

Real Man 1

Chapter 1

A middle-aged man and woman sat across from each other at a luxurious table, without saying a word.

It was obvious that the atmosphere was very serious.

On the table, there were steak and empty glasses, as if reflecting their hollow gestures.

Glug, glug, glug.

As the wine was poured halfway, the woman's brow furrowed.

It meant to stop pouring.

The man stopped his hand, and the woman's gaze quickly moved down.

Tap. Tap tap.

She was making a repetitive rhythm with her index and middle fingers.

It was her habit before saying something important.

His honest feeling?

He wanted to avoid any topic at this moment.

As the woman's eyelids lifted and her throat moved, the man raised his glass with a forced smile.

"Are you going to congratulate me?"

"..."

Thud.

The sound that came was not a toast, but a dull one.

At the same time, the woman's back of her hand was placed on the table.

He noticed for the first time that there was no ring on her left ring finger.

The man bit his lower lip.

"The moment you take your hand off, there's no turning back."

"I've already made up my mind."

As the woman took her hand off, the ring on the table shone with the light of the lamp.

"Why are you doing this?"

"Han Yoo-hyun, did you ever have a family? Weren't you always thinking about your own success?"

At that remark, Yoo-hyun's brow wrinkled.

But it was not the time to get angry.

He tried hard to regain his composure, pondering over and over again.

Zing. Zing.

Just then, Yoo-hyun's phone on the table rang.

He glanced at it and saw that it was a caller he couldn't ignore.

Yoo-hyun pointed his left palm at his wife and picked up his phone with his right hand.

"Yes, Chairman. This is Han Yoo-hyun. Yes. Yes."

Creak.

At that moment, his wife stood up abruptly.

She left a cold smile again.

He had to stop her.

But he couldn't ignore the person on the phone.

"No, sir. It's possible. Yes, Chairman."

Click clack.

His wife walked away without looking back.

When he hung up the phone and got up, his wife was already gone.

“Damn it.”

The wine he drank alone tasted bitter at the end.

...

The next day.

Yoo-hyun closed his eyes and leaned back on the soft seat.

The sound of classical music playing softly calmed his mind.

The ride was so comfortable that he couldn't hear the sound of the wheels rolling.

Thanks to that, he could quietly picture his day in his head.

Squeak.

Before he knew it, his car arrived in front of Hansung Tower.

The security guard who had been waiting ran up nervously and carefully opened the door.

“Mr. President, good morning.”

“Yes. Good morning.”

As Yoo-hyun got out of his seat with a light smile, people followed him from behind.

The large front door of the tall building opened, and people lined up bowed to Yoo-hyun.

With a faint smile on his face, Yoo-hyun walked slowly.

A woman’s voice came from behind him.

“Mr. President, today’s schedule includes a tour of the research center, a meeting with executives, and a dinner with the chairman.”

Yoo-hyun nodded his head toward his secretary as he walked through the lobby.

More responsibility and work came with becoming president.

The position of president of Hansung Electronics, a top-class company, was that heavy.

That’s when it happened.

Creak.

The front door opened, and a man with a pale face approached Yoo-hyun.

Then the security guards jumped out in front of him reflexively.

“Get out of the way.”

“I have something to say to Mr. President.”

“He’s not someone you can meet. Move away. Hey, drag him out.”

“Just for a moment.”

Despite the tense situation, the man’s voice was calm.

Yoo-hyun stopped talking and glanced at the man for a moment.

It was a familiar face, so he quickly opened his mouth.

“Stop it.”

“...”

With Yoo-hyun’s words, the air around him froze and stopped.

“Kim Young-gil sunbae-nim*, what brings you here?”

(*sunbae-nim: honorific term for senior or elder)

“Do I deserve to be called sunbae-nim?”

“If you don’t mind, can we talk somewhere else? I can spare a moment.”

He heard a sarcastic remark, but Yoo-hyun didn't care and pointed to the inside of the company with one hand.

But Kim Young-gil shook his head.

"No. I can say it here. Do you remember the name Kwon Se-jung?"

"Se-jung? Why are you suddenly talking about him?"

Kwon Se-jung was Yoo-hyun's colleague when he joined the company, and he worked under Kim Young-gil when he was a section chief.

He couldn't forget him.

Then Kim Young-gil's voice thundered.

"Kwon Se-jung is dead."

"What?"

Yoo-hyun was shocked, but Kim Young-gil calmly continued.

"He's gone to the other world. You probably don't care, but I think it's proper for you to stop by."

"Sunbae-nim, what are you talking about?"

Yoo-hyun asked anxiously as he approached him.

But Kim Young-gil, who had grabbed his forehead with his thumb and index finger, lifted his head and sighed.

“Huh! I came to tell you this. I don’t want to come here because of that bastard, so please understand.”

“...”

Yoo-hyun could only stare at the back of Kim Young-gil, who turned away and left.

He felt his resentful eyes in his heart.

With a complicated feeling, Yoo-hyun finished his day’s schedule and entered the funeral home on the outskirts of Seoul.

It was a place he didn’t want to come to, but he had to.

The funeral home was not crowded.

He first paid his respects to the deceased and bowed to the chief mourner.

He saw a young son and a wife crying in front of him.

He barely finished his bow and moved his heavy steps.

“Oh my, he was fired and couldn’t find a job, and he ended up like this.”

“Hansung is too much. They just sucked out the juice and threw him away. They should have let him go somewhere else if they were going to do that.”

“That’s right. It’s the problem of the bigwigs. The one who made that decision back then...”

Yoo-hyun walked past them, hearing their voices.

The murmurs of people in the hallway died down as soon as Yoo-hyun appeared.

Yoo-hyun paused for a moment and started walking, leaving behind the whispering people.

He knew what was going on without looking.

People thought that there was a direct connection between Kwon Se-jung's suicide and Hansung Group's massive staff reduction.

Yoo-hyun, who was quick-witted, couldn't not know that.

'And I was the one who made that choice.'

He had to turn the company into a profit.

If he left it as it was, it would cause damage to the whole group due to the lack of funds.

Someone had to take the lead, and Yoo-hyun, who was the head of the group's strategy department at the time, raised the issue.

He believed at that time that it was an inevitable choice for the survival of the company.

"Anyone would have done the same."

Yoo-hyun tried to convince himself.

He finished paying his respects and moved his seat slowly.

At that moment, familiar faces entered Yoo-hyun's sight.

They were people who had worked with Yoo-hyun in the past.

Of course, not anymore.

He felt more sorry than happy.

He knew he wouldn't hear anything good if he faced them.

He wanted to avoid them if he could.

But Yoo-hyun's steps led him to the reception room where they were sitting.

As Yoo-hyun entered, a startled man quickly straightened up and said.

He had a sarcastic voice, just like Kim Young-gil.

"Oh my, Mr. President Han came all the way here for this."

"I'm sorry for being late, sunbae-nim."

"You bastard! Do you have the right to say that?"

"Stop it, stop it. This is not a place to talk. Mr. Han, you can speak comfortably here. This is not your company."

"Yes. Of course."

Yoo-hyun nodded his head.

They were members who had worked with him before, and they were all seniors as Hansung alumni.

Now Yoo-hyun's rank was higher than anyone else, but only in his company.

They were no longer related to Hansung, so he didn't need to be polite.

A senior picked up a bottle of alcohol.

"Come here. Have a drink."

"I'll just touch my lips."

"This kid, he's still so inhuman."

The drunk people started to spill their complaints in front of Yoo-hyun.

"Hey, be honest. You ran away because you thought you were better than us. We could have done well together."

They resented Yoo-hyun for leaving their sinking team and moving to another team,

"Yoo-hyun, you were wrong then. You should have gone somewhere else and lived well by yourself. Why did you stab us in the back?"

They recalled the situation where they were in trouble because of the project that Yoo-hyun had carried out in another team and blamed him.

“Do you know what situation we were in because of your pen play? Have you ever thought about how hard it is for someone to lose their job overnight at this age?”

“...”

Yoo-hyun remained silent throughout.

The most resented thing was obviously the massive layoffs.

They didn't say anything harsh directly because they faced him, but their eyes were full of resentment.

Yoo-hyun had many excuses from his point of view, but he didn't make them.

It was a clear fact that there were people who were harmed by Yoo-hyun, who had only looked ahead and run.

He understood why Kwon Se-jung had no choice but to make an extreme choice after listening to their stories.

It was a tough place to be.

But Yoo-hyun endured it bravely.

He stayed at the funeral home for a long time and finally looked at Kwon Se-jung's portrait photo.

-Do you know what consequences your choice will bring? Many innocent people will be sold as incompetent and suffer because of you.

The righteous look that stopped Yoo-hyun remained vividly in the photo.

A friend, a colleague, and for a while, someone he thought of as a rival, Kwon Se-jung left the world like that.

Yoo-hyun quietly asked his smiling face.

'Was I wrong?'

It was a question that couldn't reach him anymore.

A while later.

After finishing his visit, Yoo-hyun leaned back on the back seat of his car and sank into deep thoughts.

His car had changed to a bigger and more comfortable one, and his salary had increased by several times.

It was the result of reaching the highest position he could climb up to.

But his emptiness in his heart was still not filled.

Rather, guilt occupied a corner of his empty heart.

"Huh..."

Yoo-hyun sighed deeply and slowly turned his gaze.

He looked at the night view of Seoul passing by, leaning back on the soft seat.

He saw the street lights that stretched endlessly along the Han River.

They were like Yoo-hyun's life, who had only looked ahead and run.

There were things he had given up for success in each of the lights.

"Did I live right?"

He finally uttered the doubt that he had wrapped up tightly.

He might have known the answer long ago.

He had ignored it even though he knew it.

He passed it off as inevitable for success.

"Do you regret it, Han Yoo-hyun?"

He answered his own question by slowly blinking his eyelids.

It was a word he couldn't say easily to anyone.

He felt suffocated.

Wouldn't it be nice to have someone to confide in at times like this? But he didn't have anyone.

-Do you think you'll be happy if you push everything away and go up? You can't live alone in this world.

The bitter words of his boss, whom he respected, echoed in his head.

He pushed him away and refused him with a childish mind, but now he seemed to understand the meaning of his words.

The scenery he saw at the top was not a magnificent sight.

There was no bright sunlight, sparkling sea, or swaying clouds.

Rather, it felt like the small light he had been chasing had disappeared.

It was dark.

It was hopeless.

It was empty.

Was it because of his bitter feelings?

Yoo-hyun, who hadn't touched alcohol for a long time, craved alcohol desperately at this moment.