Long Courtships and Late Marriage: A K-Drama Asks Why

Name Date Class

Reading

1 A Love Other Than Yours, a KBS2 drama that premiered on September 12, 2026, ends its central relationship in the first episode. Namgoong Ho and Lee Mi-do (Seo Kang-joon and Ahn Eun-jin) met at the age of seven, started dating at twenty-six, and are now ten years into a relationship that has stopped moving. They break up, yet the next morning Ho **reflexively** calls to wake Mi-do, and the two trade their usual "I love you" before remembering that they are no longer a couple. The moment is **mortifying** for them and funny for viewers, and it poses the show's question: after this long, how can two people tell love from habit? By the end of episode two, Ho has proposed.

2 At home, the response from viewers has been **lukewarm**. According to Nielsen Korea, the first three episodes drew nationwide household ratings of 2.6, 2.8, and 2.5 percent, the last a series low. The drama streams on Amazon Prime Video on the day it airs, in more than 240 countries, and the tracking site FlixPatrol placed it seventh among Prime Video series worldwide for September 14 to 20: first in Indonesia and Thailand, and in the top ten in 35 countries. The **divergence** is real, but the two numbers measure different things. Nielsen estimates the share of households watching a live broadcast, while FlixPatrol compiles platforms' daily top-ten lists, which rank titles without saying how many people watched. Neither is a perfect **proxy** for an audience, and inside Korea the drama also topped two streaming charts, Wavve and Coupang Play, in mid-September.

3 One plausible reason the story travels: delayed marriage is not only Korean, although Korea is an extreme case. The country's national statistics office reports that in 2025 the average age at first marriage was 33.9 for men and 31.6 for women, 1.3 and 1.7 years older than a decade earlier. Marriage itself has not collapsed: registrations rose 8.1 percent in 2025 to about 240,000, the third increase in a row. The office credits a larger **cohort** of people in their early thirties and a recovery from marriages postponed during the pandemic. The trend is less a rejection of marriage than a longer road to it, and a longer **courtship** is part of that road.

4 Money is the explanation Koreans give most often. In Statistics Korea's 2024 Social Survey, the most common reason chosen for not marrying was a lack of money for marriage (31.3 percent), followed by the burden of having and raising children (15.4 percent) and **precarious** employment (12.9 percent). Among unmarried women, the second most common answer was not feeling a need to marry (19.1 percent). In the drama, Ho is an assistant manager at a confectionery company, with a steady career **trajectory**; Mi-do is a film director whose early promise **curdled** into years of rejected projects. Timing is rarely equal for two people: had Mi-do's first film led to a second, the couple might be married by now.

5 Japan has better data on how long couples date. In the National Fertility Survey run by Japan's National Institute of Population and Social Security Research, couples who had married for the first time in the previous five years had dated for an average of 4.3 years in 2021, up from about 2.5 years in 1987. The institute's 2025 round, published in September 2026, found that fewer than 80 percent of unmarried people aged 18 to 34 intend to marry eventually. A decade of dating is unusual even there, but the direction is shared.

6 Does a long wait make a marriage stronger, or only later? The research does not show that length itself helps or harms. Psychologists Scott Stanley, Galena Rhoades, and Howard Markman argued in 2006 that couples often "slide" through transitions such as moving in together out of **inertia** rather than decide on them, and that sliding can leave commitment unclear. In a 2013 study of 252 American adults, Jesse Owen, Rhoades, and Stanley found that people who described more **deliberate** decision-making also reported more dedication, higher satisfaction, and fewer outside romantic involvements. The study was correlational and based in one country, so it cannot show that deciding causes better relationships. Its implication for Ho and Mi-do is still **unsettling**: if they had ever had a **candid** conversation about their future, their ten years would mean something different today.

7 The show itself is now on a short **hiatus**. KBS2 did not air episodes on September 26 and 27 because the network is broadcasting the Aichi-Nagoya Asian Games. Had the series been made only for Korean living rooms, its ratings would now look like a verdict. Because it also reaches dozens of other countries, the remaining ten episodes will test something narrower: whether audiences in both places will keep watching a couple who still cannot decide.

Vocabulary Matching

Match each word from the reading with its meaning. Write the letter on the line.

1	**reflexively**	_____	**A**	causing strong embarrassment or shame
2	**mortifying**	_____	**B**	causing a feeling of worry or discomfort
3	**lukewarm**	_____	**C**	honest and direct about something personal or difficult
4	**divergence**	_____	**D**	the general direction something develops in over time
5	**proxy**	_____	**E**	unstable and likely to get worse or be lost
6	**cohort**	_____	**F**	a pause or break in something that continues later
7	**courtship**	_____	**G**	a measure used in place of one you cannot get
8	**precarious**	_____	**H**	showing little interest or enthusiasm
9	**trajectory**	_____	**I**	the period of dating before a couple marries
10	**curdled**	_____	**J**	a tendency to keep doing what you already do
11	**inertia**	_____	**K**	done carefully and on purpose, after thought
12	**deliberate**	_____	**L**	a difference that grows between two things
13	**unsettling**	_____	**M**	a group of people born around the same time
14	**candid**	_____	**N**	done automatically, without conscious thought
15	**hiatus**	_____	**O**	turned bad or unpleasant, especially after starting out well

Fill in the Blank

Choose a word from the box to complete each sentence. Use each word once. The words are already in the correct form.

cohort	**courtship**	**curdled**	**deliberate**	**divergence**	**hiatus**	**inertia**	**lukewarm**	**mortifying**
precarious	**proxy**	**reflexively**	**trajectory**	**unsettling**				

1 She pulled her hand away _____ when the pan touched it.

2 Seeing my old diary read aloud at the party was _____ .

3 The minister's speech got a _____ reaction from the audience.

4 The report notes a growing _____ between city and rural incomes.

5 Library visits are a rough _____ for how much people read.

6 The study tracked a _____ of 5,000 people born in 1985.

7 In many novels, a long _____ ends with a wedding.

8 Without a contract, the workers' position was _____ .

9 Her career _____ changed after she moved to Singapore.

10 Their friendship _____ into rivalry after the competition.

11 Most people stay with the same bank out of _____ .

12 Choosing a smaller wedding was a _____ decision, not an accident.

13 The empty streets at noon felt strange and _____ .

14 The magazine will return in spring after a long _____ .

Comprehension Questions

Answer in your notebook or discuss with a partner. Questions 10 to 12 are IELTS-style.

1 What happens between Ho and Mi-do in the first two episodes?

2 What does the reflexive "I love you" scene suggest about the couple?

3 How did the drama perform in Korean television ratings, and how did it perform on Prime Video abroad?

4 Why does the writer warn against comparing Nielsen ratings directly with FlixPatrol rankings?

5 What do Korea's 2025 marriage statistics show about the age and number of marriages?

6 Which reasons for not marrying did the 2024 Social Survey find, and how does the drama reflect them?

7 What does Japan's National Fertility Survey add to the picture?

8 What is the difference between "sliding" and "deciding", and what did the 2013 study find?

9 Do you think a long courtship makes a marriage more or less likely to succeed? Use evidence from the reading and your own experience.

IELTS-Style Questions

10 **True, False, or Not Given:** *"The drama's ratings rose after the Asian Games break."* Explain your answer using evidence from the reading.

11 **Yes, No, or Not Given:** *"The writer believes the low domestic ratings prove the drama has failed."* Explain your answer using evidence from the reading.

12 **Author's purpose:** Why does the writer include the research on "sliding versus deciding" in paragraph 6?

True or False

Circle T (true) or F (false) according to the reading. Write a correction for each false statement on the dotted line.

1 **T / F** The couple breaks up in the first episode.

2 **T / F** The drama is shown only in South Korea.

3 **T / F** FlixPatrol's lists show exactly how many people watched each title.

4 **T / F** The drama topped two Korean streaming charts in mid-September.

5 **T / F** The number of marriages in Korea fell in 2025.

6 **T / F** Unstable employment was among the reasons given in the 2024 Social Survey.

7 **T / F** Japanese couples dated for a shorter time in 2021 than in 1987.

8 **T / F** Japan's 2025 survey found that fewer than 80 percent of young unmarried people intend to marry.

9 **T / F** The 2013 study proved that deciding causes better relationships.

10 **T / F** KBS2 skipped two episodes because of its Asian Games coverage.

Discussion Questions

Talk with a partner or in a small group. The questions move from personal to more abstract.

1. Have you watched a drama or film about a couple who have been together for a long time? What happened?
2. At what age do people usually marry in your country or community? Has that changed since your parents' generation?
3. How long do you think a couple should date before marrying? Why?
4. Do you think Ho's "I love you" the morning after the breakup shows love, habit, or both?
5. Which do you trust more to tell you whether a show is popular: TV ratings, streaming charts, or what your friends watch?
6. Why might a story about a Korean couple rank first in Indonesia or Thailand?
7. The 2024 Social Survey found money was the most common reason for not marrying. Is marriage expensive where you live? What costs are involved?
8. Why might unmarried women and unmarried men give different reasons for not marrying?
9. Should governments try to encourage earlier marriage? What policies, if any, would be fair?
10. Think of a decision in your life that you slid into rather than made. How did it turn out?
11. Is living together before marriage common in your culture? How do people view it?
12. The 2013 study was based on American adults. Do you think its findings would apply in your country? Why or why not?
13. Can a long relationship stay exciting, or is some loss of passion unavoidable?
14. If later marriage continues, how might families and societies look different in thirty years?

Language Focus: Mixed Conditionals

A mixed conditional joins an unreal past condition to a present result: if + past perfect, then would or might + base verb. It describes how a past event that did not happen would have changed the present. In formal writing, if can be dropped and had moved to the front: Had X happened, Y would be true now.

In the reading:

- "**had** Mi-do's first film **led** to a second, the couple **might be** married by now" (past condition with inversion; present result)
- "**if** they **had** ever **had** a candid conversation about their future, their ten years **would mean** something different today" (past condition; present result)
- "**Had** the series **been made** only for Korean living rooms, its ratings **would** now **look** like a verdict" (past condition with inversion; present result)

Practice: Complete the mixed conditional: *"If Ho and Mi-do ___ (decide) to marry at thirty, they ___ (not / argue) about it now."* Then rewrite it with inversion.

Activities and speed challenge
englishbridges.com/lessons/love-other-than-yours-drama

Notes