrollable and escaped your fences.”

Janghae lowered his head slightly. His family history he had not exposed anywhere flowed out of the chairman’s mouth. He didn’t even try to think about who he heard that from. The chairman probably had his ears everywhere after all. What made him unnerved was that he had exposed his weakness. The fact that he was unable to control his sons would probably look extremely dissatisfactory to the chairman who valued control over everything else.

“You know, you should beat people so that they cling to you. If you beat them mercilessly like you did, they will run away like their life depends on it. You should show them some affection by beating them up moderately. Or else, just beat them up with the intent to kill. Only then will they not be able to resist.”

“I was insufficient.”

“How can a man be perfect in everything? You were born with a talent for work, so you must be lacking fortune in that area. This Geunsoo, he has completely escaped your crutches, so you won’t be able to do anything about him, but try coaxing the little one and bring him back. When you get old, you’ll feel lonely, and seeing your son will be your only solace.”

The chairman, who was speaking while looking at his phone, picked up the landline at the end of his desk.

“Secretary Kim. Send some calls around and tell them to go along with actress Lee if they get a call from her. Also, send in a call to the boys who caused some messes in the redevelopment district last time. Oh, lordie, don’t use such a scary word like gear. People may misunderstand that I’m telling you to kill a man. Alright, go about your work.”

The latest\_epi\_sodes are on\_the LIBREAD.COM. website.

The chairman hung up on the call. That was how Lee Miyoon’s future was decided. Janghae dearly wished that his name would not be put in that spot one day.

“Little Hong. When it comes to the most dirty work, you should not have other people do it. Only those who know how to soil their hands know how to go up. You get what I mean?”

“Yes.”

The chairman made a benevolent smile. He felt like he could take a breather.

“Looks like I should give Junmin a call. My grandson is doing fine with his own powers, but I should still try to give him a little push. As you know, my grandson is not one of those naggy ones like the kids these

days. I want to tell those that blame the world or society that they should learn from my Giwoo. He splendidly became independent without anything in his hands.”

“You’re entirely right, sir.”

The chairman put his earphone against his ears and spoke,

“Little Hong, you can get going. Thanks for coming over today.”

“I’ll take my leave.”

Janghae walked backwards out of the study and pulled the door shut. He heard a voice call out “Junmin” as he shut the door.

### **Chapter 898. Crank Up 1**

“Then I’ll schedule a flight to China in three days and....”

“Head manager Kang, wait a sec.”

Junmin picked up his phone. He felt a headache the moment he saw the name of the caller. This old man definitely wasn’t the kind of man to call just to see how he was doing.

“I’ll stay outside. Call me when you’re done.”

Head manager Kang stood up after cleaning up. Junmin picked up the call after seeing the door close.

-Junmin, it is me.

“It has been a long time, chairman. I should have called you first.”

-It’s fine. Everyone in the country knows you’re busy.

“How is your health? Last time, you seemed to have been coughing a lot at the start of winter.”

-I’m eating the medicine you sent me. Thanks to that, I think I’ll last this winter pretty well.

“That sounds like great news. You should live for a long time and lead the economy.”

-I’ve long since become an old man in the attic. The young’uns will lead the economy now. How are you doing?

“For me, I’m just getting by every day while looking after my own kids.”

-You’re going to China in a few days?

“Yes. You seem to be taking great interest in Japan too, these days. It looks like you’re going to go to Japan along with a few acquaintances.”

There was a period of silence after they each talked about their recent matters. The old man’s intelligence powers were incredible. He had only set up plans for now, yet even the routes he was going to take had been estimated by this old man already.

-Whether it’s then or now, you seem to know about my own kids more than I do.

“Not as much as you, sir.”

-It's such a pity, you know? YM would have spanned its wings even more if you had run a subsidiary under me. You're probably the only one who rejected my offer.

“It wasn't easy for me either. The leader of a colossal company reached his hand out to me directly. But I don't have the capability to run a company of that scale. It already hurts my back to maintain a small agency.”

-If it hurts your back, you can't call that small.

Junmin stood up and walked to the window. That day, he was inside a building where he could look down at the night scenery as well. The chairman reached out to him, and Junmin refused him. The chairman, who looked down at his hand indifferently, seemed like a lion crouching in front of prey. Would he dart forward and grab him by the neck? Or would he let him go? That day, Junmin found out for sure what kind of man the chairman was.

“So, why have you called me?”

-It's nothing that amazing. I just had some things I was curious about.

“Please speak.”

-There's a boy named Han Maru under you, right?

Junmin replied yes while frowning at the same time. Maru's name came out of the chairman, but they had completely no relation to each other.

-Is it true that that kid is shooting a film with director Park Joongjin?

“At the earliest, the shoot will start in the middle of this month.”

-I hoped that that wasn't the case.

“Is there a problem?”

-Junmin, may I ask a favor?

“Please speak.”

-I'd like to hear you accept it first. Am I being too greedy?

“I'm sure you must know me as much as I do you, so I will not comment on that matter.”

-You never changed. You were like this back then too. That was why I wanted you even more.

“Please speak about the matter first. I will listen to you if it's possible.”

-The film that that kid is shooting. Can you cancel it?

“This is the first time I've heard that you're dipping your hands into the film industry, so why are you trying to cancel his work?”

-This is not about business. This is just an old grandpa trying to do something for his grandson.

The pieces of the puzzle that he was trying to put together in his head came together in an instant. There was indeed a connection between Maru and the chairman. Kang Giwoo. Did that immature brat ask the chairman for this?

-In case you ask, this is something I'm doing on my own. I just want to gift my grandson something without him knowing.

"I see."

-So how about it? Of course, I'm not telling you to do this for free. We're going to do a commercial for our insurance company, so how's an actor from your side for two years, fixed contract? I'm sure anyone under you must have enough recognition for that. I'd personally like Hong Geunsoo though. It can satisfy a subordinate of mine.

A two-year contract with YM insurance was a contract that would involve hundreds of millions of won. It would help with gaining recognition as well. It was definitely not a losing deal for giving up a movie that wasn't even shot yet.

"I apologize, but it will be difficult."

-Even though I'm asking you like this?

"Yes, what can't be done can't be done."

-What a cruel fella. Do you have malice against me? I don't think I treated you badly.

"Who am I to have any malice towards you? I just don't want to take away Maru's work."

-Why? Is the money insufficient? Since I'm getting a gift, I want it to be the best. I'm rather greedy for director Park that fellow, since he's known to be the best these days. How about two commercials?

"That's indeed a rather shocking deal. However, I cannot do it."

-You seem to be looking out for that kid a lot?

"I look out for all the people under me. They trust me, so I should repay their trust."

-This is a difficult matter. I really want to pair that director with Giwoo. A good movie needs a good actor, doesn't it? I'm not too knowledgeable, but I think my boy Giwoo will be better than that kid known as Han Maru.

Junmin spoke as he placed his hand on the window,

"In my eyes, Maru looks slightly better."

-Isn't he just a kid who has no noteworthy appearances?

"That's precisely what he's going to do now. Park Joongjin is an oddball, but he's undoubtedly a genius. Maru's not ordinary either. The two of them creating a piece together will definitely be an interesting sight to see."

How would the chairman respond to this? Junmin placed his hand that wasn't holding his phone on the landline. Depending on the situation, he may have to move busily. He had to prepare if the chairman decided to sabotage things outright. He did not like getting dealt a blow while sitting still.

-You're so protective of him. Why? Did you see that great light from that kid as well? The beautiful light that you always boasted about?

The context of the conversation changed at once. Junmin could not understand what the chairman was saying to him. The chairman preferred to refrain from using abstract expressions as much as possible when talking about business. He loved numericized information, so Junmin never believed that he would use the word 'light' with something like this.

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

-Are you mocking me? You don't remember that? That day, you talked to me about this in that building.

"I do remember. We talked about various business proposals."

-You should have told me something while you refused my proposal.

"The words I said as I refused you?"

Junmin probed his memories. The scene of the building unfolded in front of his eyes. The colorful night scenery, the strangely quiet hall, the smell of unfinished food, the glaringly sharp gaze of the chairman - everything was vivid, but he could not remember what he said to the chairman at the last moment. He could only remember himself leaving the building after that meal. It was as if someone had scooped out that portion of his memories as he couldn't remember any of it.

-Seeing you stay quiet, it seems like you really don't remember? How can you young fellow be like this? I wonder if you're getting dementia earlier than me. Or maybe your meeting with me was so insignificant to you that it's not worth remembering for you. In either case, it doesn't feel that pleasant. Is it because you've received psychotherapy for a long time?

He was attacked every time he exchanged words. Junmin looked at his reflection in the window and smiled.

"Perhaps. I clearly remember having a meal with you and leaving the building afterwards, but I do not remember my last words to you."

-You should watch out. The brain is something that you can't touch once it starts going down. Hey, even I'm reading books at this age because I'm afraid of dementia. I heard that it's good at preventing it, so I keep reading them.

"Maybe I should too."

-Since it came down to this, it looks like I should spell it out for you. I mean, when else would I be able to act proud in front of you? That day, you told me this: I have a special pair of eyes for people. Then I asked what it was. Then you gave an incredulous answer. You said you could see how far that person would grow if you see that person. You supposedly saw light around a person's ears and could judge a person based on that. You looked completely serious as you said those words too. It was to the point that I even wondered if I should turn to shamanism too. That was the first and last time I believed such

absurd words in my life. For other fortune tellers, they only talk grandly, but they show nothing. But you were different. After that, you befriended all sorts of big figures as if you really could see a person's future. The secretary head of state has connections to you, doesn't he? Even the president, who would at least listen to every word I say, has ties with you too. This is why I can neither have you nor throw you out. I think it will endanger my own roots just to oust you.

Junmin felt confused even as he listened to the chairman's words. He had no recollection of it at all. Seeing a person's future by looking at their ears? He couldn't believe that he himself had mentioned such supernatural abilities. He was someone who loved proven facts as much as the chairman did.

-Why? You still don't remember?

"Looks like there's a problem with my head after all. I have no recollection of saying those words at all."

-Looks like you don't want to talk about it, rather than you not having a memory of it. Had I taken you more seriously back then and had you stay behind even by force, YM should have become even bigger than it is now. No, YM isn't the problem. I could have become president. Seeing what became of the people you met, it doesn't sound impossible.

"I don't have such great powers."

-Don't you, now? A man that only handled some screws on a construction site created a venture company and now became a man who overrules the construction panel world. Surprisingly, it was you who mediated the investment. You took around the guy that was at the bottom seat of the congress, and now he has become the leader of the majority faction. It's not just one or two people that came out this successful, is it? For a person who's running an agency in the entertainment industry, your connections are simply unbelievable. Your authority and your positions - they're all created through your eyes that see people.

"Your imagination must have gotten very good ever since you started reading those books. If you don't have anything more to say, I'd like to hang up."

-Sure. I don't want to quarrel with you either. I'll just call director Park Joongjin and negotiate with him. This is just how much I love my grandson.

The chairman hung up. Junmin put down his phone on the desk. The chairman wasn't someone who was so free that he would make stuff up to make a fool out of him. Did that mean that he really said such words in the past? He suddenly recalled the files that he saw before; the file that contained the resumes of the people he scouted during the early days of the agency. He picked out people who didn't have any qualities of a star at all and turned them into stars. For him right now, the actions he took back then were completely incomprehensible.

"The past, huh."

Junmin thought back to when he first met Maru, the bold kid who talked about 2 billion won without batting an eyelid. He could remember the reason he decided to bring that boy under his wing in detail. He pulled his memories a little more forward. It was when he first met Suyeon. Likewise, he liked the unyielding look in her eyes, as well as her charming skills for other people, which was the reason he brought her in. Everyone had a reason he could accept.

“As for Geunsoo and Ganghwan...”

Junmin touched his lips. He couldn't remember what made him bring those two under his wing with so much confidence. He only had a vague impression in his head, an absurd conviction that the two would definitely become stars.

Junmin went to his desk and pulled out a book. It seemed like he needed to do some reading.

### **Chapter 899. Crank Up 1**

“Looks like you're quite busy these days. I never see you at the office.”

Dongwook smiled as he fidgeted with the notepad he placed on top of the table.

“As you know, president, I was born under a bad star. Even if I stay seated in the office, it just feels like I'm hinting at the others to do work. These days, I can get work done wherever I want to as long as I have a laptop, so I take it outside.”

“I see. Anyway, we got the food now, so let's talk while we eat.”

Junmin had approached him out of the blue and said that they should eat together. Dongwook was curious about what he wanted to talk about, but the president did not talk about much at all. He just asked the customary stuff like how the new notepadists were, and if there were any problems with the magazine every once in a while. He scratched the bottom of the pot with his spoon to eat the last bit and then wiped his mouth. The president also finished his meal and rinsed his mouth with some water.

“The food here is pretty decent.”

“The locals around the area recommended this place. It's quite cheap too.”

“I should come more often. I got to know a good place thanks to you.”

“Are you going to get coffee? The vending machine coffee here is pretty decent.”

He bought two coffees from the vending machine inside the restaurant. He placed the paper cup in front of the president, who was waiting for him.

“You'll have to be fully prepared if you want to touch the lion's tail,” Junmin said as he swirled the coffee in his hand.

He said those words without any context, but Dongwook understood what he was saying. He had been as cautious as possible while taking action, but it seemed that he had caught the president's radar.

“I'm not trying to set the tail on fire. I'm going to catch some of the fleas that leech off it. Not that I'm doing it myself.”

“That man, Hong Janghae, isn't someone that you can look down on, not to mention the chairman who's above him. I'm sorry about what happened to Miss Choi Miyeon, but in a certain sense, she was asking for trouble. You must know that too.”

“I do. I also don't know why I'm trying to dip my feet into this shithole. Heck, pouring oil over my body and jumping into a fire sounds less dangerous than this, and I know I should very well stop what I'm



doing, but my arms and legs are moving as they wish. It's been a long time since I've been enveloped in useless compassion and a sense of justice."

"Looks like you're past the point where you can be persuaded with words. If someone under me gets caught in weird trouble, I'll be having a hard time too."

Dongwook felt a bitter taste in his mouth. He thought about the letter of resignation that he had stashed under his desk at his office.

"Even if I do cause trouble, I'll make sure no harm comes here. I'm going to resign the moment I see signs of trouble. Better yet, would you like it now? If that's better for you, I'll do that."

"Do you have anything to do once you leave?"

"There should be something. I'm not going to have spiders cast webs over my mouth. I only know how to do this line of work, so I should be able to feed myself if I work as an outsider notepadist or something."

"Was I wrong in my assessment? Editor-in-chief Kim, no, notepadist Kim, I didn't think you were this reckless when I first met you."

"I also don't get why I'm acting like this. I should just turn a blind eye and a deaf ear to it once. But even if I close my eyes and cover my ears, I can still see and hear things; the figure and voice of a girl who foolishly tried to have a showdown with the world with truth and facts."

"There's nothing more arduous than fighting with the truth in hand."

"Exactly. Only the most foolish idiots do that. And I'm about to join their ranks. I've already written my letter of resignation, so you just have to put your stamp on it."

He stood up with the notepad in hand. There probably weren't any employers who would stand up for an employee that was clearly about to run into trouble. He had to quit while he was still getting hints. If possible, he wanted to get fired and get unemployment benefits, but considering what the president had done for him until now, he wasn't shameless enough to do that.

"When are you pulling out of your apartment?"

"As soon as I get another room."

Pursuing the clues that Choi Miyeon had let go of meant tailing Lee Miyeon, Hong Janghae, and by extension, the YM Group. It was only natural for him to be kicked out of the apartment that the company had provided for him.

"Do take care of yourself. Your junior has gotten to that state as a consequence of lingering around the shadow. But you aren't stopping there, you're planning to step into the shadow and get to the real body of this, aren't you? I can tell from your eyes. You would not have those eyes if you were planning to stop after setting fire on the tail."

"I won't get buried alive if I try to take care of myself, I think. Since we live in the era we live in, I'm going to be going around in streets with a lot of dashcams. Though, I guess I will be helpless if they just run me over with a car."

"I guess there's no helping that."

The president stood up and paid for the meal.

"I'll pay for the meal this time. You can pay next time."

"Sure."

Dongwook left the restaurant with the half-empty cup of coffee in his hand. He never realized that he would willingly walk out of the job that he resolved to stay in for the rest of his working life even if there was a knife against his neck. It felt like just yesterday when he nagged Miyeon about all those things.

The president walked past him. Dongwook looked at his back and put a cigarette in his mouth. There was a lot to do. He had to look at the articles of the juniors who had been promoted to an office job and also had to have someone else prepare to succeed his work. He also had to pass down the connections he made to a smart guy. If he received terrible treatment here, he would have left after wreaking havoc, but Junmin treated him so nicely that he even felt sorry for it.

"Maru will be starting a movie soon."

Dongwook put down his lighter just as he was about to light his cigarette. The president stood in front of him and reached his hand out. He stared at the hand for a long while, not knowing what his intention was.

"Can I borrow a cigarette from you to smoke?"

"I seem to recall you having quit a long time ago."

"I have to smoke if there's something causing me to."

He took out a cigarette and placed it in the president's hand. He lit it up for him and put the fire against his as well.

"I told the others to have the articles uploaded at a suitable time. They'll start writing once they get info from that side."

"This is not about that. You take care of the work side just fine."

"Then...?"

"Lee Miyoon has been semi-ousted," the president said before he could take a puff.

Dongwook put the cigarette between his fingers. The topic had jumped from Maru's movie to a completely different topic, but it didn't matter. If it was anything related to Lee Miyoon, he would gladly pay money to know about it, so he asked,

"What do you mean? She must have been on the same ship as Hong Janghae."

"That Hong Janghae has changed ships. Whether there was a fight between the two, or it was an order from the chairman, I do not know."

By chairman, he probably meant the chairman of the YM Group. Dongwook thought about Hong Janghae's recent course of action. The fact that he had ousted Lee Miyoong meant that he probably had another partner in Japan.

"Actually, I've been trying to approach a woman who came off of Hong Janghae, but if it is like this, I should try looking into Lee Miyoong as well. If she really got thrown out, we might be able to join hands."

"The enemy of your enemy is your friend. This stood true across all ages."

"I'll make use of the information you gave me. You're quite generous to someone who's caused you nothing but trouble."

The president puffed the cigarette twice. He swallowed the smoke and coughed dryly before throwing the cigarette on the ground and stepping on it with the back of his shoe.

"Why does it feel so strong to smoke after all this time?"

"You did well to quit. People like me get their energy through this, but you have many other things apart from this. Please look after your health."

"I will. Anyway, watch out. Take care, whatever you do, and don't rush it, because you'll be hurt if you do. Though, I'm sure you don't need me to tell you this."

The president patted him on the shoulder. Dongwook put out the cigarette. He got some new info, so he had to organize all he had and come up with an efficient route. He was just about to say goodbye for one last time when the president took something out of his pocket. He tossed over the item in his hand. It was some keys. They were attached to one keyring, and one was a car key, while the other seemed to be a house key.

"What's this?"

"I can't afford to let a spark jump onto my tree, but I can't let my person jump into a pit of fire without bare minimum protection. That's an apartment I got under a name that belongs to someone who has no relation to the company at all. The same goes for the car. You should use that until you're done. It won't be that cramped. In fact, it might be rather empty since it's 60 pyeong<sup>[1]</sup>. I'll also give you someone who can run around to get info. Of course, don't tell anyone outside. Only the two of us know about this."

"President."

"I'm going to process your resignation tomorrow. For the editing work, have someone else under you take care of that, so focus on that. You just need to finish things up cleanly and return. I can't help it if that becomes difficult, but you'll get a good apartment and a good car, so it shouldn't be a bad deal."

He hadn't expected this. He thought that the president would naturally pull out since this was about touching the shameful parts of YM.

The president continued,

"To finish off what I was saying before, Maru will be starting a movie soon. But things have changed for the worse. The chairman desires something that's in my domain. I want to walk parallel to the chairman without ever touching him, but he cast the bridge first, so I have no choice but to step over him. I want

to act proud for once. It seems like the chairman doesn't understand why I'm dedicating everything in my life to raising actors."

He didn't understand the specifics, but it seemed clear that the president was going to support him on this.

"Of course, I will not step up to the front. I'm putting all of this in your hands, and you just have to update me on whether you can give YM's chairman a good gift or not."

"I'll try to prepare a big gift."

"That sounds great for me."

The chairman left in his car. Dongwook put the keys in his pocket. The first thing he had to check was Lee Miyoon's recent state. If she, who was at the center of the prostitution scandal 6 years ago, had been thrown away and was angry over it, he might be able to make use of her. There was no one better than her when it came to driving a knife through Hong Janghae's back.

Dongwook got in his car and called Lee Miyoon's agency. He got an interview scheduled with her. The title of editor-in-chief of a famous magazine was quite convenient at a time like this.

-We'll get back to you shortly.

Dongwook hung up before starting the car. He drove to the address that the president had texted him. It was an apartment located in Banpo. He was familiar with this area. He was just five minutes away from where Maru lived by foot. Somehow, he suddenly had the thought that all these buildings, from which the Han river was visible, might belong to president Lee Junmin. If it was anyone else, he might have just thought of it as a delusion, but it was definitely possible for the president. He put the key in the door lock and turned it around.

"It is rather empty for sure."

There was only a single computer in the middle of the insanely large living room. Dongwook laughed and rotated his wrists. This workspace was very much to his liking.

[1] 200 sqm

## **Chapter 900. Crank Up 2**

The sun was resting on the reeds of Suncheon bay. Maru placed his hands on the fence and looked at the setting sun, the reeds below it, as well as the people moving slowly on the boat.

"I come here whenever I have a headache. Looking at the reeds swaying in the wind without any resistance, I can feel my head clearing up."

"I think I can feel what that's like."

He followed behind Park Joongjin. They crossed a wooden bridge that was built there as a part of a hiking course. People took photos with the reeds on both sides as the background. Maru also took some photos of the browned reeds and sent them to Gaeul, alongside the message that they should come here together in the future.

“What kind of acting do you want to do, Mr. Maru?” Joongjin asked as he stopped.

They had gone off the main course and were in a place where there wasn’t much human presence. Only Suncheon bay and the reeds could be seen.

“I have the hardest time when I’m asked questions like this. I’ve never really thought about it. I’ve always tried to fulfill the role I’m given to the best of my abilities.”

“There are actors like that. It’s not that they don’t have an objective or a goal, they just don’t have it for a specific type of acting. Then what is your goal as an actor?”

“The first is to earn a lot of money, and the second is recognition. I want to hear something like ‘I can’t imagine anyone other than Han Maru playing that role.’”

“The second goal might perhaps be harder than getting an award. There aren’t many actors who hear that even now.”

“That’s why I set a realistic goal as my first one and an unrealistic one as my second.”

“So you have the confidence to earn a lot of money.”

“I’m not sure about anything else, but I seem to be rather lucky when it comes to money and relationships. As long as I don’t screw up badly, I think money won’t be a problem.”

“I can’t deny that. Looking at your acting, it definitely isn’t something that will make you starve. Even if you don’t get selected as lead characters because your charms aren’t enough, you will definitely become a good-selling supporting character.”

“Having you say that makes me feel a lot more relieved. Do I just need to focus on acting without worries now?”

“Don’t trust me too much. I sometimes screw up because I don’t know what’s in front of me. I did make a huge blunder once in the past too.”

Joongjin checked the time before saying that they should go to a nearby restaurant. They entered a kal-guksu<sup>[1]</sup> restaurant, which was the first restaurant they saw after leaving the reed field. The restaurant was bustling with people who had come to watch the reeds before winter came around. They wanted to get a room, but upon hearing that a minimum of 8 people was required to get a private room, they sat at a table in a corner. They ordered some kal-guksu and some buckwheat jeon<sup>[2]</sup>.

“I was convinced after seeing the indie film you shot this time. You are an actor who knows how to handle violence. You are cruel and merciless, and yet, still possess a sense of restrained beauty, and it’s not too overboard. That’s why I want to see it. The Mr. Maru after everything has been mercilessly pulled out of you.”

Just as he was about to reply, the kal-guksu was served. From how it didn’t even take five minutes for the food to arrive, it seemed that the noodles were boiled beforehand, and the broth was just poured right before it was served. Joongjin said that they should eat first. He ate some with chopsticks. Before he could even chew the slipper noodles, he could smell something bad from the broth.

“If I knew it was going to be like this, I would have looked up some good places around the area.”

It seemed that Joongjin didn't like it either. The buckwheat jeon that was served afterwards was also grainy. The taste was worse than simple wheat & gochujang-based jeon.

"I looked it up before coming, and this place seems to be a famous restaurant based on a blog post."

Maru showed him his phone screen. This restaurant turned out to be one that had the 'good restaurant' title. Joongjin clicked his tongue.

"Ads are causing trouble everywhere. Before, you could gain some good-quality information from the internet, but ever since the ad companies entered the scene after seeing that they can make money off it, everything has become terrible."

Joongjin raised his hand before telling the server to take the kal-guksu away. The employee panicked and asked,

"Uhm, what is your reason for doing this?"

"This smells way too bad, and I can't bring myself to eat it. Take the jeon away too. Also, if possible, tell the cook in the kitchen that he or she needs to take better care of the food if you have the money to give to blogs. I'm not telling the owner something bad. I'm just dissatisfied with whoever cooked this thing."

The server disappeared into the kitchen after taking the food away on a tray. Maru had known about the director's peculiar personality, but this was the first time he saw that he was picky with food. Maru was on the side that he should get his fill at least even if it didn't taste that good, but the director was different.

"Director, shall I look for another restaurant nearby? We do have to eat after all."

Since they had returned the food, there was no reason to stay seated. Joongjin shook his head. He waited, wondering what this was about. Joongjin called another employee who was walking by his side.

"Please get us two bowls of kal-guksu and a buckwheat jeon."

"Please wait. It'll be out soon."

The director ordered the exact same things again. The employee picked up the order paper. He was just about to note it down with a ballpoint pen before stopping. It was probably because he found that two bowls of kal-guksu and a buckwheat jeon had been ordered already.

"Sir, did you perhaps not get the food you ordered?"

Maru stayed quiet because he didn't know how to answer. The reply came from the director.

"We did."

"Then why...."

"It's not like there's a problem, so please give the order. Two bowls of kal-guksu and a buckwheat jeon."

"Okay."

The employee walked to the kitchen after writing down the order. Not long later, the bowls of kal-guksu and buckwheat jeon came out. Maru picked up his chopsticks and looked at Joongjin.

“Are you not going to eat?”

“I’m curious as to what you’re up to, director.”

“Eat it for now. They might have made a mistake with the last order, which made it strange.”

Maru moved his chopsticks. The noodles and broth betrayed his remote hope that it would be better. It was no different from the first one he got. The noodles were slippery on the outside and undercooked on the inside, and the broth had a bad smell. The director also ate a little bit and pushed the bowl to the side. At this point, Maru wanted to go to the kitchen and tell the people there that there is an extremely picky customer and so they should create a proper one.

At least the buckwheat jeon was better than before. The mix seemed to have been done properly this time, and it wasn’t as grainy as it was before. The director also ate the jeon without much fuss. Maru could imagine what Joongjin was going to say next. Conveniently, there was a server walking by. It was the lady that took their first order.

Maru knew that the server who had received their order was consciously not approaching this area. She even went to the table next to them to refill some cubed radish kimchi but did not give them a glance. Joongjin stopped the server as she was about to return with the side dish plates. For a moment, the server looked like she was about to cry. What is it now? – her eyes seemed to say.

“Please give us two bowls of kal-guksu. And take this to the kitchen. if possible, to whoever made this.”

“Again?”

“Yes, again.”

“Uhm, please don’t do this....”

“No, I want to do this. If it’s too much of a bother going to the kitchen, give me the tray, I’ll go myself.”

“What?”

“I said give it to me. I’ll have a look at the one who made this and talk to them about it.”

“That’s a little....”

The server seemed restless. She seemed strangely bothered about this. At first, Maru thought that she was having a hard time listening to his request, but from the looks of it, it seemed like she was thinking of it as her own business. It was probably related to Joongjin calling out to this specific server in particular out of the many servers here. From the looks of it, she seemed related to the owner of this store and was not just working as a server here. Perhaps the one making the noodles inside was her husband.

“Sir, if the food was strange, you don’t have to pay for it, so please cancel your order,” said the server.

A mere server would not be able to meddle in monetary affairs. Either she was the owner, the wife of one, or a close relative or acquaintance.

“I’m not shameless enough not to pay after eating food. I’ll pay for everything, so bring us two bowls of kal-guksu. We have plenty of time.”

Any ordinary person would have backed off at this point, but Joongjin even crossed his legs, looking like he would not budge unless he got the bowls of kal-guksu. The server, who seemed restless, eventually took away the bowls and went to the kitchen. Even though Joongjin spoke in a small voice, they attracted a lot of attention with all the things they did. Everyone here must have been forcing themselves to eat the tasteless kal-guksu. They were probably putting up with it, thinking that they didn’t want to ruin their traveling mood; that all tourist attraction restaurants were like this; and because they didn’t want to get into a fight. Maru turned around slightly. The gazes of the women who were staring at them intensely like they were cheering for a soccer team were immensely pressuring for him. They seemed to want Joongjin to give a blow to the owner of the restaurant selling such terrible food.

“Director. Are you going to order another two if the same kal-guksu is served again?”

“What do you think I’ll do, Mr. Maru?”

“You’ll probably order once again.”

“You already learned how to read my mind. It seems like this will be a very enjoyable shoot this time indeed. It was worth coming all the way to Suncheon. The director and the actor are of one mind.”

“I’ve been wanting to leave ever since we got told we didn’t have to pay though.”

“Then I guess we still lack understanding of each other. Great. I do not plan to create a film with a puppet, so let’s have some time to learn about each other.”

“So you’re going to order kal-guksu again?”

“Since we’ve come all the way to South Jeolla province, we might as well raise the sales here. Let’s make them sell so many that they can raise a building in Gangnam.”

Maru crossed his arms. The one in front of him was no human, it was a wall made of solid steel. The magical chant to make the door appear was a properly made kal-guksu. Rumors seemed to have spread that there was a strange customer among the servers as all the ladies working here looked at them. It would have been easier for them to deal with if the customer said that they weren’t going to pay, but it was a pain for them when someone like the director keep asking them to bring him food.

“I hope we can get some kal-guksu quickly. I had two bowls, but I’m still hungry.”

Maru laughed as he heard the director’s words. How would the kitchen respond to this? If the owner had a terrible personality, he or she would come out and start ranting at them, and if it was a shameless owner, they would keep getting served terrible kal-guksu. The only thing he could do was to give up and watch. It wasn’t going to be easy to change the mind of a genius who had become fixated on something.

“Director.”

“What is it?”

“I participated in ‘Those Guys’ for two days, back when you were shooting that.”



“So it has already been seven years since then. The idea you came up with back then was very much to my liking. Perhaps you had taken a spot in my head ever since that time.”

“Thanks for looking at me in such a good light. But what surprised me during those two days was that there was a very small number of takes other than the important action scenes. Most of the time, you only took one take per cut.”

“I do that for most of the commercial movies I shoot. Since I’m shooting them to earn money, I place value on efficiency. That was why I needed Miss Yang Miso’s help back then. I would lock the actors who try to do some acting awkwardly into a frame and let the story do the job. It’s just like advertising through blogs. The taste doesn’t matter, as long as there’s the opinion that it’s good. Putting it like that, it makes me feel a little sorry for ordering the kal-guksu again, but double standards I guess.”

“That’s true. This is what I really wanted to ask, so is the film you’re shooting this time also....”

“No,” Joongjin interrupted him before he could finish.

Maru inwardly sighed in relief. He now realized what Joongjin meant by learning about each other.

“From your expression, you seemed to have pictured what it would be like to work with me. I only take into account efficiency for commercial films. You need to shoot quickly if you want to minimize human resources costs. But for my ‘piece,’ that doesn’t matter. The only important thing when it comes to doing my piece is self-satisfaction. And I mean, self-satisfaction.”

The director emphasized it twice. Maru looked at the tray that the server brought. There were two bowls of kal-guksu in it. His future seemed the same as those bowls of kal-guksu.

“Please bring it again. Two bowls of kal-guksu,” said Joongjin.

To Maru, that sounded like ‘let’s shoot that scene again.’

[1] Knife-cut noodle soup with usually seafood or chicken. Wikipedia for more details.