



Exclusive Bonus Scene

THE PUZZLE MASTER

Some things can't be explained by logic or formula.

Some things just do feel right.

Trust your heart. Trust your tummy.

Aim for the stars!

Always!



Seoul. Jae's Office. Just before the initial band meeting in the very 1st chapter.

Jae tapped a scuffed drumstick against the edge of his desk. Tap-tap-thwack. It was a messy, emotional rhythm that belonged in a garage, not a sterile Seoul high-rise.

Across the room, Minho, the junior A&R rep who looked like he ironed his socks, sighed heavily. "Manager Jae, please. The board meeting is in an hour. They want the final lineup."

"I know what they want, mate," Jae muttered, rubbing his tired eyes. "Seven boys. Maximum visual appeal."



Or five girls with a crush-pop concept. 'That's what the market dictates.'" He made air quotes with his drumstick.

"Because it sells," Minho said, adjusting his glasses. "We have about fifty trainees in the monthly evaluation pool. You just pick the top-ranking boys, put them in a room, and we debut them. It's a formula. It works."

Jae leaned back, his faded denim jacket creaking against the chair. He'd spent the last three days staring at monthly evaluation videos. He had tried following the formula. He'd grouped the top boys together on his screen. He'd grouped the girls. But every time he imagined them on a stage, it felt flat. Manufactured. Like a shiny car with no engine. It felt wrong in his gut.

"It's not about the top seven, or the top 5 on the other side," Jae said. "It's about spark. And I don't see any."



He clicked his mouse, dragging four separate video files onto his main monitor. Four kids. Two girls, two boys. Four solo trainees who had never practiced together and who, on paper, broke every rule of the agency.



"A mixed-gender four-piece?" Minho groaned, coming up behind Jae's chair. "The executives will literally throw you out the window. It does not work like that."

"Just watch," Jae said.

He didn't try to mix their audio tracks into one song. Instead, he played their individual monthly evaluation videos side-by-side, keeping the sound muted. He just watched how they moved, how they carried themselves.



Top left **Hana.**

She was singing an up-beat number, her posture straight, eyes bright. She had a natural gravity, a light that pulled the camera right to her. But Jae could see the hidden anxiety in her shoulders. She was a leader who didn't know she had a team yet.

Bottom right **Daon.**

A freestyle dance and rap evaluation. The kid was a firecracker. Bouncing, spinning, wild on his feet. He reminded Jae of himself at fourteen - too much energy, playing loud to feel big in a world that didn't give kids much room. He was a heartbeat waiting for a chest.



Top right **Mira.**

Sitting at a keyboard, playing a gentle chord progression. She wasn't flashy. She didn't demand attention. But her smile was warm, and the way she swayed to the music was pure glue. She was the harmony that held things together.

Bottom left **Noah.**

Just standing there with his bass. Deep, rumbling, steady. He barely moved, but his fingers were a blur of precision. He was the spine. The anchor in the storm.



"They're good individually," Minho admitted slowly. "But you can't put them together. It makes no sense. They're not idol material. They're like real musicians."

"You say that like it's a bad thing! Just watch," Jae repeated softly. He reached for the volume slider and unmuted the videos, letting the four different performances bleed into the room at the same time.

It should have been a wall of noise. Four different songs, four different rhythms. But as Jae listened, his drummer's ear caught something impossible.



Underneath the clash of different tracks, there was resonance. Noah's heavy bassline seemed to catch Daon's frantic beat, grounding it. Mira's soft chords filled the gaps in the rhythm, and over it all, Hana's voice soared, cutting through the noise like a morning star.



Jae froze. The hair on his arms stood up. He didn't just hear it. He felt it. The air in his cramped office seemed to shift, growing suddenly lighter. The persistent, annoying hum of the air conditioner faded into nothing. For a split second, the dust motes dancing in the beam of his desk lamp seemed to glow with faint, colored lights. It was a feeling he hadn't had since he was sixteen, jamming with his own band back in Australia.

It was magic.

Minho took a step back, blinking hard. "Did the ... did the air pressure just ... ?"

Jae hit the spacebar, pausing the videos. The silence snapped back, heavy and ordinary. The dust was just dust again.

Jae stared at the frozen faces on the screen. Four kids who thought they were just waiting for their big break.



They had no idea what they were capable of. Hell, Jae didn't even know what they were capable of. He just knew he had never seen a puzzle snap together so perfectly that the seams disappeared entirely.

"You're going to pitch this to the board," Minho whispered, horrified. "They'll fire you."

Jae let out a low, raspy laugh. He tossed his drumstick onto the desk. "Maybe. But I'm not letting this go. This right here? This is it."

"How are you going to explain it to them?"

"I'm not," Jae said, a slow grin spreading across his face. "You are, and then I'll let the kids do the talking. The board wants a manufactured product, but once they see these four in a room together, they won't have a choice."

The phone on his desk buzzed. The receptionist's voice crackled through the speaker.

"Manager Jae? Three of the four trainees you asked for are here. They're waiting outside. Number four is running late. She'll be here in five."

"So it's not even a pitch anymore - you already made that decision. You're meeting your new band - now?" Minho stuttered.

"All set, all booked. Their tour starts tomorrow. They have a pre-set for starters and record their debut album while touring," Jae said calmly. "Please tell the board that we found our next chart cracker ... and to throw out their sacred formula just this once."

"How am I gonna tell them all that?" Minho asked, rubbing his temples.

"In Korean or English - I'll leave that up to you, mate," Jae said, standing up and straightening his jacket. "But tell them they're about to meet the future."



Not every moment is written in the books...
Some are hidden between the lines.
Have you found them all?

