

## Once Again 931

### Chapter 931. Crank Up 4

Try working things out with him — was there a time when these words got on her nerves so much? Gaeul picked up a mango with her fork and spoke,

“Giwoo is just a friend. There is nothing to work out with him.”

The senior sitting opposite her looked taken aback.

“I thought you two looked good together. I think many people do.”

“Please don’t do that. It might make things awkward for us.”

“Giwoo looks like he has feelings for you though.”

“I’m sure he’s joking around, and it doesn’t matter even if he’s not. Giwoo and I are just friends.”

“If you’re worried about rumors, then don’t. Kids these days date perfectly well in cars. It’s not like people apologize to death like before if they get caught for it either. You’re at an age where you should be dating, aren’t you? Someone like Giwoo is really decent too. Don’t put so much distance and try meeting him. Heck, he’s from a rich family too.”

The sweet mango tasted bitter. Gaeul put down her fork and wiped her mouth with some tissue. She had a hard time staying seated. She had come for a vacation, so there was no need to keep listening to something unpleasant.

“I’ll stand up first. You can go ahead and finish the rest.”

“Gaeul.”

Being a quick-witted senior, she probably immediately realized what her actions meant. She would probably no longer try to couple Giwoo and her together. If she still tried to indirectly probe her out about this, then she would tell her firmly that she didn’t have a shred of intention to do well with Giwoo.

Just why did this keep coming up? This was the third time she had heard about it already. Did Kang Giwoo ask them for help? She could laugh it over if it was said half as a joke and in passing, but she felt furious when she was directly asked about it like right now. She left the terrace and walked over to the beach. She walked past two foreigner couples and dipped her feet into the sea. If it was Korea, she would immediately take her feet out because of the cold, but here, it wasn’t that cold even though it was December. As the seawater brushed past her feet and drained away, her iffy feelings were washed away with it. Perhaps this was why people often looked for the sea when they felt complex.

She took out her earbuds and started listening to her favorite songs. She would get lonely if there wasn’t anyone around her, but sometimes, she would desperately long for solitude, especially on a day like today, when she heard something unpleasant in the morning of a perfectly good day.

That was why she snapped out when a hand tapped her shoulder. Not only that, the fact that the owner of that hand was Kang Giwoo was the worst possible thing that could happen in this place where the green seawater and the white sand were beautiful.

“This place is really good.”

Giwoo sat down next to her without asking. Gaeul pressed her earbuds with the intention to block her ears. She also raised the volume by around 10. She felt a little better when she heard the loud thumping of the bass guitar. At this point, she couldn't be bothered to tell him off or even hint about it. It felt like a waste of energy to try and make him understand the simple concept of 'I hate you.'

Kang Giwoo stopped talking as though he realized that his voice wouldn't reach her no matter what he blabbed on about. It would be great if he just left like this since she didn't want to yield this spot where the seawater washed up just the right amount. She flicked her finger on her knees and focused on the music. He should probably leave soon unless he had some weird fetish for talking to a wall.

Suddenly, something was placed on her hand that was tapping on her knee according to the rhythm. Gaeul opened her eyes and looked at Giwoo's hand that covered hers. She looked at the side of his face. He was looking at the sea as though nothing happened. She didn't feel angry. In fact, she felt indifferent, as though it was a piece of plastic that touched her hand. But, that didn't mean that she wouldn't take action. She didn't know whether he got caught up in the mood or had gone half-crazy, but he would have to pay the price for doing something that he wouldn't be able to bear the consequences of. She didn't show any signs. It was he who made a shameless action without warning. She grabbed Giwoo's index finger and snapped it backwards. Giwoo screamed as though it was totally unexpected. It seemed that he had no room to brag about his manliness. When she let go, Giwoo hurriedly checked his index finger.

“It won't break with just that, but I'd love to tell you that it can break if you do what you did just one more time. Now I'm finally sure. There's no value in talking to a beast that you can't get through to.”

Giwoo stood up while rubbing his finger. He seemed to know some shame at least. She stared at him to see him leave. A strange smile crept onto his face from an expression of pain. Gaeul took out one of her earbuds and stood up.

“You sit here then. I'll leave.”

“Are you responding like this because you got hurt by a man? If it's like that, I can understand you. I should've been more careful.”

“I don't know where you pull your bullshit out from.”

“From how I see it, I hit the bullseye.”

“Did you finally set your mind to it today?”

“It's because you got dumped by Maru.”

She wondered when he was going to bring that up. She didn't know whether it was because of his pride or because he was probing her, but he finally brought it up. It seemed like Kang Giwoo had set his mind to it today.

“It has nothing to do with you.”

“To my eyes, it’s not like that. I understand you. It’s true that Maru is a good friend of mine, but he lacks compared to you. Such a guy kicked you away, so it’s not surprising that you’re having a hard time. I’m sure you’re rejecting all advances from other people because of that.”

He seemed convinced. His ‘own world’ was disgustingly firm. She would love to tell him that he had been totally fooled, but she brought out her patience.

“Also, where did you hear something like that? That Maru and I were going out, and that we broke up. Not many people know about it.”

She decided to go along with him. It didn’t look like he was going to go away just because she kept rejecting him. Instead, she planned to ask him difficult questions.

“Mijoo told me.”

Giwoo obediently spilled everything. She thought he would be roundabout with his answer, so she asked while pretending to be taken aback.

“Mijoo?”

“I asked her because Mijoo seemed to be worried about you, and that came up. It seems like she tried not to interfere with your relationship that much since it’s a personal thing, but it seems like she had a problem with your relationship with him after all. After all, she did say it like she wanted my help. Of course, I might be wrong about all this.”

He had twisted the truth in an abstruse way. It was true that Mijoo had committed a mistake, but she had never asked for his help. She instantly understood Giwoo’s intentions. He was intending to ruin the relationship between her and Mijoo. He probably calculated that there would be an opening for him to exploit if she had fewer and fewer people to speak her heart to. The if-I’m-wrong-oh-well right at the end was the epitome of self-defense. This way, he would be able to escape the responsibility later. She could practically hear his head churning from all the way where she was. However, it seemed that Giwoo still hadn’t realized that he should look at the opponent before trying to write fiction. In this field, the man who was next to him when she woke up every morning was second to none. This man looked down on a woman who lived with such a man.

“I see.”

“I found out unintentionally, but honestly, I felt happy. It gave me an opportunity to approach you. I know that you were hurt because of Maru, and I want to help you heal it.”

“Yes, I perfectly understand what you’re trying to get at. Since you know about it, I don’t have a reason to hide it either. I am utterly disgusted by your actions. The way you tattletale other people’s mistakes is like a kindergartener, and any sort of friendship I felt towards you is instantly reduced to nothing.”

Giwoo visibly showed with his eyes that things weren’t going the way he expected. It seemed that he didn’t know how to react when his plans didn’t go the way he expected since everyone around him showed him goodwill, and he had never gotten caught doing something bad with that smart head of his. Gaeul felt that he was really like a little kid.

“If you want to grumble about something, then look for someone else.”

“Gaeul.”

“Also, if you’re spreading something funny to other people, you better stop, if you don’t want to be shamed. You know what I mean, right?”

Giwoo, who never stopped talking, fell silent for the first time. Gaeul thought that it was over now. The shoot was over, so there was no reason for her to hold back. It was fine even if this ruined their relationship. If she ever had to work with him again for a shoot, she would rather sleep at home without thinking about anything.

“Shamed?”

Giwoo, who spoke after a long time, made a dry smile and tilted his head, repeating the word ‘shamed.’

“I’m almost fed up now, Gaeul.”

“Fed up?”

“Don’t take things too far. There’s no loss for you in this. I get that your pride was hurt because you got rejected by a third-rate actor while dating him. So, I’m telling you that you should recover that pride next to me and reclaim your true worth. You know, people should hang out with others in their own league. You don’t realize that you’re in a pit of maggots. It’s not surprising. You were born like that. But I can lead you out of that place. Let’s be honest. Love? Sure, it’s important, but you aren’t going to rely on that for your entire life. In the end, the people next to you are nothing more than accessories.”

Giwoo had thrown away a little of the shell that covered him. This was much better. It would be much better on his conscience to advertise himself as total trash rather than forcefully wrapping that disgusting personality of his with something different.

“Kang Giwoo, you are a total lowlife, huh.”

“I know the true hearts of people. I’ve seen them countless times ever since I was young. People act proud, lofty, amazing, and as if they have a conscience. But in the end, it’s all just a temporary method that’s used to survive. They’re bound to take it off in front of the thing that they truly want. I’m sure you’re the same.”

“Can you not treat me like you? I feel like I’m going to vomit what I just ate.”

“The reason you’re doing this is ultimately to raise your value as a woman. How much more should I woo you? There’s a trend for decorations. Bear in mind that worth falls with time.”

“My worth as a woman, huh? I’ve heard something good today, so let me return with something else.”

Gaeul raised her middle finger.

“Fuck off.”

#### **Chapter 932. Crank Up 4**

Choi Hoseon calmed her breathing in front of the door. There was nothing on her that the person on the other side of the door could nitpick about. She had chosen the most plain clothes from her luggage to wear and prepared some fruits according to the senior’s tastes. She also did not forget that the senior

only drank brand-name carbonated water. She lightly knocked on the door before waiting. If she knocked again because there was no response from the other side, a pillow might get flung at her. It would be fortunate if it was a pillow too. If what entered her hands was an ashtray, that ashtray would fly right at her. Fortunately, there was a response asking who it was.

“Senior, it’s me, Hoseon. I prepared a light meal because you didn’t seem to have eaten breakfast.”

“Come in.”

Hoseon pushed open the door and went inside. She saw Lee Miyoon watching the sea from the balcony. She quickly scanned the room. A wine bottle with the cork missing was placed on the table and dirty wine glasses rolled on the floor. The duvet was unkempt and the carrier was still sealed. She first picked up the glass and placed it on the table before unpacking the food she brought.

“Senior, would you like some sandwiches? It was pretty decent with some fruit.”

She couldn’t use any assertive words. This senior was someone who would nitpick with speech. If she spoke without thinking, she would receive a sharp reprimand instead.

“Can you give me some water?”

Senior Lee just reached her hand backwards. Hoseon quickly poured some water and placed it in her hand. She chewed on the water like she would bread before finally standing up from the chair on the balcony.

“So you remember what I drink.”

“As a junior, it is natural for me to remember the preferences of a senior. As for the sandwich, there’s one with ham and one without. Which one would you like?”

“Give me the one with ham. I want something filling.”

Hoseon placed the sandwich on a small plate before giving it to senior Lee. After having a taste of the sandwich, senior Lee told her to sit next to her. That was her way of saying that they should eat together, and they were also the words that Hoseon had been waiting for.

“Is everyone else doing well?”

“I think they’re a little bored without you around, senior.”

“Damn girl. I can see that they’re overjoyed to not see me. But still, that makes me feel better. Would you like some wine?”

“I’ll pour some for you.”

She brought two wine glasses from on top of the fridge and poured some wine. As grape wine was sweet and sour, she would never even touch it usually, but she had to pretend to enjoy it since she had to look good in front of the senior. Other people would shun the idea of coming to meet this senior, but Hoseon thought differently. It was true that she wasn’t someone to befriend deeply, but this senior possessed power. She not only had influence over the producers and the writers, but she was also one of the rare few who could directly contact the head of the drama department. She was afraid of this

senior and it wasn't like she didn't want to put some distance, but more than that, she wanted to become closer to her and become a cherished junior to acquire the wings known as 'Lee Miyoon.' Life started and ended with connections, did it not? Just like how the fruits of labor were sweet, she was bound to get some good stuff if she endured.

She listened and responded to senior Lee's words like a doll that would clap at the flick of a switch. She even smiled and agreed with words that she inwardly didn't agree with. It was only hard at the beginning, but after getting used to it, she could smile voluntarily. If their future could be promised just by listening to some grumbles of an elderly, anyone would do this.

"I'll introduce you to a film director next time."

"No, senior. That's not why I'm doing this."

"What do you mean you're not? I can see it in your eyes. But heck, obvious girls like you are much better. At least much better than those who deceive until the very end and backstab at the end."

Perhaps she was drunk, but senior Lee started lamenting about her own situation when she would usually never talk about herself. Was she conned or something? While Hoseon felt curious, she stayed quiet as though she had heard nothing. The change in her emotions was like a squall. One of this senior's specialties was to retract her smile like nothing and suddenly start roasting people, no?

Senior Lee was patting her head saying that Hoseon was a good junior, but then she abruptly jumped up from her seat when she heard her phone. Hoseon had a glimpse of her eyes, and they were sharp to the point that they freaked her out. She had the same eyes as the day she slapped Han Gaeul's cheek with her bag. Hoseon instinctively felt that she would not get anything good by staying here. She had been reading other people's moods for 10 years and knew that this was the time to run away.

"Senior, I'll be taking my leave now."

Senior Lee just waved at her without even looking at her. That was probably her way of being considerate. It was also a warning that she would smash her if she said one more word. As she was closing the door, she heard a sharp screeching voice,

"So what, you're saying you can't do anything or what! I want that bitch in Japan and the men below me to...."

She wanted to listen some more, but she immediately closed the door. If she kept listening, perhaps a slap like Han Gaeul wouldn't be the end of it. She started sweating profusely. As she had done all she could, she decided that she wouldn't come anywhere near this place until the end of the trip.

Hoseon placed the empty plates on the cart in the corridor before leaving the hotel. She couldn't see anyone from the drama team as it was free time until dinner. It seemed that everyone had formed groups and headed to nearby tourist spots. Just as she was wondering what she should do to kill time, she saw Gaeul walking over to the hotel.

Why was she upset? Hoseon recalled the conversation she had with Gaeul about an hour ago. She told her to work things out with Kang Giwoo, but Gaeul stood up from her seat as though she couldn't be bothered to talk about it. That was Hoseon's way of being considerate of her, but her response was

lukewarm, which made her feel strange. Giwoo should be more than worthy of her, yet Gaeul was feeling that he wasn't enough?

Kang Giwoo, who dressed up well and always had a kind smile on his face, was one of the hottest topics that would always come up when actresses gather. There were many who said that they fell for the gentle side that he showed during shoots. Many of the female staff were the same. It was just that since he was such a decent man, everyone thought that he must have a lover, and even if he didn't, they would just admire him from afar because reaching out to him was too burdensome for them. He was the grandson of YM Group's chairman after all. During the last get-together, Hoseon asked him what he thought of older women as dating partners as a joke. Giwoo said that he would love to have an older lover who would act cute for him. That 'noona' figure might not be Hoseon herself, but she still felt shaken.

"Gaeul, did something happen?"

"It's nothing."

"You don't look good."

"Maybe I stayed under the sun for too long. I should go inside and get some rest."

She really didn't look good, so Hoseon didn't hold her back and told her to get some rest. Was she on her period or something? Ever since the hot fight with senior Lee, Gaeul received attention and love from the whole drama team, but Hoseon didn't think that it was that good. It was true that senior Lee's personality was flawed enough that she deserved a scolding, but she was a sniper after all. A great senior that no new actors would even dare look at. She might be feeling unjustified that she got hit on the cheek, but there was something called karma, so Gaeul must have done something wrong as well. Heck, even taking a hundred steps back, Hoseon could understand why she snapped at senior Lee, but she didn't think well of the fact that Gaeul did not go to her later to make up with her. In the world of actors, hierarchy was pretty important.

The reason Korean people placed importance on class years in college and debut years in the entertainment industry was all to maintain a strict hierarchy. There were some actors that said that lining people up according to generations was a product of the past, but Hoseon believed that there were advantages and disadvantages. If there was no hierarchy, the bond between seniors and juniors wouldn't be as strong, and the warm affectionate tradition of supporting the seniors and leading the juniors would disappear. There were both advantages and disadvantages to this tradition, so just dismissing it as something bad was childish.

In that sense, the fact that Gaeul did not apologize was definitely a mistake on her part. She might feel like she's something because everyone raised her to a pedestal, but in the long term, this would act as a detriment to Gaeul. She wouldn't be able to say anything to a junior much younger than her in the future because she had done the same. If she wants respect, she should know how to bend, but maybe because she got so popular at such a young age, it looked like she knew how to take care of herself, or maybe it was her innate personality.

Hoseon wanted to give her a scolding as a senior, but she honestly didn't have any courage to say anything to her when she thought back to the scene when Gaeul went back against senior Lee. She

could smile so coldly in front of senior Lee. She probably wouldn't even scoff if Hoseon herself said anything to her.

"I want to be popular too."

She subconsciously grumbled. Ultimately, she was just envious of Han Gaeul. That bold personality of hers, that soul-stirring acting skill, and a charming set of facial features to top it off – did God not consider 'average' when he made people? It was too unfair. What was she supposed to do with such a powerful girl right in front of her eyes? The only thing she felt was a sense of inferiority, and the only thing that decreased was her self-confidence.

While she had lived a decent career where some people would acknowledge her, she could only sigh whenever she tried comparing Han Gaeul to her in just one year. Hoseon was a lot older too and had debuted a lot earlier. Whether it was skill, appearance, personality, courage, or even the interest of men, Gaeul was superior in every way, so she probably felt like life was worth living. It would be great if Hoseon shared just a little bit of those.

She stopped thinking about such useless things and looked around the nearby stores. She desperately needed some sweet fruit juice. There was nothing better than fruit juice to soothe her iffy feelings.

Just as she was walking to a front store, she saw Kang Giwoo walking over while covering his hand with the other. If Han Gaeul was a regional rain, it was a huge typhoon this time. He looked like he had just heard that his family had gone bankrupt. Hoseon rushed over to Giwoo in a heartbeat. She was worried about him.

"Giwoo, what happened?"

Giwoo flinched and raised his head before making a gentle smile. How good was this boy? It was likely that his kind personality to not want to inconvenience others made him retract his worries.

"Senior."

"Yeah?"

"Can you listen to me for a little?"

Hoseon watched as Giwoo approached her and just nodded ardently. She didn't know the specifics, but the smell of perfume that tickled her nose was really good.

#### **Chapter 933. Crank Up 4**

He was so cheerful during the morning yet... Hoseon took Giwoo, who had thinned out in a mere few hours, to a nearby café. She had him sit down at one of the terrace tables and went to the counter. Recalling that he ate quite a bit of mango during his meals, she ordered a cup of mango juice. As there were many Korean tourists around this area, ordering wasn't that hard. She stood in front of the counter and had a look at Giwoo on the terrace. As this neighborhood wasn't known for being quick, it would take at least fifteen minutes for the drinks to come out. Should she wait here and go back with the drinks? Or wait with Giwoo? It was a funny worry to have, but Hoseon was totally serious. If Giwoo was smiling like usual, she would go back without hesitation and chat with him, but he looked depressed like



he was hosting a funeral, making her unable to go back so easily. Ultimately, she waited 15 minutes in front of the counter. She walked around like an uneasy dog before picking up the drinks.

I even faced senior Lee. This much is nothing — she consoled herself and approached Giwoo.

“Here, drink some of this.”

“Thank you, senior.”

She thought she had her way with her conversation skills, but now that she actually had a depressed man in front of her, she could hardly talk. Not only that, she was even more cautious as the man was someone she felt attracted to. She didn’t want to say anything that might lessen his impression of her or make bold guesses. Kang Giwoo was someone she wanted to befriend as much as Lee Miyoon after all.

Unable to do anything, she emptied half of the mango juice. It was when she was almost getting tired of waiting for Giwoo to speak and had started worrying about what she had to say,

“Senior, I’m sorry. I know that staying quiet isn’t the answer to everything, but having you around me made me relax, so I just stayed still, even though I know it’ll trouble you.”

A droplet of early morning dew at the edge of a blade of grass — that was how feeble this fully grown man’s eyes looked. Hoseon reached her hand out subconsciously. His skin was as fair as a baby’s.

Only after the sensation of touch registered in her head did she realize what she did. He wasn’t a cat that she raised at home. When she became flustered and was about to take her hand off Giwoo’s face, Giwoo smiled brightly. Hoseon looked at his face in a daze. She felt like the heart-throbbing sensation of first love was coming back to her; a time when she liked someone so much that she could smile just from looking at that person’s face from afar was resurfacing.

“You’re a really good person, senior.”

“I’m not really...”

“Had it been anyone else, they would’ve stood up thinking that I was a bothersome guy, but you waited until the end for me to talk. I think you have a really deep heart.”

Her pride that had been suppressed while sucking up to senior Lee, as well as the confidence that had been shaved down in jealousy of Gaeul had been restored with a single word from Giwoo. She even momentarily forgot that she was supposed to be the one giving consolations here. She looked at Giwoo in a daze for a while before coming back to herself.

“I’m sure anyone would’ve done this. You do so much for all of us usually. It’d be nonsensical to not do this much. Also, it’s not like I did anything. All I did was listen.”

“I think that’s what’s important, just watching and listening from the side. It might sound easy at a first glance, but it’s really not. You’re a really good person, senior.”

Hoseon slowly averted her gaze. She felt like she would fall in love if she kept looking. She didn’t know that a weak-looking man could be so fatal. If there were no eyes around, she even wanted to give him a hug and pat him on the back, telling him not to worry because she would listen as much as needed.

Seemingly having recovered to some extent, Giwoo started to drink. Unlike his fair skin, the movement of his throat was very distinct, as though to boast its masculinity. There were times when actresses gathered together and jokingly talked about male actors who might unexpectedly be quite passionate in bed, and Giwoo was in the rankings. Just as she was fantasizing while looking at his neck, shoulders, and wrist, Giwoo smiled bitterly. It was a smile that made her unable to help but ask the reason behind it,

“Did something happen? I’ve been staying still because I might seem nosy, but it’s bothering me.”

“Looks like I can’t control my emotions that well. I’m being pathetic in front of you.”

“You’re only human. Also, what’s so good about seniors? It’s a senior’s job to listen to the worries of a junior at a time like this. Though, I’m sure I’m not that reliable.”

“You’re someone I can trust and rely on, senior.”

Hoseon curled up her toes when she heard that Giwoo seemed to be reliant on her a little. While she didn’t know the specifics, she would gladly dedicate a day if she could be of his help.

“It looks like the feeling of liking someone doesn’t really go the way I expect it to,” Giwoo said as he lowered his head.

So it was about love. Hoseon thought back to Gaeul, who looked like she was in a really low mood when they brushed by. Her intuition told her that something happened between these two.

“If you’re okay with me, then try talking to me about it.”

“Shall I?”

“I’m known for being tight-lipped. I’ll forget about it once we leave this place, so don’t worry.”

“I’m not worried about that. I know what kind of person you are after all. Also, it doesn’t matter even if it does spread around.”

Giwoo downed the mango juice in one go. Hoseon asked if he needed some liquor instead, as she felt that maybe this wasn’t something that should be talked about over some juice.

“I was just craving for some alcohol too. I’ll go order some.”

“No, you just wait. I’ll go order.”

She thought about going back with just two glasses of rum-based mojito, but she then also decided to bring a bottle of Bourbon whiskey. They drank without talking for a while. She drank the whisky and rinsed her mouth with the mojito and water. Meanwhile, Giwoo didn’t even touch the side snacks that she brought and kept drinking the whisky. Just as she was worried that he was going to get drunk while the sun was still up, Giwoo spoke.

“I’m sure everyone knows since I talked about it during the get-together, but I’m attracted to Gaeul.”

She indeed knew about it, but it didn’t feel that good to hear about it in person. She knew that Giwoo was a persimmon she could not reach and pick, but she always had vague hopes. Kang Giwoo and Han Gaeul - the two of them standing side by side definitely made a good picture. Meanwhile, she would perhaps be one of the little dwarves crying in the corner while listening to the love stories of a prince

and a princess. Or perhaps the witch that hands the poisoned apple? In any case, it was true that she was just a side character. Even if she consoled Giwoo and listened to his stories, she wouldn't even appear on the last page of the book. Sitting here was a useless endeavor, yet despite knowing that, she had a hard time leaving. After all, she was under the spotlight while she was here looking after Giwoo. She was being recorded on the main pages.

"You two really suit each other."

Now that she actually thought that she was just a side character, she had an easier time talking. She thought that she might as well get the 'grateful noona' treatment after hooking the two up. Looking at things, it seemed that Giwoo had expressed his feelings to Gaeul, but Gaeul did not accept him. It would be fine as long as she cheered him on with the old adage that there is no tree that will not fall after enough swings of the ax.

"Is that so?"

"Yeah. So don't feel so down and be more proactive about it. A woman's heart isn't always so fickle, but it's bound to be shaken if the wind is strong. The saying 'the brave gets the beauty' isn't entirely wrong. Giwoo, you're a really good guy, so if you talk to her calmly about it, Gaeul will open her heart up to you."

Did that make her seem like an expert in dating? Men had the tendency to resolve the situation by themselves if they were given a little conviction. He might be feeling down because he was rejected, but he should soon get back on his feet as long as she gave him a little push. That was how it was with the men that Hoseon had experienced.

Giwoo shook his head as though that wasn't what he meant.

"Looks like I didn't explain enough."

"What do you mean?"

"I'm not the only one with feelings. Gaeul also showed interest in me. That's why I brought it up during the get-together. Acting like that without even understanding what she feels is just shameful."

That was true. Boldly bringing it up like that was only doable if both parties had implicitly agreed to it. This was especially true since their occupations were sensitive in regard to romance.

"Then there shouldn't be any problems, are there?"

"What I like about Gaeul is her refreshing personality. She doesn't act coy, nor does she put up any pretenses. I thought that if it was her, our love would last a long time like a friendship. But as I talked to her and got to know her, I started to realize that there's a disparity between what I knew of her and her real self."

Giwoo's tongue had become semi-loose. He started grinning a lot too, and his head would bob up and down from time to time. It seemed that he was seriously drunk. She could tell since he was bringing up secrets so easily. Hoseon hesitated. Should she have him stop here and have him return? Or listen to the end and find out about the secrets of the two? The hesitation didn't last long as Giwoo started talking,

“It was after she got hit on the cheek by senior Lee Miyoon. I was worried about her and talked to her about it. That was when I found out something strange. After all that’s happened, senior Lee Miyoon is still a senior, but she spoke as though she had done nothing wrong. That was when I started to lose interest in her. I had a look at her again after that. That was when I found out that Gaeul had been talking bad behind everyone’s back.”

“Talking bad?”

Hoseon pulled her chair in. She knew that it would be something like this. She always thought that that impolite junior would be talking crap behind everyone’s back. Some of the actresses she was close to had been talking about how ‘dishonest’ Han Gaeul was for a long time. It seemed clear that that deceitful fox had been talking behind everyone’s backs. No one caught anything from her, but she probably hid it meticulously.

“I can’t talk about this, but I’m only saying it because it’s you, senior.”

Giwoo sighed. He reeked of booze.

#### **Chapter 934. Crank Up 4**

It was not a misconception. The gazes she got last night, the whispers that practically asked her to listen, and the mockery that she could hear in the background – Gaeul looked at the actress who snatched the tongs and turned around. Even though she must have known that Gaeul had been waiting to use the tongs, that actress had no hesitation in her actions. She watched as the actress walked over to the fruit section with the buffet plate in her hand. Another actress, who had been talking to a staff member, looked her way. The moment they locked eyes, that actress immediately blinked several times as though she got dust in her eyes before looking away. The staff around her did the same. Even though she was quite a bit away from them, Gaeul could tell that those people were talking behind her back. She thought that she had been overly sensitive because of what happened with Kang Giwoo, but it seemed that she was wrong.

“Unni.”

Mijoo approached her. Her eyes as she looked around looked cautious. Gaeul headed to the dessert section following Mijoo, who dragged her by her sleeve.

“I might be wrong, but the atmosphere seems strange. What do you think, unni?”

“You probably aren’t wrong. Just yesterday, I thought I was overthinking, but now it looks like I was right. Senior Hoseon, senior Woonjeong, senior Minjeong, senior Jimin, and then Ajin - these five people have something against me for sure. There seems to be some among the production crew too.”

“Right? I knew something was strange. They suddenly started to talk badly about you. It’s not like they’re saying outright that they don’t like you, but they’re indirectly mocking you. Did something happen between you and them?”

“The problem is that we aren’t close enough for something to happen. I can’t understand the reason they are doing this all of a sudden.”

“Should I go and try to find out?”

That would be the most reassuring solution, but solving this through Mijoo had the possibility that it might make things more complex instead. Mijoo might get hated by the others too.

“You stay still for now. If someone talks to you about it, just respond accordingly.”

“I can’t do that. You know I have a firm personality. I’ll be angry if someone says anything strange to me.”

“Who am I to tell you to do anything.... But anyway, just don’t oppose them so directly. You know how you should act if you want to work for a long time in this industry, right?”

Without firm popularity, a stylist should usually avoid getting involved with bad rumors amongst actors. Mijoo nodded, but she clearly looked disgruntled. It was a joyful thing that there was someone that would unconditionally be on her side. After telling Mijoo to return, Gaeul headed to the salad corner. She stood next to Hoseon, who was getting some kabocha pumpkin salad. Hoseon started sidestepping as though she didn’t expect her to come so close.

“Senior.”

Gaeul took a large stride. She wanted to ask from the front where she could see her face. She wanted to know why this woman had been laughing while giving her glimpses since last night and why she would avert her gaze when they met eyes if she had done nothing wrong. Hoseon froze on the spot while holding the salad spoon. The kabocha pumpkin salad fell from the spoon.

“I called out to you because I am convinced that I’m not mistaken. Senior, you’ve been talking about me since last night, haven’t you?”

“Me?”

“You can’t deny it. Even just now, you pointed at my table with your fork like you were pointing fingers, weren’t you?”

“No, I didn’t.”

“Then what were the things I saw?”

She was used to getting hated for no valid reason. It had been years since she suffered under the hands of Lee Miyoon. If she flipped out just because a few female seniors looked at her and whispered behind her back, she would’ve quit the entertainment industry a long time ago. The reason she asked Hoseon wasn’t that she intended to find trouble with her. Heck, she could hate her all she wants without any reason, so it wasn’t like Gaeul wanted to ask her to stop hating her. There was only one thing she wanted to know — where this cold treatment that arose without any precursors all started. If a senior who didn’t look at her in a good light usually gave her a displeased look even during the vacation, she would just accept it and ignore it. However, in just one day, some of the actress and staff members that she neither had a good nor a bad relationship with started giving her a cold glare as though they had all planned it beforehand, which made her curious. Why were they doing this all of a sudden?

A female staff walked over to Hoseon, who was hesitating. Then she hooked arms with Hoseon before taking her to the table. For the first time ever, Gaeul felt that there was a separate organization with great unity within the Doctor’s Office drama team. The gaze of the staff member that took Hoseon away

landed on Gaeul's face for a brief moment before leaving. It had been quite a long time since she felt something material from someone's gaze. She wanted to grab her and ask her all about it, but she did not want to interrupt the other people who were enjoying the last day of the holiday. She should just meet the eight people with hostility against her in private.

"I knew you'd be like that."

It was Lee Miyoona. The queen who had never shown her face throughout the entire vacation had finally come out on a stroll. Gaeul asked as she put some kabocha pumpkin salad on her plate.

"Can you elaborate a little, please? I'm stupid so I don't understand what you mean."

"Do you really not know?"

Lee Miyoona picked up a pair of tongs before pointing at some tables as though she was a conductor of an orchestra. They were the tables with the people who had been glaring at her since last night. If a person that was not directly involved in this situation could tell, it meant that their gazes were pretty blatant. The actress and the staff member that met eyes with Lee Miyoona quickly looked down at the floor. That was a drastically different reaction to when Gaeul looked at them. The actress who even sent mockery her way had obediently lowered her head. At this moment, she was envious of Lee Miyoona's terrible personality and background.

"It's been a common thing for ages. It's been repeatedly happening for generations too. When I had pretty and supple skin and a fist-sized waist like you, things would be like this when I didn't pay attention for just a moment."

Lee Miyoona picked up a piece of roasted shrimp before asking if she wanted some. She looked especially in a good mood today. Gaeul held out her plate. Her opponent had hidden away her fangs and teeth and bothered to talk to her, so there was no need to pick a fight.

"It's something that actors commonly experience if they don't put their mind into managing their reputation. It's fine to not, for run-of-the-mill dregs because they will never become big, but things like this happen to people like you, a perfect target of jealousy."

"So you're saying that those people are acting like that out of jealousy? That doesn't sound that believable. It's not like jealousy occurs all at once across multiple people."

"Usually, yes. But what's the thing that makes or breaks us? It's rumors. You should handle yourself better. You were playing around with me, so what does it make me when you suffer from people like them? I hope you can protect my pride. Like I said before, I only have you around because you're a toy I can play around with, and I don't deal with crude toys."

"So people hit their toys these days, huh?"

"You can tell me whatever you want today. I'm on a roll today. I think I can laugh even if I get slapped by you."

"Since we're on the topic, can I try hitting you? It'll make me feel refreshed."

"Sure, go ahead."

Now that this woman, who had been holed up in her room with a serious face throughout the entire vacation, was all smiles and even held her cheek out, Gaeul felt her energy draining. She would only feel well if she fought against this woman while glaring at each other. She watched as Lee Miyoong put some food on her plate and remembered what Maru told her — that Lee Miyoong was in a fix because her business had been taken over by Yoojin's mother who was in Japan. Now that she looked like she had finally gotten rid of her trouble, it probably meant that the problem had been resolved to a certain extent. It also meant that the things Maru was doing were progressing smoothly. So that woman was rejoicing because she could return to selling new actresses as prostitutes? At this point, the actresses and the staff that pointed fingers at her looked cute. Compared to Lee Miyoong, what they were doing was child's play.

"Looks like something good happened to you, huh."

"I'm on cloud nine today. The world looks different. It makes me realize just how important the things I was holding were."

"I'm not sure what it is, but I hope you keep holding on to it."

Because only then, will you receive your judgment — Gaeul smiled and placed a piece of dragon fruit on Lee Miyoong's plate. Lee Miyoong looked at Gaeul's face and the dragon fruit alternately before curling her lips.

"I'm feeling good, so I'll look into it for you. For you to be swayed by those dregs, I've put too much effort into you. If you wanna be broken, you should be broken by me. The person Han Gaeul should cry in front of and ask for forgiveness from is me."

"Would such a day even come?"

"Just wait. I'll tell you just how amazing this unni was. Thanks for the dragon fruit, my cute little junior."

Unni, coming from a woman nearing her seventies? Lee Miyoong walked over to where Hoseon was with her plate. Gaeul saw Hoseon and the other actresses quickly cleaning up when Lee Miyoong approached them. She watched as Lee Miyoong preached to those actresses in dissatisfaction. She never knew there would come a day when she would receive help from that woman. However, what would've happened if Lee Miyoong knew what she knew? Could she still smile if she found out that she was in a trap placed by Maru?

Gaeul turned around with a plate full of food. Kang Giwoo entered her eyes on her way back to the table where Mijoo was waiting. The smile that he would show her often was no longer there. He scanned her from top to bottom with cold eyes before turning his head around. Gaeul immediately realized where the rumors came from. It was also something that she could've noticed if she calmed down and carefully went over the pieces of the puzzle.

Gaeul clicked her finger to attract Giwoo's gaze. Then she pointed at Hoseon, who was getting an earful from Lee Miyoong. A gentle smile crept onto Giwoo's cold face. Gaeul could easily tell that the smile was there to hide his astonishment. She waved at him before turning around. The gaze that hit her back felt like knives. So he was a little kid who couldn't do anything with his own power.

"Unni, what's so funny?"

“I was wondering what would happen if an immature brat fought with a woman with a terrible personality, and it made me laugh.”

“What is that? A drama?”

“Something like that.”

Gaeul told Mijoo that they should eat and raised her fork. That was the last meal they had before the flight.

#### **Chapter 935. Crank Up 4**

The salmon salad she had in her mouth couldn't be more tasty. Ever since she regained her appetite, she regretted looking out at the sea from her room throughout the entire vacation. Had she gotten the news just one day earlier, she would've gone to a nearby famous restaurant and eaten classily. Lee Miyoon gathered the salad together in one spot and shoved it in her mouth by lifting up the plate. She couldn't remember the last time she ate to her heart's content. She ate not to survive but to savor the taste. She was already thinking about what she should eat once she returned to Korea.

She looked around while savoring the carbonated water in her mouth. The drama production staff and the actors were all paying attention to her like deer who came across a leopard in the middle of the grassland. Miyoon enjoyed those gazes; gazes of fear, wariness, and jealousy were all directed at her. They were signs that the human Lee Miyoon had not died yet. Miyoon looked at Kang Giwoo, who was sitting two tables across. He must be feeling extremely uncomfortable right now. After all, she had interrupted his scheme against Han Gaeul. While Han Gaeul was bad enough that she would chew on her to death, she was even more bothered by Kang Giwoo right now. She had been humiliated, so she had to return the favor. Although she couldn't do anything directly with him being the grandson of the chairman, scattering dirt on his path should be fine.

Kang Giwoo stood up after moving his jaws around. Two of the female staff immediately walked up to him like they were his loyal guards. He went to the hotel lounge and met Han Gaeul, who was on the way. Kang Giwoo waved at her, but Han Gaeul didn't even give him a glance. Miyoon covered her mouth and laughed. The pride of the grandson of the chairman was utterly crushed. Miyoon originally thought that he had chosen Han Gaeul as someone to play around with for a brief time, but from his actions until now and his current figure, he seemed to be pretty serious. Perhaps he was even considering her as a marriage partner. He seemed uneasy because the woman didn't fall for him as he even used those around him. However, his methods were terrible. He seemed to be planning to lend Han Gaeul his shoulder once she ran into difficulties due to him spreading bad rumors around, but there was no way a girl like her would be shaken by rumors like that, was there?

“Senior.”

Hoseon and the actresses stood in a line with their hands neatly folded in front of them. Miyoon raised her glass and asked what.

“I just wanted to apologize to you again. It looks like we must have misunderstood something about Gaeul. We really didn't have any intentions to talk bad about her.”



“You know you did that out of jealousy because she’s younger, more popular, and received acknowledgment from others.”

“It’s really not like that. Moreover, we didn’t know that you doted on her so much, and that’s why we made a mistake.”

“Me, dote on her? So there comes a day when I hear that from someone, huh.”

Lee Miyoon put her glass down with a tap. The actresses lined up in front of her all flinched at once.

“Let me ask while I’m at it. Kang Giwoo is the one who ordered you to do it, right? No, wait, there’s no way he ordered you to do it. He must have said things that made you girls talk like that. I have to admit his skill is quite something when it comes to that.”

“It’s not like that at all.”

Hoseon denied it, even going as far as to wave her hands in the air. Miyoon flicked her finger. Hoseon flinched before walking in front of her. She flicked her finger again. Hoseon’s face was right in front of her.

“Are you playing with words with me? Or are you lying in front of me?”

Hoseon’s lips trembled. Miyoon saw emotions drain from Hoseon’s face. If she pushed her a little more, she might even turn blue and faint on the spot.

“Girlie, you should’ve acted more modestly. You put so much effort into me, didn’t you? You prepared my meals while the others were shivering in fear and notified me of the schedule. I’m someone who repays what I’m given, whether it’s grace or something else.”

“I will never do that again, senior.”

Being able to control other people at a whim like this gave her pleasure bigger than any form of entertainment. This was why power was a necessity, Miyoon spoke to the other actresses standing neatly,

“I get that you want to look good in front of Kang Giwoo. On the outside, he’s quite something after all. But think about it a little. Do you think you have any chances with the grandson of the YM Group? I’m sure it isn’t just sympathy towards him when you badmouth someone just based on his words. It’s because of your fantasies of ‘what if things go well with him.’ I’ll tell you this straight: it’s not happening. I’m sure you know best. So think about it. Should you continue following a pretty boy like that who has no substance? Or would you prefer me, who has real power in this industry?”

Actors with guts wouldn’t even be here. Those who were busy preparing what they needed to do for the sake of the future didn’t even have the time to be shaken by other people’s words. They should be busy fulfilling what they’re lacking. However, the actresses standing in front of her right now were cheap ones who would change their actions based on other people’s words. Just as people had their uses, trash like them had their uses as well.

“We’ll listen to your words from now on, senior,” Hoseon said as their representative.

It was a satisfactory answer. Miyoon gave them a simple order to put Kang Giwoo on the chopping table just as they did Han Gaeul until moments ago.

“Giwoo doesn’t have any flaws to ta...”

“Don’t you get why Kang Giwoo wanted you to badmouth that kid Gaeul? Do you really think Han Gaeul did something that deserves your insults? No, you don’t. You know it perfectly well. You just kept watching her, who was more popular than you, because there was nothing on her, and then Kang Giwoo’s push triggered you to joyfully start badmouthing her, didn’t it?”

Miyoon picked up her fork and pointed at Han Gaeul, who was sitting a little away from her.

“Kang Giwoo got rejected by that girl. That’s why he went to you all to complain. I’m sure his plan was to help her out and get some points from her once you badmouth her and attack her. I’m sure you all must have realized that but intentionally ignored it. That’s because it’ll hurt your pride if you admit it. It will feel like your worth as a woman is degraded. Heck, it’s clear to see from how there’s not a single boy who’s been talking bad about her since last night.”

The actresses did not say anything. Miyoon thought that there were no fools in this world. Most of the time, people just do not want to admit it and cause big trouble. The same was true for Miyoon herself.

“You girls should all spread around that Kang Giwoo started spreading bad rumors about Han Gaeul as a form of revenge. I need to ruin that polite image of his. I don’t care what he does, but he needs to be punished if he crosses the line.”

Threats were much stronger than any sweet words. The actresses should be expecting that they would receive big losses if they did not do what they were tasked with. Consequentially, Miyoon would be helping Han Gaeul, but she didn’t care. She was feeling merciful today.

When she went to the hotel lounge, Kang Giwoo blocked her path. It seemed that he had been waiting for the moment when there would be fewer eyes on them.

“Just what are you thinking?”

“What?”

“Senior Lee, I can’t have you do this to me. Why are you meddling in my business unnecessarily and ruining my plans? You’re putting me in a fix.”

“Seeing as how you’re showing your true nature just because you got kicked away by a girl, it makes me wonder if you’re really the grandson of the chairman. I guess this is why the chairman’s so overprotective of you?”

Kang Giwoo’s right foot flipped up and down. His sandal made flapping noises. Miyoon smiled when she saw him react so nervously.

“I must have been an idiot for clinging onto a brat like this even for a moment.”

“Senior Lee, you’ll regret this, you know?”

“Regret? And what are you going to do to me?”

“It looks like you must’ve forgotten that you will never reach grandfather unless you go through me.”

“There’s no way I’ll forget since that’s your only worth. But it’s fine now. I’ve found a way out.”

“I’m not sure what you’re trying to do, but you know that everything will be over for you the moment I put in a word with my grandfather, right? Regardless of what you’re preparing, you’ll be finished the moment grandfather rejects you,” Giwoo said as he stepped right up to her, making a smile befitting of his title, the ‘smiling prince.’

Other people watching from afar might think that they were a close senior and junior pair. Miyoon found the boy rather impressive for his efforts. She found it cute, and even a little pitiful.

“The fact that you’re the grandson of the chairman is a privilege greater than anything, but you must’ve forgotten one thing. You’re the one who told me that I should grasp where power comes from. That’s the only way someone leeching off power can live longer.”

“You seem to be mistaken about something as I’m the grandson of the YM Group’s leader, not some kind of parasite.”

“Giwoo, let me tell you one thing. While you were going to school without a clue in the world, I was seeing your grandfather and was the one working closest to him. While you grew up under the limitless love of the chairman, I kept passing through his tests and survived. You probably don’t know yet what it means for that person to give power to a woman when he extremely looks down on them. This time, I’ve committed a blunder and he lost sight of me, but I am well aware that there is no one who’s more sensitive to achievements than him. The chairman is someone who will pull someone to his side if he finds them useful even if that person tried to stab him in the back the day before. Conversely, he will more than willingly abandon his blood kin if he deems them useless. Giwoo, has the chairman ever told you that you will be inheriting the YM Group?”

Giwoo, who was armed with a firm smile, flinched backwards in an instant. Miyoon waved at him once as his face twitched before going back up to her room. The call she had been waiting for had just arrived.

“I was just about to call you. Looks like we have something in common, journalist Kim, eh?”

Miyoon sat down on the sofa and continued her call.

#### **Chapter 936. Crank Up 4**

When he saw Hoseon take a step back and fidget with her fingers with an awkward smile on her face, he realized that the power balance had shifted. Giwoo was about to say something else before he stopped. Lee Miyoon might be someone she couldn’t go against. He couldn’t exactly tell her that Lee Miyoon was a tiger without fangs, so he had to finish their conversation here.

“Also, Giwoo, I’m telling this because I’m worried about you, but you should be careful when talking bad about others. I know who you are, so I believe that there must be some kind of circumstances, but other people might not think the same. You know what I’m saying, right?”

Things were going in a weird direction. The wenches that seemed like they would undress in front of him if he took them to bed had all changed their expressions and even reprimanded him. Seeing the women

changing their attitudes in a mere hour, he realized that his grandfather's words were right: women were to be controlled, not trusted. He truly felt that right now.

When he thought about how the good image he had maintained until now might fall apart, he felt frustrated. He was angry at Lee Miyoong, who butted in and ruined everything, but Han Gaeul was the source of the problem. Isn't it a woman's duty to respond in kind to a man's wooing? They should obediently follow if a man was polite, yet she kept her head held up high and continued pushing him away.

Giwoo looked at the back of Han Gaeul's figure as she went up to her room. She was a really good product, an item that he wanted to have even at the cost of some humiliation. Hundreds of millions of won wouldn't be wasted if he could see those proud eyes being subservient in front of him. It would be great if they were in the feudal era where women were treated like assets. Sometimes, he hated the fact that he had to treat them like a person just because the era had changed when he could've easily got his hands on them. He wanted to bed her and rip apart her clothes immediately before looking at every nook and cranny.

Giwoo scratched the back of his lower teeth as he stopped his imagination. He had too many things to be doing that. He couldn't taint the name of the YM Group just to get his hands on some woman. His pride didn't allow that either. Perhaps he should change his methods? It seemed like he wasn't getting through to her because he was only using words. Perhaps trying to treat Han Gaeul like a special person was the wrong approach. Maybe she would easily open up her heart if he gave her lots of gifts like he did with normal women.

Creatures known as women were simple in the end and were bound to be won over as long as he could create an environment where he could raise their pride and they received respect. There were rarely any women on whom that formula didn't work. She may be acting coy right now, but she would usually fall for him anyway. After all, she fell for that pathetic Han Maru, did she not? Objectively speaking, he and Han Maru were worlds apart.

He laughed. He didn't think about this. Han Gaeul just found him too burdensome. Only now did things fall into place. Gaeul must be aware that the reason Han Maru said goodbye to her was for Kim Suyeon. She had experienced the ultimate shame she could experience as a woman. She was approached by such a perfect man in such a situation, so it was no wonder that she was feeling wary.

Giwoo energetically stepped on the stairs. He saw Gaeul in front of her door. Wait – he shouted and she stopped after opening the door halfway.

"If you're here to pick a fight, then you got the wrong door. Senior Lee did that of her own accord. Done?"

"I don't care about that."

"Then I see we have no business. I need to pack up, so I'm a little busy. Can you do it over text unless it's something urgent?"

"Han Gaeul, go out with me."

Gaeul opened the door and went inside as though she hadn't heard anything. Giwoo put his fingers behind the door and pulled it open. Gaeul looked behind once before going to her bed and starting to pack up. She didn't seem the least interested in what he was up to.

"I know what you're thinking. I'm sure you must have had a hard time after you were kicked away by Han Maru. But you have no fault in that. You were just next to a lacking man for a brief moment. That doesn't degrade your value as a woman. I don't plan to find fault with it either."

Gaeul took large strides towards him. Did she finally have something to talk about? Standing right in front of him, Gaeul crouched down. When he looked down, he saw a sock.

"If you're done, then can you get out of the way? As you can see, my room is a mess, so I think I won't make the morning plane if I don't clean up quickly."

Seeing her eyes without a speck of emotion, Giwoo subconsciously took a step back. Gaeul stuffed her sock into her carrier. He thought that he had to regain the upper hand in the conversation. Just as he thought about bringing up Kim Suyeon, there was someone who walked across the corridor to the room. It was Han Gaeul's stylist, Mijoo. After seeing Giwoo from afar, Mijoo quickly walked over.

"Unni, I'm here. You aren't done packing up yet, are you?"

Giwoo watched as Mijoo pushed her way into the room. Did she not have eyes? Or was she simply dumb? It seemed that he needed to spell out that they were in the middle of an important conversation.

"Mijoo, can you give us some room? I'm in the middle of an important conversation right now with Gaeul."

"I need to quickly pack up. Just think I don't exist and talk to her."

"How can I think that you don't exist when you're here? I'm not playing around."

His grip on the door tightened. Mijoo, who was standing boldly, started flinching and let go of the one-piece dress. Now that was a reaction he liked. There was no need to shout at a dog that obediently curled up its tail. He was waiting for Mijoo to leave when Gaeul, who was folding her clothes, approached him. Her hands slowly approached his. Just then, he remembered that his fingers were snapped backwards back on the beach. When he reflexively pulled his hand away, she smiled.

"Coward."

Being pushed on the chest, Giwoo took several steps back. Gaeul put away her smile and closed the door. He tried to grab the door again, but he was startled by her pulling close the door without hesitation, so he let go. Had he continued grabbing onto it, his hand might have been squashed. A loud boom hit his ears. Forget squashed, he might have been crushed instead.

"Han Gaeul!"

He hit the door several times as he called out to her, but there was no reply. He saw a foreigner couple peeking their heads out from another door. Giwoo covered his face with his left hand and kept knocking on the door.

“I’m different from Han Maru. I’m different from the bastard who abandoned you for Kim Suyeon. I’m sure you’re scared right now. Maybe you’re disgusted at men. I understand that you are pushing me away. But if you talk to me just a little, you’ll find out that I’m different.”

She might feel embarrassed since Mijoo was next to her. She should have no choice but to open the door. He leaned against the wall and looked at the door. He had the conviction that she would soon open the door. However, there was no response even after five minutes.

“What are you doing?”

A voice that ticked him off hit his ears. Lee Miyoong told her manager, who was holding a carrier, to go down first. Giwoo simply ignored her. This was no time to be facing off against the old hag. Contrary to his expectations that she would go down, Lee Miyoong approached him instead.

“Are you actually waiting to meet the owner of this room? For what, to do a serenade or something?”

“Senior Lee, you won’t get any benefits by clashing with me so often.”

“I find it fun, so why not? Anyway, did you call the chairman? You should check if he has any intention of making you inherit the company.”

“I have no intention of inheriting the company. Of course, if I say that I will succeed him, grandfather will immediately start making me take business classes. Once that’s done, I’ll climb up the hierarchy step by step and receive the title of president. I jumped into this industry because I didn’t want to live a boring life like that. I wanted to show that I could be successful without the help of YM, and I succeeded to an extent.”

“This is why the thought process of young masters is interesting. Do you really think that you became successful through your own efforts? Then what was the endless amount of lobbying that I saw then?”

“That’s because those people sucked up to grandfather to look good in front of him. It’s not related to me.”

“Little boy, that’s what we call related. You are standing on a starting line prepared for you by those above you, yet you don’t even seem to realize that. I can now see how much the chairman doted on you when he raised you. Thanks to that, I’m convinced. To the chairman, you must be just a cute and precious grandson. And that’s about it. Gaeul? There’s a pitiful dog who wants attention over here, so why don’t you come out for a bit?” Lee Miyoong shouted at the door.

Just as he was about to grab Lee Miyoong, who mocked him before turning around, the door opened. It was Gaeul and Mijoo, who walked out with two carriers. There seemed to be no fluctuations in her emotions. Mijoo heard the story between Han Maru and Kim Suyeon, but she did not even frown. Did that mean that Mijoo knew that as well? Giwoo looked at Mijoo’s expression more than Gaeul’s. Yesterday, he had mixed in a lie while talking to Gaeul. He said that Mijoo told him everything. If Gaeul reprimanded Mijoo, Mijoo would’ve naturally said that it wasn’t her. In that process, the relationship between the two might worsen.

“Now you’re interested in my little sister?”

Gaeul grabbed Mijoo's hand and walked away. They didn't look like they fought. In fact, they looked even closer than before from the way they looked out for each other. Did she not scold Mijoo for exposing her relationship? Giwoo couldn't understand with his head.

"Gaeul," he hurriedly called out to her.

He was filled with hastiness. Why did nothing go the way he expected it to when it came to Han Gaeul? Something like this had never happened before. Gaeul sent Mijoo down first. After seeing that they were the only ones in the corridor, Giwoo slowly walked over to her. When he took about three to four steps, he heard a voice. It was a voice that didn't just fill the entire corridor; it was a voice that also pushed him away.

"Seeing as how you're obsessed, you look quite pitiful. You should visit a psychotherapist. I visited quite often when I had it hard. It's quite helpful."

"I'm obsessed?"

"You aren't then?"

After throwing that question, Gaeul went downstairs. Giwoo tried to chase her, but he couldn't lift his foot. Obsessed? He was? He felt like a mosquito was flying right above his head. It felt terrible. He couldn't admit that. He was obsessed with a woman? The almighty Kang Giwoo was?

He consciously blinked. Whenever his eyelids closed and opened again, the world was cut off before continuing again. He stood in a daze like that before looking at his palm. They were drenched in sweat like he had just dipped them in water. He rubbed his hands several times. By the time the water on his hands disappeared, Giwoo uttered the words that suddenly came to his mind,

"When was my first love again?"

## **Chapter 937. Crank Up 5**

"Good work. I guess we have to wait for Lee Miyoona to come back to Korea now."

Maru thanked the stylist who gave him the coat with his eyes before leaving the store. Dongwook, who was eating on the other side of the phone, sighed slowly as he spoke,

-Things went well over the phone, but you never know. She might change her mind if she meets up with me.

"She's a cautious woman, but she shouldn't have the room to look around since she's been driven against the edge of a cliff. If you emphasize that it's a temporary alliance until you get Hong Janghae, you should be able to easily get her agreement."

-She did seem quite willing. I can tell that she's suspicious of me, but she still showed willingness to go through with this. It seems like she's willing to take some damage as long as she can bring Hong Janghae down.

"I'm sure the fact that she can't guarantee her actress life must have made her nervous. Is Miss Mari doing well?"

-For now, she's resting in a place I prepared for her with her man. They seem to rely on each other quite a lot, and they didn't look that unstable. They're quite cooperative too.

"Once you give me the information, I'll try to persuade the 'madam' in Japan. As long as we can get her to take her hands off it and place Lee Miyoon back in the equation, we should be able to proceed."

-Looks like I'll only be able to get some rest once I jail Hong Janghae and Lee Miyoon and whoever else is involved. I've also scouted some reliable junior journalists of mine. I'm sure you've heard of Lee Dongyeon before.

"You mean the one who keeps doing his thing despite being sued by SC once?"

-He lives on his toughness alone. This one's the real deal. He will rush to any cases involving large business companies or politicians. Though, thanks to that, he got divorced and lives a poor life.

"Please introduce him to me later. I wish to get to know more about him."

-If you get close to a guy like that, it'll screw up your life. An ordinary man will get stabbed by the villain if they stay next to the apostle of justice.

Maru smiled and looked at his watch. It was about time for Byunchan to arrive. He stood by the road in front of the store before looking around. He saw Byungchan's car held up by the traffic light.

"Hyung-nim, it looks like I must hang up now."

-You said you had something to do. The afterparty?

"Yep. I'm in neat clothes too. I'm not sure if there are any journalists willing to take photos of me though."

-Walk boldly. Isn't your boldness the only thing you can boast about?

Dongwook then hung up saying that they should have another call tomorrow. Maru put his phone inside his coat before waving his hand. A black van slowed down and approached him.

"You look quite decent in neat clothes."

He got on the van, listening to Byungchan's compliment.

"What if no one recognizes me even though I'm wearing these clothes?"

"Don't worry about that. One of our journalists is waiting too. When you go there, there should be someone who's especially attentive to you. You should wave your hand."

"That puts me at ease."

The car started moving. Maru checked his hairstyle with his phone's front-facing camera. Perhaps it was because of the light, but he thought he looked quite young when he looked at himself at the shop, but now that he saw himself in a dark environment, he looked older than his peers.

"Should I reveal my forehead a little more?"

"Let me see."



When the van got stuck at a traffic light, Byunchan had a look at Maru's face.

"I think it might be better to raise your hairline by just a little."

He took out some hair wax to do his bangs before spraying his hair. It felt a little better with his eyebrows exposed. The GPS navigation device notified them that they had arrived at their destination. The parking lot for the galbi restaurant on the 2nd floor was filled with cars. Byungchan followed the guidance of the parking manager and parked inside.

"Looks like we managed to get here before the older members. There are quite a lot of actors who don't want to go in before the juniors. They want to pick up the spoons earlier than anyone else<sup>[1]</sup>, yet they always want to appear late, sheesh."

He got out of the van, following Byungchan. He saw journalists waiting outside. As the weather wasn't that cold considering that it was early December, everyone had light clothing.

"I feel nervous now."

"What's there to be nervous about when you just have to walk inside? It must be harder to stand on a stage or something."

"For me, events like this give me more pressure."

"You should get used to things like this if you want to be an actor for a long time. Go in now. If there's a journalist who acts like they know you, then wave your hand at them. If you get photographed like that once, the other journalists will also think that you're an actor and will start taking photos."

After neatening his coat once, he was about to make his move. Just then, a white van drove past the journalists and entered the parking lot. Some of the journalists whispered to each other before raising their cameras. Maru knew who was inside. Indeed, the person inside was worthy of making the journalists fuss.

"Looks like I should go in right after that person. I feel like it'll be less embarrassing too."

"Whose car is that?"

As Byungchan asked, the door to that white van opened. Yoonseo, wearing jeans and a leather jacket, got out of the van. A girl, who was a popular idol, and a successful actress, was then greeted by a ceremony of shutter sounds and flashes from the journalists.

"Yoonseo, huh? Looks like you would've been in big trouble if you tried to go in before. They would've gone over there before any cameras shot you."

"My words exactly."

Wearing sneakers, she lightly walked past the journalists. Celebrities who were used to the photo line definitely had leisure when they walked, whether it was their demeanors or their expressions. Maru fidgeted with his hand. So, he had to walk in naturally like that? It was nothing much, but it made him very nervous that it bothered him.

Just as Yoonseo was about to walk past the journalists and head inside the restaurant, she stopped. Maru saw that her eyes were directed at him. When he looked around, he saw that the only other person around him was Byungchan. Yoonseo waved her hand and walked over.

“Why is Yoonseo coming here?”

“Why is she indeed?”

“Then I’ll back off now. You’re on your own.”

Byungchan returned to the van. Maru looked at the cameras that followed her wake. They seemed like sunflowers chasing the sun.

“What are you doing here?” Yoonseo asked.

“Getting ready to go inside.”

“Are you waiting for someone?”

“No.”

“Really?”

Yoonseo turned around. When she did, she had on an idol’s smile that seemed to show what ‘experience’ truly meant.

“Let’s go in together then. I was just feeling depressed because I got stood up.”

Yoonseo grabbed Maru’s arm and took a step backwards. Being dragged by that hand, Maru left the scope of the van. The moment he misstepped, camera flashes bombarded him from everywhere. He stood to the back left of Yoonseo and walked in front of the journalists. When they arrived at the end of the photo line, a microphone blocked their path. The symbol of YBS was on the microphone. There was a reporter holding out a wireless microphone and a cameraman holding a camera that had the label ‘The Entertainment Show Weekly.’ Yoonseo stopped and said hi to the reporter. The reporter was a woman he had seen many times on TV as well.

“Miss Yoonseo! Congratulations on the afterparty.”

“Thank you. You promised me you would come last time, and you actually did.”

“I have to work if I want to make a living.”

The two of them lightly joked with each other. The reporter asked if she could do a light interview. Yoonseo nodded and stood in front of the camera.

“What do you think the viewing rate is going to be tonight?”

“I wish it would hit 30%. I’m not sure many people know, but I made a pledge for hitting 30%.”

“Oh, I know about that. You’re giving out free hugs in Myeong-dong.”

“Yes. I want to hit 30% and try doing that.”

Maru walked out of the angle. He couldn't exactly daze out behind her when she was having an interview.

"Miss Yoonseo. Who's the one that came with you?"

The reporter's eyes moved. She seemed happy that she got more interview material. For now, Maru smiled. He couldn't afford to be on TV with a gloomy-looking face.

"You don't know him? Mr. Maru here is quite famous, you know? From Chatterbox."

Before Yoonseo even finished explaining, the reporter exclaimed in realization.

"So it was Mr. Han Maru. Your image in dramas, entertainment shows, and here are all different. I thought you were a completely different person."

Haha — Maru could only laugh dryly. Yoonseo reached out before pulling him by the sleeves a little. Before he knew it, he was standing right next to Yoonseo in front of the camera.

"The performance he showed on the talk show was too funny so many people might remember him for that, but actually, he's an actor who showed better concentration and acting skills compared to anyone else. Everyone started applauding when Bigfoot exited the drama."

Yoonseo's words were picked up by the reporter.

"I remember that. The viewing rate spiked up back then, and he even made it to the search term rankings. Mr. Han Maru, Miss Yoonseo is giving you so much praise, so you should pay her back. How was Miss Yoonseo during shoots?"

Maru lowered his head towards the wireless microphone before replying,

"She was an actress who put in a lot of effort. She has a lot of persistence as well. I'm sure everyone who watched the drama must know that her acting became better with every episode."

"That sounds like someone wrote that line for you. Did Miss Yoonseo perhaps ask you to say that?"

"Was it obvious?"

Yoonseo smiled and waved her hand. The reporter seemed to be satisfied with her content and put her thumb in the air outside the camera angle.

"Miss Yoonseo, see you later, then. You too, Mr. Han Maru. Don't ignore my greetings once you become famous."

Maru sighed in relief as he entered the restaurant.

"I can't say I've paid you back in full for your grace, but please shave it off a little," Yoonseo said in front of the staircase.

Grace? When he made a puzzled face, Yoonseo explained,

"You recommended Senior Ahn Joohyun's film to me. You may not think much of it, so you must've forgotten, but it really helped me out a lot."

“Ah, I remember now. It’s not really something to call a grace.”

“What is grace? If I feel grateful, then it’s a grace. Also, you were good with the interview back there, you know? There’s no way you actually prepared for that.”

“I’m quite good at flattery and lies.”

Yoonseo laughed out loud, but then her laugh was overshadowed by a loud voice. It was producer Jayeon, who raised her hand in the air and shouted at them to come over. Yoon Hyungseok could be seen at the table next to hers.

“Let’s go. She’ll make us drink if we’re slow,” Maru said as he took off his coat.

[1] In Korea, it’s customary to wait for the elders to pick up their spoons before the younger members start to eat. Table manners of sorts.

### **Chapter 938. Crank Up 5**

“Who are you to come in together with Miss Yoonseo?”

“What could possibly happen? I just met her in front of the restaurant.”

“You walked past the reporters with Miss Yoonseo?”

Maru nodded.

“Good for you, man. I wanted to walk in front of the reporters in a cool fashion too, alongside an actress.”

From listening to him, it seemed that Hyungseok had come here early along with the staff. Apparently, he wasn’t on the list of invitees for the afterparty, but producer Jayeon had called for him here, making him dress up before coming.

“Did any of the reporters recognize you?”

“A couple.”

“You’ve become famous, Han Maru. I wonder when I will reach your level.”

“Why don’t you set a higher target? If I’m considered famous, then what makes that guy who is coming in now?”

Maru pointed at Lee Heewon, who came in amidst the cheers of everyone present. It was the appearance of the main character that led the whole drama. The reporters raised their cameras and kept taking photos of him.

“Mr. Heewon is a god.”

“So you still call him a mister, huh.”

“It’s somewhat hard to drop the honorifics. He looks like a good man, but his aura is too strong, so I can’t find myself treating him comfortably.”

Haewon, who stood quietly before Heewon, waved at him. After acknowledging him, Haewon walked over.

“Maru-hyung, I heard the news. You’re working with director Park Joongjin right?”

“That’s how it is.”

“I’m glad to have you around. Please take good care.”

Of what – before he could even ask, Haewon was called away. He was dragged by the other managers to a corner of the restaurant. While Maru had his suspicions, it wasn’t anything urgent, so he decided to hold it in. The afterparty was an occasion where people would switch seats frequently. People would receive glasses of liquor here and there. It would be fine to ask Heewon about the details when they met.

He dipped his spoon into the boiling doenjang-jjigae. Although charcoal was burning with all of its might under the grill, there was no table with grilling meat. Ten minutes before the last episode of *Doctors* started airing, an older senior entered the restaurant. Along with welcoming applause, the sizzling of meat rang out like fanfare.

“So that place is the Olympus, huh.”

Hyunseok pointed at the table where the director, the writer, and the main actors were. They were placed in the middle of the restaurant, and their voices spread around to the entirety of the restaurant. The old senior praised everyone for their hard work until now, the director thanked the actors who had received her nagging, and the writer resolved that she would write a better story next time. Even though no one told them to, everyone held their breaths when a voice came out from the ‘Olympus.’ Even the sizzling of meat had halted as though a round of grilling was done. The various tables started talking by themselves again after the last episode of ‘*Doctors*’ started airing.

“I should’ve cried a little more right there.”

“My words exactly. Yoonseo, I’ll slap your back next time. I’m sure you’ll cry buckets.”

With the conversation between Yoonseo and the director acting as the trigger, people started talking; the staff with the staff, the actors with the actors, and managers with managers. Maru checked the TV from time to time as he ate some meat. Heewon, who had finished a dangerous surgical operation, collapsed outside the operating room, almost passing out, and Yoonseo rushed over to him and hugged him. The restaurant became quiet all at once. So this was that scene? From what he heard over the grapevine, the last kissing scene took over half a day to shoot. Apparently, the two actors would burst out laughing whenever they locked eyes, making it difficult to shoot. The two people exchanged gazes under the dim light. Their lips brushed past each other like a prank a few times before locking together like a pair of cogwheels. Cheers erupted from everywhere. Hyunseok booed, as though to prove that he was a passionate fan of Yoonseo.

It was a kiss scene that made him watch over them. The affectionate emotional acting of the two people soaked his heart not too strongly. People who watch that scene would probably want to do such a kiss or would want to receive one. Heewon and Yoonseo, who were sitting at the Olympus table, stood up

from their seats and created hearts with their hands. Like the others, Maru sent the two actors and their lovely acting, a round of applause.

As the drama went past its climax and was heading towards the end, the atmosphere at the restaurant changed a lot as well. Whether it was the people who were drinking without stopping, those who kept chatting without any interest in the drama, or the people who were on their phones, they all turned their eyes to the TV hung on the ceiling.

The two protagonists had left the general hospital located in the middle of the city and opened their own medical clinic in a quiet town. The two people were so busy that they had no time to look at each other, and sometime later, the two sat side by side on the bench in front of the clinic under the sunset. Heewon, who was watching the occasional snowflakes fall down, said, 'how good.' Yoonseo responded with a 'true.' The man and woman sitting in front of an old medical clinic had finally found and attained their happiness amidst their misfortunes. They had overcome all the harsh trials and found their refuge; it was a very drama-like, and hence, dramatic, conclusion. Maru rather liked the writer's boldness in letting the story flow by itself rather than adding fancy techniques. It was much better than throwing the whole title into the ditch under the pressure that it couldn't be ordinary. Above all, he liked that it was a happy ending. If dramatic love and happiness couldn't be seen in dramas, there would be no reason to watch them after all.

Along with the message thanking the audience for watching until now, the final OST decorated the ending. It was the cover song of the drama sung by Heewon and Yoonseo. Heewon's part was pretty good, and it seemed that he had the talent for singing. No words needed to be said about Yoonseo.

"So this is the end, huh? I didn't really participate that much, yet I still feel rather bittersweet. How about you?" Hyunseok asked as he filled Maru's glass.

"I'm wondering who'll earn the royalties if there's profit from the background music, so I don't feel anything that great."

"Actually, I'm curious about that too."

Maru chuckled before emptying the glass. This drama had placed another step in front of him for him to climb. He was slightly disappointed that he couldn't act alongside Heewon more, but there was no helping it since the character he was assigned to didn't have that much of a role in the first place. Popularity was one thing, but it was quite an enjoyable thing to act alongside an actor that provoked his soul. It was also something that he couldn't experience easily even with money.

The ending credits started rolling. Usually, this would be the part for the teaser for the next episode, but today, the figures of the production staff could be seen: the camera director focusing in on the actors, the floor director taking light naps right next to some boxes of equipment, the director pulling her hair out, the sound director looking at the audio mixer with a grave expression. There was even a scene where the background and minor actors were receiving makeup, including Maru himself. There was also Bigfoot, wearing a baggy doctor's gown and a pair of slippers, waving his hand at the camera. It made Maru smile. It was a character that brought him a lot of things, albeit having a short appearance. There were quite a lot of scenes where he was requested to do dynamic acting, so it was quite tricky too. It was a stroke of luck that he came across a character like this.

“Han Maru, you’re a new man.”

It was Choi Hyunjin. From what Maru heard before, she was supposedly unable to come today because of her schedule, but she was here. Maru pulled out a chair next to him and told her to sit. As they had greeted each other before, Hyunseok didn’t find things too awkward. Though, he would be overjoyed and wouldn’t act awkward if a woman came around anyway.

“Things ended earlier than I expected, so I quickly rushed over. I was talking over there, but then I saw you, so I came over.”

“Welcome. We were just two stinky men drinking together too. Would you like a drink?”

“I’d love to, but I brought my car, so I can’t.”

“Then have some soda instead.”

Maru poured her some of the fizzy drink. Hyunjin voiced out ‘cheers’ before gulping down the drink.

“I wanted to thank you at the afterparty no matter what.”

“There you go again. The reason you digested your role so well is your own skill, not my help.”

“I don’t think that’s true. Without you, I wouldn’t have had the opportunity to discuss ideas with the writer like that, and the character of the director’s daughter would’ve become boring too. Thanks to that though, I managed to score a cosmetics act this time for two years. It’s Vince.”

“Noona, if you scored something like that, you can’t just say thanks with words. You should give me something.”

“That’s why I’m here.”

Hyunjin took out an envelope from her bag. Maru only said it as a joke, so he was rather taken aback when a white envelope appeared in front of his eyes. Hyunseok quickly told him to take it.

“It’s a hotel restaurant ticket. It’s not a sponsored ticket, and I bought it myself. Call the number or go to their website to set the date and go with your girlfriend. If you don’t have one, you can go with Mr. Hyunseok over here. From what I believe though, I think you’re going to go with your girlfriend, so there shouldn’t be a problem, right?”

“Have I ever told you that I’m going out with someone?”

“Nope, it’s just intuition. Also, decent boys usually have partners.”

Hyunjin stood up, saying that they should meet later. Maru tried opening the envelope. A reservation ticket to a hotel restaurant known to be expensive in Seoul was inside.

“Isn’t this an invitation for a date?”

“That noona has a boyfriend already.”

“Really? What a pity. So who are you taking with you?”

“Who do you think?”

“If you go there with Miss Gaeul, there will be rumors about it everywhere.”

“So?”

“I’m appealing to you that there’s an extremely safe alternative right next to you. I’ve always wanted to go to this place. I know I said that I’ve saved up quite a bit of money, but the price of this place isn’t something you can easily make a decision about. Just a cup of coffee costs 50 thousand won. It’s an insane place, so I should eat it with another person’s money.”

“I’d rather put it in the charcoal here than go with you.”

Maru put the envelope inside his coat pocket. As Hyungseok said, it might be difficult to use it immediately, but they should be able to use it in the future.

After the drama ended, the people who were chatting and drinking loudly all started to wrap up. It seemed that those going for a second round were grouping up by themselves. Maru hung his coat around his arm and stood up. Hyungseok and a few other actors grabbed him, saying that they should drink some more, but he left the restaurant after telling them that he had matters to attend to.

Breathing in the chilly air, he checked the time. It was half an hour before midnight. He was about to press the power button on his phone to make a phone call when he received a text message. It was Gaeul. She had arrived and was waiting at home. He sent a reply that he’d be right back.

“Maru!”

When he looked behind him, Heewon, who was latched on to Haewon, was being dragged away. Maru smiled and wished Haewon luck with his brother.

“Maru, please take care of me!”

Heewon shouted those words before he was stuffed into the car. Only then was he reminded of the words that Haewon said before. He was about to approach and ask, but the car had already departed. It seemed that they were busy getting away from the reporters and journalists waiting. Maru looked at the car that departed before starting to walk. If it was important, he was bound to find out soon, so there was no need to worry about it so much.

“Hyung, I just left.”

Maru called Byungchan. It was time to go home.

## **Chapter 939. Crank Up 5**

“You were close to Yoonseo the idol?” Byungchan asked as soon as he got in the car.

Maru replied as he pulled the seatbelt,

“We’re at most acquainted with each other. We didn’t have that many scenes together during the shoot, so I didn’t get to talk to her that much.”

“Then she must be one kind person. I mean she practically took pity on a guy standing awkwardly. Thanks to that, you got to show up on the entertainment show weekly.”



“True.”

“How was the atmosphere inside? I would’ve gone in with you if I didn’t have work to do.”

“It was good. The last episode turned out to be good too. I could see their hardships. I think the viewing rate will be pretty good.”

“Is that coming from one of the cast? Or from a viewer?”

“I think it’s closer to the cast? I personally rather like fairytale-like endings where two people live happily ever after, but there are bound to be people who don’t like such clichés.”

“I guess the trend of dramas is changing lately. When crazy plots were everywhere, all daily dramas had crazy plots, but these days, the emotional factor is coming back. Mini-series dramas used to be all about smooth progress, but ever since KBS did a deep-dive on political crime stuff, it became the trend to give the stories a twist. In that sense, Doctor’s Office conformed to the needs of the audience.”

“The last episode of Doctor’s Office was good.”

“And you must have liked Miss Gaeul from that episode.”

“You don’t say.”

Byungchan said that there were hangover drinks in the back seat. When Maru turned around, he saw boxes of various drinks. Not to mention hangover drinks, there were energy drinks with lots of caffeine, vitamin drinks, digestive medicine drinks, and even fiber drinks.

“You still carry around so much with you these days?”

“It’s a force of habit. I would buy a lot of them and put them in the back seats back when I worked as a road manager. I had to say hello to many people after all. It’s just that I haven’t fixed that habit. These days, I stay a lot more at the office, so I don’t even have anywhere to hand those around.”

“Then should I take them? I can place them at home.”

“It’s the blood and sweat of a salaryman, but since it’s you, I’ll give it to you. Take a box with you.”

Maru picked up the box of vitamin drinks. Maru pointed at Gaeul printed on the box.

“She’s pretty, isn’t she?”

“Yeah, she is. Is she coming back tomorrow?”

“She’s at home already. She came back in the afternoon, and hung out with some people before coming back.”

“So there was a reason why you didn’t go for the second round.”

The car stopped in front of the apartment complex. Maru undid his seatbelt and spoke,

“Are you going home now?”

“I think I’ll have to go back to the office. I still have to take care of some things.”

“You’re working hard. Give me a call when you have some time. Let’s eat together after a long time.”

“Sounds good.”

Byungchan fidgeted with his phone. It seemed like he received a text message regarding work. Maru tried to get out quietly so that he did not disturb him.

Just then,

“Maru, have you heard anything from senior Dongwook recently?”

He poked his torso back in with one foot still outside.

“What about him?”

“He suddenly quit work and is no longer picking up my calls. The chief editor for our magazine has changed too. The president said in passing that he quit because of personal circumstances, but he quit work so suddenly and cut off all contact, so I’m worried about him.”

“He quit?”

“So you didn’t know about it either.”

He had a vague idea since Dongwook invested quite a lot of time into chasing Lee Miyoona and Hong Janghae, but it felt very different to hear about it in person. Just because president Lee Junmin gave him his support, it didn’t mean that quitting work was any less grave. Whether it was just a formality or not, he had left the workplace he used to be in and jumped into a matter that had an unclear outcome. Even if Lee Miyoona and Hong Janghae were punished later, Dongwook wouldn’t gain any monetary benefits from this. At most, it would be a sense of relief from being able to take revenge.

“I got through to him once before, and he seems to be resting. You know, he’s been overloaded with work quite a lot. It seems like he’ll take a full break and return later.”

“Really? I’m glad if that’s the case. I also want to throw my phone into the Han river and go missing.”

“Everyone’s like that.”

Maru closed the door. Before the car departed, Byungchan asked him to say hi to Gaeul. Maru waved at the car that was becoming distant before going to his house.

“I’m here.”

Gaeul was on the veranda. He walked over to her and gave her a light hug and a kiss.

“Who was it? You seemed to be close.”

“Byungchan-hyung.”

“Oh, it was your Mr. Byungchan? You should’ve brought him with you.”

“He has some work to do at the company. He’s a busy guy.”

Maru looked at Gaeul’s arm. There was a tint of bronze from the tanning.

“I’m a little sunburnt, aren’t I?”

“It looks nice on you. How was the vacation?”

“Unexpectedly good actually. The weather was warm, the sea was clear, and the fruits were really tasty. It’s totally different from the ones you eat in Korea, even if they’re the same types of fruit.”

“Which one was the most delicious?”

Like a squirrel spitting out all the seeds inside its cheeks at its home, Gaeul told him everything that happened during the vacation from start to end. She was so excited as she talked that it was to the point that it made Maru happy just by watching. Her voice was filled with joy whenever he responded to her words. He listened to her words over a can of beer. After talking for a while with a smile on her face, she stopped and rolled her finger around the lip of the beer can. Perhaps she remembered some bitter memories about the vacation she said was ‘unexpectedly good.’

“You must be tired. Should we head back inside?”

There was no need to bring up past memories if it was exhausting to do so.

“Things are going well, right?” Gaeul asked suddenly.

Although she left out all the context, Maru immediately realized what she was referring to.

“Yes, they are.”

“I knew it. I thought so when Lee Miyoona, who had been depressed ever since the start of the vacation, became overjoyed right before we came back. Something good must have happened to her. I don’t think she realized that it will ultimately be her own shackles.”

“I don’t think that’s true. She’s just treating it lightly since she probably thinks that the risk is worth taking. Or, maybe she had the confidence to suppress things even if something does happen once she regains her power.”

“That sounds reasonable. It felt rather strange watching her. It involves many people, so I can’t exactly feel happy about it. How is it going with Yoojin’s mother?”

“I’m going to contact Yoojin once I get some materials from senior Dongwook. She’ll probably persuade her mother to stop. I’m sure her mother will immediately quit once she realizes that things might get dangerous for her.”

“Is there anything I can do? I’m not unrelated to all this. If you need my help, tell me any time.”

“I might need your help when we persuade Yoojin. We should be able to win her over easily, but if that isn’t the case, we’ll need someone more persuasive than me.”

“We’re doing this for Yoojin’s sake, aren’t we? If it’s like that, I’ll gladly help.”

Gaeul sipped on the beer. She looked a little tired right now as though she spent all the energy she charged up during vacation talking. When he asked if she was sleepy, she shook her head.

“One more thing. I think the relationship between Lee Miyoon and Kang Giwoo has become bad. I didn’t hear the whole conversation because there was a door between us, but from the angry voices and the tone of their words, I can tell for sure that the relationship between them became sour. I ran into a little problem so I was in a fix, but Lee Miyoon even helped out. I found out later that her helping me was equivalent to harming Kang Giwoo. It looks like she hates Kang Giwoo to the point that she was even willing to make me benefit after hating me so much over the years.”

“How were those two before?”

“Don’t even start. The only one Lee Miyoon doted on during the shoot was Kang Giwoo. At one point, Kang Giwoo was even famous for having tamed Lee Miyoon. Though, she still acted terribly towards others.”

“Yet the relationship between the two soured, huh? The answer’s obvious then.”

“What is it?”

“It’s because you’re too pretty.”

“I can’t get used to your jokes now since it’s been a few days.”

“I’m not joking though.”

“Don’t say that. It’s making me feel iffy.”

Gaeul said that she should talk about it now that it was brought up and began to talk about what happened between her and Giwoo. So, he grabbed whose hand, and incited others to talk bad about who? By the time she finished, Maru was looking for his car keys. He felt like he had to give that guy a smack in the face and have a good talk with him.

“I don’t know anymore. I just thought it was a simple affection or greed, but I don’t think it’s at that level anymore.”

“There’s only one thing that comes to my mind after listening to that: Obsession.”

Gaeul faintly smiled after hearing that word.

“That’s what I told Giwoo as well; that he was obsessed with me. He looked quite shocked, as though he didn’t have an idea what his own feelings were until now.”

“Those with mental problems should visit a doctor. Will there be another occasion where you meet with Giwoo in the future?”

“No, not for the foreseeable future. Even if there is, I’m going to cancel it. I was originally not going to tell you about it since I know you’ll be worried, but I think that it’ll be better if you know about it.”

“Thanks for telling me about it.”

The timing of Lee Miyoon hitting Gaeul’s cheek and the relationship between the two going sour matched. Maru felt like he shouldn’t take this ‘obsession’ lightly. There was no one more dangerous than those who would commit crazy deeds out of madness.

His expression seemed to have frozen up while he was thinking as Gaeul told him to loosen up a little.

“Don’t worry too much since nothing much will happen if I watch out for it. Rather than that, how was the afterparty? I talked about mine, so let’s hear yours.”

Gaeul went over on her knees and placed her head on his shoulder. Feeling her warmth made the depressing emotions coursing through him disappear without a trace. Lee Miyoong, Kang Giwoo, Hong Janghae - those names were vaporized from his head. He felt like nothing would matter as long as she was by his side.

“There’s something that might invoke your jealousy.”

Maru started talking with a grin on his face. Looking at Gaeul, who was urging him to go on, he whispered in a small voice.

### **Chapter 940. Crank Up 5**

Lee Miyoong looked at the journalist that walked through the door. Seemingly aware that numerous deals had been written in this Chinese-style restaurant, the journalist spoke as soon as he sat down,

“I never knew I’d come to the 3rd floor of this place.”

Miyoong did not reply and told the waiter who came in with the journalist to prepare the food. The waiter closed the door and left.

“You know, I’m the type of person who can’t eat if there’s something on my mind. That’s why I try to get my business sorted to a certain extent before eating. Won’t that be good for you as well, journalist Kim?”

“I’m grateful that you said those words. Actually, I also don’t enjoy eating while sitting on pins and needles.”

The journalist downed a cup of water in one go. Miyoong also drank some water. Ever since Hong Janghae stabbed her in the back, she couldn’t quench her thirst no matter how much she drank. That was because of the thirst of her soul that couldn’t be fulfilled by dealing with the desires of the flesh. That too, would no longer persist after today. It might not be resolved immediately, but she should be able to pour a bucket of water over her dried-up pride.

“As I told you before, my aim is Hong Janghae, and I need your help in order to catch him,” said the journalist.

She rather liked him for not dwelling in formalities.

“So the gist of it is that you want my help in return for you helping me return to my position, yes?”

“Yes, you go back to your position, and Hong Janghae to the abyss he must be punished in for his crimes. As I told you before, you might receive some harm in the process, but I believe that you can cope with it.”

“I know that. I’ve already seen blood, so I don’t believe I can wash my hands clean. I also can endure getting involved in rumors as long as I can bring that man down and return to my position. That is something I can easily handle as long as I return to where I was before.”

Miyoon had a close look at the journalist’s face. Kim Dongwook -she already investigated this man’s background through her connections. He used to be a TV journalist at a TV station until he left and became an internet journalist before he was elected by JA Production’s promotion department. Later, he became the editor-in-chief for a film magazine operating in JA’s capital.

“I heard you quit work.”

She threw a question to probe him out. Although they were going to join hands, it was ultimately a temporary alliance in the end. She had to see through how this man would act after kicking Hong Janghae out of the equation so that she could sleep easy at night.

“I can’t afford to have any hindrances. I told you, haven’t I? As long as I can destroy him, it does not matter if my life turns into shambles.”

“That junior journalist of yours attempted to commit suicide, right? I know it’s a sensitive topic, but I felt like knowing about it would further consolidate our relationship.”

The journalist pressed his eyes that twitched violently. Miyoon inwardly scoffed. Love was such a troublesome emotion. Just because a female journalist slit her wrist while trying to whistle-blow, this man threw his life away. While she found it pathetic, she could understand him. Having lived a long life, she had seen numerous times what would happen when a woman went crazy for a man, and when a man dedicated everything to a woman. Heck, even most of the murder cases that made the news were related to love affairs in some way.

“That’s something I don’t want to think about.”

“And Hong Janghae was the one who did that?”

“He used all sorts of means — legal, mind you — to drain a person’s blood. She perfectly fell for his trap, so there was no helping it.”

“That’s so unfortunate. That man, Hong Janghae, is quite vicious. While I have done some things that I can’t be upfront about with him, I know how to be tactful. I can’t believe he went so far when he could’ve just told her with words.”

“I couldn’t endure. I wish I could barge into his office with a club and beat him up, but I can’t afford to do that. Not that I can do it either. Just like how he bullied her with the law, I plan to do the same back to him.”

“You must’ve had a hard time. Pay him back through the law, you say. Yes, that’s right. Beating people up like a savage does not suit this era. We should be smart about it.”

“So please help me. I know that you also have a lot to pay back to him.”

Miyoon nodded. It was okay that a man blinded by vengeance was going on a rampage. It would be all the better for her as long as she could hitch a ride and reap the benefits. However, something did tug at her mind. It was indeed Hong Janghae’s doing that almost drove this man’s junior to death. He showed

how cruel a man could be in a constitutional state by making the most use of his meticulous personality. The problem was 'Lee Miyoon', her own name. Miyoon knew about this junior journalist as well. She was like a moth to a fire, a foolish journalist who flew to the fire of truth despite knowing that it would burn her to death. It was Miyoon who tossed her a fake witness. She heard later that she experienced backlash while trying to go to court. If this man was crossing a dangerous bridge because of the resentment harbored by that female journalist, he should want to bring the blade to Miyoon's throat as well.

"Did that junior not mention anything else? Like how there was someone other than Hong Janghae involved, for example. Around that time, I was still in business, so I might have given her trouble."

At times like this, it was better to declare war. He was bound to be startled if he was probed first before he talked about what he had prepared beforehand. The journalist's face suddenly crumpled. He didn't look flustered because of the unexpected question though.

"Had I known that she had dug deep into the matter, I would've stopped her early on. No, I had a vague inkling that she was dipping her hands into something she shouldn't. But I just ignored her, not realizing that that was the last moment I could save her."

The journalist shook his head as he talked about his past.

"Sorry about that. I ended up saying something unnecessary because I recalled what happened back then. My junior knew that you were in that business back then. However, she told me that Hong Janghae was at the core of it all. She told me that she was going to chase Hong Janghae too. The next time I met her, she had broken down. Right now, she's a lot better after having quit work and received psychotherapy, but she still finds it difficult to talk about what happened back then. It's like she's aphasic when it comes to that topic."

"So the main culprit is Hong Janghae."

"Yes. That's why I'm trying to bring him down. It might be difficult just on my own, but it won't be difficult as long as you can help me."

Miyoon crossed her legs. So it wasn't that he was entirely unaware. He knew that she had been involved in it. However, it seemed that the junior journalist of his had not told him everything. Well, it was indeed true that Hong Janghae was the one who ultimately strangled her. It was understandable that the arrow of fury was directed at him. She was relieved to know that they were in a mutually beneficial relationship without full trust. If the journalist tried to fawn over her with sweet words, she would not have believed him.

"I hope that junior of yours gets better soon."

"She might feel better if she hears about Hong Janghae's fall."

"Very well. I shall lend you my hand in this matter. I also want to see Hong Janghae slip. So, where are we in the process?"

Just as the journalist was about to speak, there was a knock on the door followed by the waiter coming in. Miyoon smiled and pointed at the table. Since she confirmed that it would be okay to ride the same boat, it should be okay to listen to the rest while eating. In this matter, the person was more important

than the method. Even as the food was getting prepared, the journalist did not look at the food even once. It was the stereotypical figure of someone in a hurry to do something.

The man obsessed with vengeance spoke as soon as the waiter left,

“I plan to persuade the middlewoman in Japan. Once that position becomes vacant, you need to step in.”

“If I can’t even sit on an empty seat, then I might as well die. If you can set things up, then I’ll do the rest. What comes after that?”

“For now, you must focus on returning to your position. If you can’t do that, we can’t topple the castle that is Hong Janghae.”

“Well, I guess it’ll be something like me opening the gates to the castle after going inside. Isn’t that right?”

“I guess it will ultimately come down to that. You must be prepared to protect yourself when the time comes.”

“Don’t worry about that. I have my plans.”

“This is obvious, but if you wash your mouth clean after returning to your position, I will not be able to guarantee what I’ll do.”

“Don’t worry about that. I know how to value connections. Also, you’ll probably find out soon that I despise Hong Janghae as much as that junior of yours does.”

“That’s good.”

Miyoon raised her chopsticks, saying that they should continue after eating.

\* \* \*

“That junior of yours runs a flower shop, right?”

“Yes, a small one. She doesn’t have to face a lot of people, so she doesn’t seem mentally tired.”

“That’s good.”

The journalist bowed outside the car, asking her to take care of him in the future. Miyoon started the car and drove off to resolve the final element of worry. She found out where that female journalist worked through the editor-in-chief of the magazine company she worked for in the past. She drove according to the GPS navigation device. Not long later, she saw the flower shop. She parked her car on the side of the road and got out. She stood in front of the glass door as she looked at the cute-looking sign. She thought that she would be by herself, but there was a man. A customer? She placed her hand on the automatic door button and waited.

Just then, the man turned around. His face entered her eyes. She had seen him somewhere before. The man, who made eye contact with her through the glass, took a bow and greeted her. As soon as she received the bow, she recalled a name. Miyoon opened the door and went inside.



“Hello, senior.”

“Yeah, it’s been a long time. Your name is Han Maru, right?”

“So you remembered me. I never greeted you properly ever since I saw you once when I was young, “  
Han Maru said as he put down the small vase in his hand.