

Once Again 171

Chapter 171

“Alright, see ya.”

“See you.”

Maru pedalled towards the market on his bike. The two of them used to hang out with Dojin after school all the time, but nowadays it was a lot harder to catch a glimpse of the boy. It looked like he chose to continue working part-time at Iseul’s store even after school started. Something about him volunteering to help when Iseul’s dad became sick? It looked like Iseul “gave up” under his persistence, she did look incredibly happy about it though. In any case, Daemyung started riding the bus home by him lonesome because of it. He said he was fine, but he did seem pretty lonely.

Maru bought some pork belly, lettuce, and perilla leaves from the market according to Bada’s request.

‘I wonder what would happen if my relationship with Bada keeps going like this.’

In the future, his sister divorces. He didn’t remember much about her, but he knew at least that much. His past self barely ever talked with his sister, to the point where he only learned of this information through his parents. Divorces are like a world-shaking event to a family. They do happen surprisingly frequently in the modern age, but it didn’t make it any less difficult to deal with. Maru thought the fault was with himself. Just how untrustworthy did he seem to her, if she didn’t even bother contacting him?

‘Troubles persist.’

He’d gotten closer with his sister, he managed to meet ‘her’ several years earlier than they originally had, he made new relationships and broke old ones, things no longer followed their original path. They say even a flap of a butterfly’s wings could turn into a storm on the other side of the planet. How would these changes in the past affect the future?

Of course, Maru came to a conclusion about this already. He wouldn’t know until that moment actually came. In the end, the train of life never informs you of your stop before your arrival. This was both terrifying, but it was also a sign that there was an infinite number of possibilities he could choose from. Possibilities that differ from being something other than just a simple bus driver.

“Can’t help but be worried about it.”

Maru spoke to himself after parking his bike next to the apartment. He knew the answer already. Although he wouldn’t know until it actually happened, he just couldn’t help but be nervous because he already knew one of the numerous futures. One of those futures was about Geunseok, he never recalled seeing Geunseok being an actor in the future. Perhaps the actor ‘Geunseok’ existed, but he just didn’t hear about it. That possibility immediately disappeared when he recalled Geunsoo’s interview. The man mentioned his younger brother to be a normal office worker in the interview.

Right now in the present, Geunseok made a deal with Junmin. He’d be going into university as long as things go well. Objectively speaking, the boy was good at acting. Good actors sucked you into their world. Geunseok wasn’t that great, but at least he wasn’t awkward. He didn’t suck you into his own world, but at least he managed to act in his own world perfectly.

Junmin did make it clear back then, the man wasn't doing charity work. Junmin probably was a fan of the idea of signing two famous actor brothers. If Geunseok just stayed on this path and debuted in a decent film, he would make a good actor... so why did the boy become an office worker? Maru thought of the past as he walked upstairs.

'Is it me?'

During the summer competition, the boy made a terrible mistake, which cost them their chance at the nationals. The acting club afterwards was a total piece of work, everyone was just busy licking each other's wounds. Everyone knew that something was wrong with the club, but no one wanted to admit it. That's when Maru sacrificed himself for the sake of the club. He wasn't interested in acting and he didn't care even if they talked behind his back. If he really did care, he would've dealt with the situation in another way.

In any case, things finished off well enough. The acting club got together once they had a common enemy, they then went to the college competition and claimed victory. Geunseok regained his confidence and the acting club, its energy. If Maru didn't get involved then... Geunseok was a kid who only sought compliments. Would the boy have been able to take it if he could only watch as the club crumbled to the ground because of him? Geunsoo told Maru before that Geunseok fell apart after getting a bad grade for the first time, the boy probably hated being in the club back then.

That's probably when he gave up. To save his pride, he might've just switched over to studying instead. It made sense, Maru nodded to himself as he opened the door. His sister said something to him as he walked in, he couldn't hear her. He briefly greeted her as he threw his bag into his room.

'There's a chance that Geunseok becomes an actor.'

Was this a good thing? Maru couldn't tell right now, but he would be impacting the future greatly if Geunseok ended up becoming famous because of this.

'No, no.'

The woman who introduced herself as an angel said that there were multiple timelines. Just as how Maru may be alive in this timeline, there exists another timeline where Maru was dead. Then "changing the future" wasn't the right term to use here, only Maru knew of the future where Geunseok doesn't become an actor. Since the future was still a realm of the unknown, it might be better to say he was just "suggesting" a possibility.

A person's action can change a person's future completely, Maru thought back on how much he'd influenced other people thus far. He did have several advantages compared to others. His knowledge, experience, and the abilities god gave him. Using these would give him more possibilities to choose from for sure.

That's when he thought. Was it okay to live like this? There were definitely people whose lives were influenced by Maru. Most of the time, he'd only worked to push people around him in the right direction. But what if this was the wrong thing to do?

'There were no issues when I just thought about myself either.'

When Maru was working hard for his family's safety and his own success, he didn't even have the time to think about things like this. With more time on his hands now, his mind drifted towards more 'useless' subjects. Sadly, they weren't issues he could just ignore either. He knew god existed and he knew that this god cared about stuff like this. He didn't want to get punished after death for screwing over other people's lives.

This was the reason why Maru started looking into churches and temples as of late. He used to believe that religion was a product of a lack of knowledge, but now that he knew god did exist... Should he just worship all of the gods he could find?

"Hah."

He didn't know what to do, he was kind of amazed that he was able to go through high school without thinking in his past life. Maru grabbed his book, shedding away all other thoughts. 'Twilight Struggles'. Reading it made him distrust humans quite a bit, which was annoying, but at least the book provided something to focus on. Just as he opened the first page of the book, he heard the door to his room open. Come to think of it, it was dinnertime. His parents went down south to commemorate his maternal grandmother's death. They said they'd come back in the morning, so dinner was up to the two of them.

"I'll cook some meat for you, so just hold on."

That was when Maru remembered the pork belly inside his bag. If he washes the lettuce and perilla leaves and makes doenjang soup...

"Alright, I'll leave it to you, then."

The voice that came from behind him wasn't Bada's, Maru turned around with a surprised look. Gray shirt and jeans, it was 'her'. Maru blinked a few times. Was he dreaming? What was happening?

"What are you doing? Bada's hungry, you know."

"Brooo! Meat! Meat!"

He could hear Bada outside, he wasn't dreaming. He got up from his chair awkwardly, she stepped towards him lightly.

"Why are you looking so dumb?"

"This is our house, right?"

"Yeah."

"So why..."

"Broo! Meat!"

Bada's voice was getting louder by the second. For now, he walked out to the kitchen with her. What in the world was happening? She was acting like she totally owned the place.

"I asked her to come."

Bada's explanation was all he needed to understand, he still didn't get it though. Were these two always this close? They were acting practically like sisters. She continued to explain what was happening.

"You remember that fruit basket you gave me?"

"Oh, that?"

"Mom said it'd be rude to just take something like that without giving anything back."

She pointed her finger towards the sink, there was a pot he hadn't seen before. Inside, he found beef rib stew.

"My mom's really good at making beef ribs."

'Ah, I know.'

Maru was still in a state of shock. He wanted to ask a lot more questions, but for now, he started grilling meat for his hungry sister.

"You came to give us that? How did you know I even lived here?"

"I was calling Bada. She asked me to come, so I did."

"Mom and dad aren't here, so I told her to come. I did a good job, right?"

His sister grinned playfully. Since when was the girl this cute? He should really increase her allowance. With that thought in mind, he warmed up some rice and set the soup to boil.

"You can cook?"

"Bro's surprisingly good at cooking." "That's definitely a surprise."

The two girls were whispering behind him, Maru shrugged as he seasoned the soup to taste. It was savory and salty, just as he liked it. He set up the table with the sizzling meat and the bubbling soup.

"Thanks for the meal."

She smiled brightly after trying a spoon of the soup, Maru watched her eat silently for a second. It reminded him of their newly wed days. There were times when she asked him to feed her after a morning shoot. Whenever that happened, Maru just got her a simple toast with some salad.

"What are you looking at? Eat."

Bada was staring at him, Maru nodded as he grabbed his spoon.

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"I'll take care of the dishes."

"You're our guest, so no way. Go play with Bada."

She took a look back, Bada was sitting in front of the television munching on some snacks.

"It's a bit late, by the way. Don't you need to go back?"

She looked at the clock at Maru's words, it was a little over seven.

"It was an early dinner. I'm fine."

"Call your mom, then. Tell her that you ate and you'll be going back soon."

Maru sounded a lot like a mother, she stuck her tongue at the boy before walking over to Bada.

"Sis."

"Hmm?"

"Why are you going out with my brother?"

"You know, I don't really know how I should respond to that."

Why date? Well, because they liked each other. Why do they like each other? Well...

'I guess it's because he was so direct.'

He did come over to her house out of nowhere in winter to confess. He was very rude and irresponsible when he did it, but she didn't hate that. What if someone other than him did the same thing? She might've rejected him on the spot.

"You're going to get fat," Maru said, walking towards the two of them.

Bada glared back at him, shouting 'I'm not gonna get fat!' She had to suppress laughter. These two were on very good terms, clearly.

"Come to think of it, I'm getting in the way of you two."

Bada looked at the two of them with a grin, she couldn't say anything from the sudden jab.

"If you know, then step outside for a bit. Care to buy us drinks?" Maru asked.

"Of course."

She could only watch as Bada quickly slipped away with Maru's money.

"You guys get along really well."

"Money tends to solve most issues."

Maru sat down next to her with mysterious words.

"Did you call your mom?"

"Ugh, don't worry about it."

"Do it before she gets worried. Any parent would get worried when their grown daughter goes to a boy's home."

"Fine, fine. You're like an old lady, seriously."

"You try getting old too. You'll become like this in an instant."

“You know we’re the same age, right?”

She took out her phone with a slight grin.

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“Yeah, I’ll be back soon.”

- Don’t be late.

“Mhm, okay.”

- Remember, anything more erotic than a kiss is reserved for adults.

“Mom!”

She felt her face heat up in embarrassment, especially because Maru was looking at her. She tried to hang up, but her mom asked to talk to Maru. What sort of weird plots was her mom planning now?

“Mother, thank you for the beef ribs. We’ll enjoy it.”

Maru chimed in happily from the side, looking at him kind of made her annoyed for some reason.

“Take this.”

“Mm?”

“Mom wants to talk to you.”

“.....”

Maru’s expression stiffened almost immediately. Oho. She nudged him more to take the call, the boy took her phone respectfully with both of his hands.

“Yes, mother. This is Maru.”

Maru got into a kneeling position as soon as he received the phone. It was such a refreshing sight, watching his anxious expression. It was nice having something fun to watch. As Maru continued the conversation, he kept nervously twitching or stretching around. She laughed out loudly from right next to him.

“Yes, I’ll come visit next time. Goodbye.”

Maru flopped down on the floor as if he just finished an important test.

“Come on, so nervous over just a single call?”

She poked Maru’s forehead with a finger. Maru fumbled upwards like a robot that got turned on.

“Mother’s still the same as ever.”

“Still?”

“...You don’t want to know.”

She narrowed her eyes at Maru.

"You know, sometimes it's incredibly obvious that you're trying to change the topic."

"Really?"

"Yeah."

"I'll do better next time."

"You're just saying that."

Maru sat down in front of the glass coffee table in the living room and rested his chin on it. He looked exhausted, even more so than when he cooked. "Did something tiring happen?"

"Mm?"

Maru looked at her with some confusion. Normally, he'd immediately say 'no' or make a joke, but today he missed a beat before he responded.

"Is it because you talked with mom?"

"No, not at all. That's... well, that does take a lot of energy, but it doesn't really tire me."

"Then what? Now I feel sorry for dropping by while you're so tired. I feel like I interrupted your rest."

"Interrupted? No way, I'm happy you came."

Maru stood up, scratching his head. He looked like he was thinking about something. He was smiling, but every bit of her womanly senses told her that this was a fake smile.

"Something did happen, right?"

"Nothing. I'm just a bit exhausted with the seasons changing. Nothing you need to worry about."

Maru was drawing a clear line here, she wasn't a fan of that. Did Maru not trust her? Was that what this was? She pouted and glared at Maru angrily, he avoided her gaze with an awkward smile for a bit before finally raising his hand.

"I'm just a bit tired from all the things I've been thinking about. Nothing else is really going on."

"Thinking about what?"

"You know, this and that."

"So what's this and what's that?"

Maru scratched his eyebrows nervously, his lips were twitching a few times from how troubled he was. To think Maru who was always so positive and quick-thinking was hesitating like this... She got kind of scared. He said that things were okay, but maybe this was a super big issue? Right then, Maru finally opened his mouth.

"I've been thinking. About the people around me... and about what might happen in the future."

Maru emphasized that this wasn't anything serious. He didn't look like he was lying, so for now she sighed in relief.

"Nothing's wrong, right?"

"I swear to god, yes."

"That's fine, then. I really did think there was a problem for a second."

"I wouldn't hide anything if I needed to talk to you."

That was a little embarrassing to hear, but it did calm her significantly. Probably because of how serious he looked.

"But in any case, you were worried because of the future?"

"It's a bit more complicated than that, but yeah."

"Ugh, you know, it's not really time to think about that."

"That's why I said it wasn't anything important. I just started thinking about this because I've been lying down daydreaming in the hospital for so long."

"Daydreaming?"

"What, want to find out? It's super perverted."

Maru stepped closer to her with a perverse grin. She tried to do a neck slice to stop him, he dodged pretty quickly. Come to think of it, the boy never got hit by her.

"Hey."

"What?"

"Let me hit you, just once."

"What? Why?"

"You always dodge! I'm not that slow either."

"Violence is bad, miss."

"Is that so?"

An opening! She tried to poke Maru's cheeks with her finger, Maru's done this to her often already. Once again, they crossed empty air.

"...You're making me feel oddly competitive."

"Don't get competitive over stuff like this..."

"You know it's actually really annoying that I can't tease you when you're always teasing me, right?"

"Do you really have to get annoyed over something like that?"

“Let me poke you.”

“No.”

“Why?”

“Just because.”

She wanted to do it, at least just this once. She started jabbing at Maru relentlessly, she still wasn't able to land a single hit. Maru dodged all of her strikes with a smile on his face. She started this out of playfulness, but this was actually annoying her at this point.

“Stay still. Let me poke them just this once.”

“Were you always this perverted?”

Maru crossed his arms to cover up his chest, she felt her face heat up almost immediately. At the same time, she got angry again at getting teased again. So this is how you wanted to play it, huh? She stood up and jumped at Maru. He'll probably dodge this one too, right?

But nope, Maru opened up his arms to catch her. She tried to jump back in surprise when she felt their bodies come together, but her center of mass already leaned towards Maru. Maru fell backwards, ending up in a sitting position. She only managed to maintain her balance by grabbing his shoulders. Her body, which was leaning forwards quite a bit, lowered slowly until she could kneel. She took a look at Maru's smiling face once, her hands that were on his shoulders once, and his hands that were around her waist once.

“Y-y-you...”

“You're light. You need to gain more weight.”

She felt Maru tighten his grip around her waist. What was he going to do? Right then, Maru lay down on his back.

“Woaaah!”

Her body was lifted up into the air, similar to the airplanes that her dad used to give her on in her childhood. She quickly put more strength into her hands on Maru's shoulder to not fall forward.

“Normally I'd hold you up with my feet too, but I don't think that's really proper.”

“Hey!”

“This is kind of tiring, actually.”

“Ughh!”

She used one of her hands to twist Maru's cheeks. Maru immediately said “ouch” very quietly as he loosened his grip on her. Thanks to their antics, they were closer than ever before. She couldn't even open her mouth, Maru's smiling face was right in front of her. She wanted to ask him what he was doing, but she was pretty sure her mouth still reeked of dinner. She couldn't do anything here. So...

Bang.

She headbutted him, but this brought about an unexpected result. Instead of pushing her away, he hugged her tightly. Their chests met together and their cheeks touched together briefly. She could see the wooden floor in front of her, she could see the side of Maru's face right next to hers as well. She could hear his entire body. His heartbeat, his breathing, and even his eyes closing, to an extent.

"Let's... let's just stay here like this for a bit."

Maru was being up front. He wasn't asking her to stay like this, not that he was giving her a choice to begin with. What should she do here? Should she get angry or should she just ask what he was doing? In the end, she opted for a pat on his head. Maru seemed very anxious today, everything from the way he spoke and the way he was acting just screamed anxiety. It felt like he was struggling hard with a problem.

Looking at that made her feel very sorry for him, she just wanted to hug him for a bit. She didn't know why she felt this way, but she just did. Why did it feel like she'd been comforted the same way by this person at some day she couldn't remember?

"Han Maru."

"Yeah?"

"There's a movie that I really like."

"Which one?"

"Dead Poets Society."

"Oh captain, my captain."

She let out a small laugh, it was funny watching him say the line a bit seriously. She could feel the breath that Maru was letting out pass by her ear like a breeze.

"I really like the word carpe diem."

"Carpe diem, huh."

"I don't know what you're worried about. I can tell it's no simple matter, though. But... if you waste away today just worrying about the future that's yet to pass, I think you'll regret it."

She was able to talk about whatever that was in her heart when she was with Maru. She closed her mouth and slowly raised her body from Maru's, the boy was looking at her from the floor.

"Do you know why I like you?"

She tilted her head at the sudden question.

"Why?"

"Because you can read me. You can read me oddly well."

Maru slowly raised his hands around her neck. By the time she felt the warmth around her neck, her head slowly lowered. Maru was pulling her towards him. The distance between their lips were closing in. She gave up on resisting, looking at his smiling face. No, maybe Maru was just too strong for her. Her

long hair draped all over Maru's face. Just like reaching for a little spring amidst a forest of vines, she carefully reached for Maru's lips.

And...

Beep beep beep. The apartment door opened.

"...Wowee."

Bada made a small noise in surprise.

She wanted to cry.

No, she kind of wanted to pass out.

* * *

"Hah..."

"Don't worry. I'll talk to Bada."

"What are you going to say?"

"That we're going to get married."

"...Oh my god. You're crazy. I'm crazy."

She got on the bus exhausted, Maru waved his hand towards her energetically. He couldn't feel more refreshed than this. Though... she did look pretty tired right now. The moment he came back inside, Bada started questioning him about all sorts of things. He knew kids these days were pretty fast with stuff, but he didn't know Bada was this knowledgeable about romance. None of his excuses worked, and in the end, the girl even cheered him on.

"I'll keep it a secret from mom. Since I owe you a lot."

"Oh, *thank* you so much."

"Ahh, I want a boyfriend too."

"You can date all you want in college."

"Said the high schooler."

"....."

He didn't have a response for that.

"Ah, right, bro."

"Yeah?"

"You know that older brother from before?"

"Who?"

“The one with the flying kick.”

“Dowook?”

“Yeah!”

She didn't look normal. Before she could say anything more, Maru bolted for his room. He locked the door as soon as he got inside.

“Hey! Han Maru!”

She was shouting outside, Maru put his hands over his ears. This didn't feel good. Dowook was handsome and he did save his sister once. Bada hated boredom and loved trying new things. Knowing that... he didn't even want to think about it.

“Hey!”

Her normal personality was starting to come out. The moment things started to go badly for her, she changed immediately from 'bro' to 'hey'. Maru wanted to put his foot down as an older brother, but he just didn't want to talk to her today.

“Date in college!”

“What about you?!”

“Fine, I'm an asshole! Go away!”

“You don't even know what I was trying to say!”

Maru ignored his sister as she twisted the doorknob and threw his body into the blanket. He'll go to school at dawn tomorrow for sure.

Chapter 173

“Don't start anything unruly, don't sleep during lectures. Let's start today off well as always. Class pres, come over here. I have something for you.”

Taesik's brief morning announcement concluded. Despite what the homeroom teacher just said, the students all collapsed onto their desks as soon as he left.

“Quite a few students came yesterday, I heard?” Dojin asked, tossing Maru a piece of candy.

It was a grape flavored one today. Maru popped it into his mouth before responding.

“Fifteen.”

“That's a lot. Three's no problem then, right?”

“We'll have to see, but yeah, I think so.”

Fifteen students came on the first day. They looked pretty impressed with the club, so Maru did have some expectations.

“I'll help you guys out if you need props. Hit me up any time.”

“Was planning on it already.”

Everyone may have left the club, but their passions were still here. Taejoon and Soyeon also volunteered to help at any time.

“Hope we get someone talented.”

“Right.”

It'd be nice if they got someone who was very deeply interested in acting. Maybe about ten of them? With that expectation in mind, Maru pulled out his textbook for first class.

* * *

“.....”

The three members were speechless when they gathered at the club. It was 5:30pm, the first years were probably long gone from school already.

“No one came.”

Geunseok stepped outside to check one more time before coming back in, he had a frown on his face.

“What the heck? Why'd no one come?”

“How would I know?”

“You sure you didn't say unnecessary stuff to them yesterday?”

“They needed to know that the club's going to be hard. We don't just play around all day, you know.”

“But what if no one comes because of that?”

“We don't want people who are just looking to play, either.”

“Hey, don't talk back to me like that. I'm the club president. What are you going to do if no one comes?”

Geunseok angrily picked up his bag from the floor, Daemyung hurriedly called out to the boy.

“Where are you going?!”

“They aren't going to come anyway. I have a lesson today. You guys can take care of everything else.”

“But you're the president like you said... If you aren't here...”

“But there's no one coming. What am I supposed to do?”

“Maybe we should think of the reason together?”

Geunseok put a hand over his head angrily as he opened the clubroom door.

“I'm busy, unlike you guys. You can think a bit yourselves. You know it's your fault if no one comes, right? Han Maru?”

Geunseok left with just that. Daemyung sighed and turned to look at Maru.

“What do we do?”

“We’ll have to do something starting tomorrow, obviously.”

“Today?”

“You should go back yourself today. You’re supposed to be working on that scene with Mintae anyways.”

Mintae and Daemyung were working together on making a script recently. Daemyung was in charge of the main story, while Mintae and Maru were in charge of the refinement.

“What about you?”

“I’ll stay here for a bit longer as I clean up. Who knows, maybe someone will come.”

Daemyung stood up with a nod. With his time divided between practice with his coach, scriptwriting with Mintae, and working for the club... the boy had pitiful little time every day. Maru wanted to help the boy out a little bit.

“I’ll take it from here, so you go work hard on that script.”

“Got it. You should go back early as well. Let’s figure things out tomorrow.”

With that, Daemyung left as well. Maru took a look around the empty clubroom. In the past, there was so much stuff inside that only five people could squeeze in. Nowadays, fifteen people could easily sit in it. It was still a bit small in retrospect, but it felt quite spacious now that he was all alone. They worked hard with the mindset that they would make new memories in the coming year. But at this rate... memories be damned, the club might be disbanded altogether.

“I guess there’s no choice.”

He’ll have to find a few lazy kids and enlist them in the club. That should at least let them keep their clubroom, but they wouldn’t be able to participate in the nationals. With three people taking care of props, acting, and everything else... running a play was entirely impossible. They could manage at the cost of their spare time and their schoolwork would also suffer, it wasn’t a good method in the slightest.

‘Can’t advertise even more...’

Teachers only allowed clubs to advertise once in their classes. Doing it again would mean that they’d have to approach the first years’ while they were on break, taking time away from them during their rest break wouldn’t be a good thing at all.

‘Guess we’ll have to throw out posters one more time.’

If he didn’t want to waste their time, posters were the way to go. He’ll probably have to hand them out using the student board with some chocolates attached. As Maru thought about a way to draw interest to the club, he turned to look at the window. He could see a little shadow on it, someone was trying to look inside.

‘Who is it?’

Maru opened the clubroom door with a creak.

“O-oh!”

The male student in front of the door stepped back in surprise. He was a very short individual, no taller than 155cm, the boy only stood up to Maru’s chest. He had a poster on his hand, the one for the acting club.

“Did you come to take a look at the club, by any chance?”

“What? Ah, yes! Hello! I’m Ahn Bangjoo, first year in mech engineering!”

The junior greeted Maru with a 90 degree bow, he was so loud that even Maru had to take a step back. The third years who were still in the school looked towards their clubroom in surprise as well.

“You’re a bit loud.”

“I’m sorry! I am a bit loud, yes!! I apologize!!!”

The boy’s voice rang across the hallway one more time, the third years that were studying inside the college prep classrooms stepped outside with a frown. Maru quickly pulled the first year into the clubroom before apologizing to the third years.

“Let’s be quiet. I know this is the acting club and it’s our jobs and all, but you know what I mean, right?”

The third year pointed at his class sign. ‘College prep’. Maru apologized once again. Right then, the first year popped out of the clubroom and bowed towards the third years.

“I’m sorry! I won’t be loud again!!”

He was still as loud as ever, the third years could only laugh it off as they waved the two of them away. Maru pulled the first year back with his hand before closing the door.

“Ah...”

The junior seemed to have realized what he just did.

“Nice voice.”

“What? Ah, yes! I’ve heard that my voice is quite loud from a young age! My granny... no! Grandmother said I’d be a great...!!”

Maru quickly put his hand over the junior’s mouth. Their clubroom wasn’t soundproofed, being loud here wouldn’t be very good.

“Quietly. Got it?”

The junior bowed when Maru took his hand off. Was this kid just energetic, or stupid?

“I’m sorry. I get loud when I’m nervous!”

“Better than trembling, I guess. Ah, sorry, I might’ve been overly casual with you. I hope that’s fine?”

“Of course!”

The boy was starting to get loud again, Maru quickly stuffed a bottle of yakult into the boy's mouth.

"Thank you."

Energetic. Maru smiled and motioned the boy to take a seat.

"Sorry, we don't have any chairs."

"It's alright. Grandmother used to always say that 'good men always needed to keep their privies cold.'"

"...True."

Maru sat down in front of the first year. Ahn Bangjoo, was it?

"You came to take a look at the club, right?"

"Yes!"

"I see."

At least they got one person.

"So, let me tell you about our clu..."

"Senior!"

Bangjoo widened his eyes as he looked over at Maru, Maru ended up closing his mouth in shock.

"I want to be like Jackie Chan!"

"...What?"

"My dream is to be like an actor like Jackie Chan!"

"Who?"

"Jackie Chan!"

Bangjoo had fires burning in his eyes, the boy was serious. Ah. Maru felt his head start hurting. A total weirdo came.

* * *

Her long hair slid down her white shoulder, Suyeon slid her hands over the chest of the man below her as she pumped her hips. The man moaned pleasurably with the loud sound accompanying it. He raised his hand, Suyeon knew that the man liked her chest. As she rubbed her hips sideways, she leaned forward. The man started massaging her breast with his hand.

"Very firm."

"You only realized that now?"

"I can't get enough of a toned woman's body."

"Oh my, how perverted."

Just like how children tend to hang onto the toys that they like, the man couldn't get enough of Suyeon's breast as well. Suyeon thought it was about time to end this, men seem to think of women's breasts as playthings at times. They just had no idea of just how sensitive breasts were, and how much pain they'd suffer. Suyeon sped up the movement of her hips, she could see the man try his best to endure with gritted teeth to no avail.

"W-wait."

"Don't want to."

Suyeon was a fan of this position, the cowgirl. She liked being above men, thinking that she had this man under her control fueled her libido. Besides, she could end this whenever she wanted. She bounced her hips as hard as she could, the man tightened his grip on her chest. Suyeon moaned loudly before dropping down onto the man, she could feel the strength sap away from his hips through her flesh.

"Was it good?"

"Hah, the best."

Suyeon got up from the bed first, she flicked the man's floppy thing once before heading into the shower. When she finished cleaning herself up and stepped out, there was food in the room, courtesy of room service.

"I'll be going first, so enjoy your meal."

"You should eat."

"Excuse you, producer, but I'm not about to bring my private life into this."

"Ah, that's right. Sorry."

"Besides that, when's that next drama happening?"

"Probably the next quarter. Besides that, you're already looking for work? Don't you need to rest?"

Suyeon shook her head. Her miniseries ended last week, it was a big payout, 30% viewership. Even so, Suyeon wasn't satisfied.

'That woman.'

The main actor, Ahn Joohyun, took all the spotlight. Worse, Suyeon had to admit that this woman was better than her. She felt humiliated when Joohyun was next to her.

The woman, who didn't care much for money and whose work spanned many different genres. She was a bonafide professional, her skills had the media following her every move. Suyeon initially planned to be a side character that could eclipse the main character, but she was completely buried. She couldn't even get an advertising contract signed from this.

"I don't need rest. Thinking about that Ahn Joohyun just makes me so pissed."

"Why don't you rest though? Just come with me to Guam and..."

"Producer? I already told you to leave my private life out of this."

“Ugh, you’re so cold.”

“That’s my charm.”

“Fine. You can go now.”

“I’ll see you next time.”

Suyeon stepped out with her clothes. She came down to the lobby through the elevator and checked out with a different room key. Just as she was about to step outside, her phone rang with a call from Junmin.

Chapter 174

“Yes, teacher.”

- Are you busy?

Suyeon could hear loud noises from over the phone. Was he at a set?

“Nope. I’m always free if you need me.”

- That’s good. I’m at Kyungbook. Can you come here right now?

“Kyungbook? Why?”

- I’m scouting out a location for filming, and you came to mind. You don’t have to come if you can’t.

“Calling me from Kyungbook on such a short notice? That’s a bit too much, don’t you think? I’m in Seoul.”

Even as she said this, Suyeon was already working the navigator. Junmin wouldn’t call people out without a reason.

“Where exactly in Kyungbook?”

- You’re coming?

“Why wouldn’t I go?”

- Juwangsang National Park. Call me when you arrive, I’ll give you the details when you’re here.

“Looks like I’ll be there in six hours. Do they provide meals when I get there?”

- Of course. It’s six right now, so you’ll probably be able to arrive before midnight if you leave right away.

“I’m going to take it slow. But scouting? Since when were you a location manager?”

- Well, I got a picture of a decent place I was told about, and I had a good feeling. So I came here to check it out for myself.

“I mean, that place is already famous for filming.”

- It’s a bit away from the actual park. Almost a wild mountain. Looks good, though.

“Ugh, you’re too much. I’m an established actress, you know that? Not a personal servant.”

- You don’t have to come then. Ah, put that over there.

A voice belonging to a different man spoke over Junmin’s, Suyeon felt one of her eyebrows twitching.

“Teacher.”

- What.

“Is there someone next to you?”

- People.

“I think I heard Mr. Geunsoo just now.”

- He’s here. He was my driver.

“How could you just use such quality people for menial tasks like that?”

- Because I pay them. Anyway, get over here. You might catch us leaving if you dally for too long.

“Fine! I’ll be there quickly, so don’t say something so scary.”

She revved up the engine after hanging up. She thought about her day thus far. She didn’t have much to worry about since her drama was over. It was the evening of a weekday, the highways should be clear right now. She should be able to get there before midnight. She bought some food from the convenience store before coming back to her car. Right then, her phone rang. Was it Junmin? Ah, Geunseok.

“Ah, there was him, huh.”

She forgot she even had a lesson with the boy and didn’t much care for it. She originally got close to the boy in the hopes of closing in on Geunsoo. At this point, she might not really need him.

“Yeah, Geunseok?”

- I’m about to arrive, coach.

“Sorry, something urgent came up today. I don’t think I can make it.”

She got in her car with her phone sandwiched between her shoulder and cheek, she could hear Geunseok’s surprised voice from over the phone.

- What? But today’s when we have the lesson...

“Sorry. Just rest for today. Maybe go play with friends?”

- Coach.

The boy was calling out to her desperately. Ugh. This was why kids were annoying to deal with, they just didn’t know when to give up. They wanted to always take, take, take from a give and take relationship.

“Geunseok, I’m disappointed.”

- What?

“You’re not like a man at all. I thought you were a gentleman who cared for ladies. I’m very disappointed.”

- No, that’s not it at all.

“Right? I’ve been mistaken, right? Anyway, don’t come over. I won’t be there.”

- Are you going far?

“What does that matter to you?”

- ...Never mind.

“I’m hanging up.”

- W-wait!

Suyeon hung up without hesitation, he was getting more and more annoying to deal with. Probably time to draw a line at this point.

‘And here I thought he was someone smart.’

She thought the boy would strike deals with the other side’s desires in mind. In the end, he just turned out to be a stupid gambler, one that chased after short-term gains. Suyeon mentioned Geunsoo in their meetings once or twice, Geunseok definitely noticed what she meant whenever she mentioned his brother. That’s when the boy was supposed to introduce her to Geunsoo, but the boy just kept pushing it away. Likely because he was afraid of losing her.

“Are they really brothers?”

She threw the phone to the passenger seat. It was still vibrating, but she didn’t even look at it. Geunsoo and Geunseok. They’re brothers in that they’re both very talented, but their personalities were vastly different. Geunsoo had a powerful aura to him, she knew the man would succeed when she saw the independent film he was starring in. He looked like a great person, so much that he is one of the biggest reasons for her six-hour drive. Geunseok wasn’t like that at all. He was talented, sure, and had some leadership qualities. That was it though, a genius with no charm at all.

Of course, life experience might change the boy, not that she had the time to wait. Especially with all of the already magnificent men shining around her.

“I hope I get paid for how much I’ve worked so far.”

Junmin was calling her out, this might turn out to be a great chance for her to form a connection with Geunsoo.

“Being a delinquent is the best.”

Suyeon drove with a pop song playing on the speaker.

* * *

“Damn it.”

Geunseok fell back on his bed after coming back home. His silver lining for the week was gone, just like that. Suyeon didn't tell him anything, either. She probably left the city. He was annoyed. Club work included, there wasn't anything that was going his way. He called a few girls he knew out of frustration, a few of them readily agreed to come out.

'Should I play?'

The girls were nothing special compared to Suyeon, but whatever.

“I'll be out for a bit.”

His mom gave him a bit of allowance on his way out, he had been getting first place at the academy he went to every week. His dad gave him a brand watch as a reward, there was a bit of pressure to take first place on the next test, but he wasn't worried. He should be able to take first place easily with some work. He met the girls in front of a karaoke nearby, they all dressed up for the occasion, but they all seemed awkward.

“I'm paying.”

“Wow, as expected of Geunseok.”

He was letting out stress at the karaoke with the laughing girls. Right then, he got a call from her brother. It wasn't a great call, but he took it for now.

“What?”

- I was just curious about how you were.

“Well.”

- Good to hear. How's the club? I heard you guys were in a bit of trouble.

“Trouble? From who?”

- Maru.

“Why would you listen to an idiot like that? I'm in charge of the club and I'm telling you there's no problem. I'll take care of it, so you work hard yourself. How long are you going to chase your dreams? Dad is incredibly worried about you. With you rolling in the mud in the independent film industry and all.”

- Haha, true that. Good to hear that you're focused. Mom and dad must be happy.

His brother sounded as positive as ever. Geunseok was sick of it.

“I'm hanging up.”

- Geunseok.

His brother didn't respond even after calling him. Just before Geunseok hung up with a click of his tongue, a voice came through the phone.

- You're doing acting because it's fun, right?

"What are you talking about?"

- You're acting because you're desperate for acting and for no other reason. Right?

Geunseok let out a little laugh. What the hell was he on about?

"Is that important? I'm talented as all hell."

He dropped the phone call and went back into the room, his annoying emotions disappeared as he heard the cheery beat inside. His worries were fading in an instant.

* * *

"The first movie I ever watched starred Jackie Chan, I still remember it very well. I actually watched it several times over in just one day. He was jumping over cars, beating people up with just clothes, and... when I learned that he was doing that with only practical effects, my mind was set. I want to be like Jackie Chan."

The boy seemed completely serious. Well, at least he was passionate about what he wanted to do.

"We don't teach stunts here though."

"But I heard the training here is difficult. I learned that overexercising from a young age can ruin your joints or your growth. That's why I planned on exercising in high school and joining a stunt school afterwards."

The boy actually seemed to have a plan, thankfully. Maru was a fan of that.

"I don't know how much we'll be of help, but we'll do our best if you join."

"Thank you!!"

"Shh!"

Maru gestured at Bangjoo to lower his voice, the boy nodded with a shocked look.

"So you want to be an actor like Jackie Chan?"

"Yes. I know it's a ridiculous dream. But that's why I want to be here."

Bangjoo's shining eyes were a bit intense, Maru gave the boy another bottle of yakult to try to change the mood. The boy grabbed the bottle with his two hands. Now that he looked at it, he was pretty well-built. He must've exercised hard already.

"Are you exercising, by any chance?"

"I'm boxing a bit."

"Really? I used to box too, just a little."

"Is that true?"

The boy's eyes were starting to shine again. Maru just responded with a "just a little bit" with an awkward smile.

"As I thought, judging by your physique."

Bangjoo nodded in understanding. He must be living with his grandparents, judging by how he constantly brought up his grandmother as he talked. Well, at least his manner of speech was very polite.

"Um, senior. The others..."

"They're all out because of personal matters. I'm here by myself today."

"I see. Then, could you tell me how many other freshmen are here? I'd love to know how many comrades I have in arms."

Bangjoo clearly seemed very eager to know. Maru hated that he'd have to tell this young lamb the truth of the club, but he had to. He explained the situation shortly to his junior.

"So if three people in total, including me, don't join..."

"This place will disappear."

"That can't happen!"

"Um, don't get too fired up. We still have four days, so we have time to think."

Saturday was the last day for clubs to turn in their members list, Maru needed to bring the club registration forms from the new members to Taesik by then.

"Please tell me if I can help. I can do anything."

Maru felt like he was about to get burned by Bangjoo's passion, he was very interesting for sure.

"We need to promote the club. Ideas?"

"To promote the acting club... There's no better thing than acting, right?"

"Mm, that's true, but..."

Maru gave Bangjoo's body another glance. He probably had a lot of stamina.

"Are you patient?"

"I'm very good at staying patient. My sister trained me in that department well."

"Sister?"

"...Yes, I have an odd elder sister. You don't have to worry. She's odd, strange, and monstrous."

Bangjoo shuddered like a mouse in front of a snake when he talked about his sister. Trying to know more felt like it would bring Maru trouble, so he decided not to pry.

"Can you stand still for about an hour?"

"Of course."

“Alright, help me out tomorrow then.”

“I understand.”

“Ah, you might have to skip lunch. Is that okay?”

“.....”

The boy looked the same as when he was talking about his sister, he must care about meals a lot.

“You can eat bread to take care of hunger.”

“That’s fine, then.”

He looked brighter already.

“But senior, what are we going to be doing tomorrow?”

Maru decided to give the boy the shortest, most direct answer.

“Performance art.”

Chapter 175

“Ugh, my back.”

Long distance driving was as exhausting as always, Suyeon stepped out of her car to take a look around. There was a single villa standing in the middle of nowhere, this was supposedly where Junmin was. The ground was slightly muddy below her, Suyeon frowned as she looked at her suede shoes. She actually liked these shoes, so she couldn’t bring herself to set her foot down on the ground. Just as she started looking around in hesitation...

“Ms. Suyeon?”

Someone appeared before her, it was Geunsoo holding a flashlight.

“Oh? Hello.”

“So it is you. I was told to step outside since you arrived. The ground is quite the mess, isn’t it? It rained a lot.”

“Yes. I’m not sure how I should go inside.”

“I’ll bring you some sneakers.”

“Can you just carry me instead?”

She made it sound like a joke so as to not pressure him, Geunsoo thought for a bit before stepping towards her.

“Here, get on.”

“Woww.”

It was a good start. Up close, Geunsoo had an aura of playfulness about him like a child, to think that someone like this would turn into a madman on the stage. Suyeon was a fan of this aspect of Geunsoo, and even loved him, to an extent. She wanted to add him to her collection.

“Heavy, right?”

“Yes. You should consider losing weight.”

“Wouldn’t a gentleman tell me I’m light?”

“Sorry, I’m terrible at those things.”

Geunsoo put Suyeon down in front of the villa. She rubbed her chest against his back pretty hard on purpose during the piggyback ride, but it didn’t elicit much of a reaction from him. As she thought, he was just as difficult to manipulate as the rumors said.

“I was surprised how good Geunsoo was at first when it came to acting. I understood right away when I heard your name though.”

“My brother never learned anything from me. We just watched plays together a few times.”

“.....”

A hurtful smile. Something was wrong. Did the two not get along well? She should stop talking about Geunsoo in that case. Still, she decided to pry a tiny bit further.

“Looks like Geunsoo wants to take after his brother.”

“He doesn’t want to be like me. He just wants the attention I have on stage. I thought he finally found a dream of his own when he went into the acting club at school, but...”

Geunsoo shrugged with a smile.

“Sorry, I shouldn’t bore you with family drama. Just teach him well, please. He’s talented, as you’ve already seen. I’m sure he can turn out to be a good actor as long as he can grasp his strengths.”

It seemed that she picked the wrong topic to talk about, Suyeon started regretting the amount of time she poured into Geunsoo. The two didn’t even get along.

“I’ll do my best. In any case, I didn’t think there’d be such a nice villa in a place like this. No wonder Mr. Junmin was so impressed.”

She quickly changed the topic from something other than Geunsoo, but Geunsoo just walked forward without responding to her. He passed through the front gates and entered the building, the first thing Suyeon saw as she entered was a wooden staircase upstairs. Next to the staircase was the living room, which already had a few people inside.

“Hello.”

She didn’t know any of them, but there was nothing to be lost from saying hello. There were all sorts of people, ranging from ages 20 to 50.

“Hello.”

“It must’ve been a difficult drive here.”

None of them was surprised, they probably received word of her coming here a long time ago. The carpet on the floor was littered with poker cards, she could spot quite a few bottles of alcohol as well.

“Here, follow me.”

She went up to the second floor with Geunsoo. There wasn't anyone else inside the villa, they must’ve rented it for the day. Geunsoo knocked on one of the doors located further away from the staircase.

“May we come in?”

“Sure, come inside.”

She could hear Junmin’s voice inside. Suyeon entered the room with a slight smile, but froze up completely when she saw who else was inside.

“You should say hello.”

She finally came back to her senses after hearing Junmin’s words and greeted the other man in the room.

“Hello, senior Yoon Moonjoong.”

“You know me?”

“Of course. I was inspired by your performance at the Myungdong Art Theater.”

To think someone so influential would be here... Aside from him, there was also someone else in the room, he looked to be in his late 20s. The man was looking at her with his hand on his black horn-rimmed glasses, his gaze didn’t look very kind.

‘Who is it?’

The man couldn’t be someone normal, especially if he was with Junmin and Moonjoong here. Suyeon greeted him with a bright smile.

“Hello, I’m actress Kim Suyeon.”

The man gave her a silent nod.

“Please understand. He just doesn’t like talking. Or maybe he’s embarrassed about talking to pretty girls.”

“That’s not the case at all.”

The man refuted Junmin immediately. Suyeon felt her stomach twist inside at the thought of getting ignored, but she still maintained a smile.

“Do you not like me? We could at least trade names. Are you an actor?”

He’d probably be an incredible rookie if he was an actor.

“I’m not an actor. Just a writer.”

“Writer? Then a scenario...”

“I just published a single book so far. No more, no less. Is that enough?”

“...Um, did I do something wrong by any chance?”

“You didn’t. I just talk like this, so please don’t take offence. Or just ignore me. It’d be better if you don’t talk to me entirely. Since I don’t like talking.”

The man ended his sentence with the same expression he started speaking with. Wow, this one will be difficult. She didn’t even want to approach him any further, guys like this were hard to take down with just words. She would’ve just ignored him like he said if he was a normal person, but...

‘He has this vibe.’

The man took a sip from a can of beer in front of him. Suyeon changed targets and asked Junmin a question.

“So who’s this mysterious writer right next to me?”

“The original writer of the movie we’ll be producing. Did you hear of a novel called ‘Twilight Struggles’?”

“I didn’t, unfortunately.”

Junmin took out a book from his bag. The cover was decorated with black and grey.

“You like books, right?”

“Well, now I do. Should I read it?”

She was getting greedy to read it already, Junmin definitely didn’t call her here for nothing. Perhaps he was thinking of casting her in this film?

“Finish it by tomorrow morning.”

“You’re too much. It’s 1am, you know?”

“So you aren’t going to read it?”

Suyeon grinned and waved the book in front of her face a little. She didn’t enjoy reading very much, but she still read during her spare time. There were no better tools for self-improvement than books, after all.

“So she’ll be taking on that role?” Moonjoong said.

“No, sir. I’m just taking her out for a test run. You’re going to have a huge say in terms of casting, sir, so please tell me if you happen to have anyone in mind for a role.”

Suyeon smiled, making sure no one saw her doing it. A movie Moonjoong was starring in, with Junmin as the casting director... This was going to be big. It didn’t even take her a second for her to realize that this was a once-in-a-lifetime chance.

“Please take care of me from now on, sir.”

"I'd have to ask the same of you if we work together from now on, miss."

"Please drop the formalities. I want to be adored, too."

"Haha."

Suyeon bowed at the two teachers and nodded at the young author, the author didn't even spare her a glance as he continued sipping on his drink. Ah well. It was a shame, but it was about time she left. She closed the door as she exited.

"That guy's a bit sensitive around people. He'll at least greet you if you get close with him."

"Are you close with that author?"

"I don't really know. He isn't very expressive."

"I see. Are you participating in this project as well, by the way?"

"I'm not sure. I'll consider it when the auditions begin."

"So you really came here for a leisurely drive today?"

"I told you from the start. It must've sounded like a lie to you, Ms. Suyeon."

Suyeon felt thorns coming off of Geunsoo's voice, he clearly didn't have a very good impression of her.

'Maybe he heard rumors about me.'

She knew she was being called a queen bee behind her back, she didn't deny it, it was true. Yet the men who knew fell when she approached them. Men were all foolish like that.

"You're not mad because of it, are you?"

"Of course not."

Geunsoo let it pass smoothly, he was going to be a hard one to tackle. Suyeon followed the man into an empty room.

"There's not much that's going to happen till 1 o'clock tomorrow, so please rest."

"Doesn't look like I can even if I want to, because of this."

Suyeon lifted her book, garnering a nod from Geunsoo.

"It won't be boring, at least."

Geunsoo slowly closed the door, Suyeon turned on the bedlight and lay down on the bed.

"Alright, let's take a look," she said, as she flipped open to the first page.

* * *

Daemyung looked at the clock nervously, it was almost lunch. The teacher was looking at his wristwatch from the front of the classroom.

“I’ll let you go five minutes early today, so don’t run. Alright?”

“Yes!”

The students in the classroom pushed their chair back, getting ready to run. The math teacher organized his textbooks and gestured to the class rep. The class rep got up and shouted “stand”, which signalled for each chair in the room to scrape against the floor all at once. The math teacher waved at the students with a wry smile.

“Thank you.”

“No problem. Enjoy your meals.”

With that, the students ran out of the room. Daemyung immediately turned to look at Maru.

“Let’s go!”

Maru grabbed a large bag next to him and ran out at full speed, Daemyung had to hold his breath as he followed after the boy.

‘Why’s he so fast?!’

Maru zoomed right through the empty hallway, he was so fast that Daemyung immediately lost hope in trying to follow him. He huffed his way down the central stairs as he watched a smaller kid catch up to Maru.

“Let’s go, senior!”

The boy had a massive voice. Maru and the small kid ran together, so Daemyung tried to follow behind as much as possible. He heard someone shout ‘don’t run!’ behind them, but Daemyung couldn’t, at least not today. Before they knew it, they were the first students in the cafeteria.

“Alright. Just an hour, Daemyung.”

“Got it.”

Maru took out a sign from his bag, the type that you could hang over your neck.

- Acting club. Looking for members. Please take a sheet! First years welcome!

Daemyung stepped forward after hanging it over his neck.

“Senior! My name is Ahn Bangjoo! Please take care of me!”

“Ah, yeah, sure.”

This must be the junior Maru mentioned this morning, the boy was wearing the same sign as well. Instead of standing like Daemyung, the boy was posed as if he was running somewhere. It seemed hard to maintain balance, but Bangjoo looked confident.

“Alright, then.”

Maru posed as well. He put the box of paper down in front and reached as if he was picking up money.

“Won’t it be hard, Maru?”

“I can just change my pose a little every once in a while.”

“Why can’t you just stand...?”

“It’s not impactful that way. But anyway, you guys both remember your actions, right? Do them whenever someone takes one of these. Remember, this is a battle of patience. Try not to move as much as possible.”

“Got it.”

“Yessir!”

Daemyung sighed and looked forward, he could see the two goalposts outside the building in front of him. A few minutes later, he started hearing noises coming from his left. There were students running their way.

“They’re coming. Let’s try to get as much attention as possible. Don’t smile.”

“Y-yeah.”

He was nervous despite this not being a stage. Daemyung tried to cheer himself up as he told himself that stillness could be more stressful than just moving as Maru told him. Finally...

“Hey! Get my plate too!”

“Got it!”

“First place!”

The others have arrived.

Chapter 176

Bangjoo was excited. To think he’d have the chance to act before he even joined the club...

‘Alright. I’ll support the seniors as best as I can!’

He carefully looked at the hallway next to the cafeteria, he could hear students coming from behind him, but didn’t look back. Maru told him that the core of this performance was in not moving. He was planning on abiding by it as best he could.

‘Come already!’

Bangjoo stared at the box of posters intently, that was his movement. Someone needed to take the poster quickly.

- When someone takes the poster, we express our thanks by doing a mini-performance. I’ll leave it to you guys what pose you want to strike. Just don’t talk. Silence attracts more attention for this type of stuff.

Bangjoo was thinking of kowtowing to whoever took a poster, he’d done this more than enough in his life already thanks to his grandmother taking him to temples and all. He liked doing it, in fact.

'They're coming!'

He could feel the students coming close, he'll surprise them as soon as they arrive. Just thinking of them laughing at him was already making him excited, being able to make other people happy was truly a joyous thing. Right then, the first student passed by the box of posters... and passed over it.

'Eh?'

Bangjoo looked at the back of the student running into the cafeteria, he didn't even glance at the three of them. The second student passed, then the third, and so on. They all merely gave them a glance before stepping into the cafeteria. In fact, most of them didn't even bother to read the signs on their necks. There were some female students who laughed at them from afar, but none of them came close. Like that, around two class's worth of students passed by them. There was a bit of a delay before the next class came.

"As I thought," Maru muttered.

"Is this alright, senior?"

"Why, are you nervous?"

"No, I'm just disappointed. I was ready to impress everyone, but no one took the paper."

"Haha, you were practicing, weren't you?"

Bangjoo turned to look at Maru, the senior was looking ahead calmly. Looking at that expression made him realize that there was no need to be nervous.

"You wouldn't know because you're a first year, huh?"

"What?"

"Today's menu is the one thing that's kind of edible here in this school. Pork katsu and fish katsu."

"Is that why everyone's running?"

Maru nodded.

"To begin with, we're only interested in getting the attention of the students as they leave."

"Aha, so that's why our sign had two sides."

The sign Maru was wearing had a back side to it as well. There, it read:

- Acting club. Recruiting members! Please take a sheet. First years welcome! Take a piece of complimentary chocolate for dessert.

"If you hand these out on the way into the cafeteria, there's a high chance that the papers would be thrown away in the trash can inside the cafeteria. On the way out, though, the students have to carry it all the way back to their classes. After all, the teachers here despise littering with a passion."

"Right. I did hear a thing or two about the cleaning."

Even when he looked around, he couldn't see even a piece of trash anywhere. That was because if a student was caught littering, they were sentenced to clean for three hours straight.

"That's amazing, senior!"

"Not at all. It's just basic marketing. Alright, get back to your pose. They're coming back."

Bangjoo turned his head back, his nervousness was long gone now. He should be fine as long as he follows this senior.

'Just twenty minutes!'

Students would start walking out of the cafeteria in twenty minutes, surely something would change by then.

* * *

Lee Jiyeon was getting squished by her friends on both sides. This happened because... one of her friends tried to carry her on their shoulders but failed. So her friends decided that they might as well carry her together.

"C-can we not?"

"You don't have a choice in this matter!"

"Yeah!"

Ughh. Jiyeon clenched her eyes tightly as she walked over to her friends, thank goodness she was wearing pants. As soon as she got her legs in between her friends' arms below, they stood up. Jiyeon screamed as she put a hand on their shoulders.

"Ohh! I knew we could do it, Jiyeon's so light!"

"Let's go!!"

She only had quiet friends in middle school, she naively thought that it would be the same for high school as well. Unexpectedly, these girls were almost as energetic as the boys in school. The three of them walked around the first floor hallway in that manner, every student in the hallway was staring at them. Jiyeon wanted to try and hide her face, but it wasn't like she could take her hands off of her friends.

"Alright, to the cafeteria!"

"Let's go!"

These two clearly didn't have plans on stopping. Jiyeon asked to switch very quietly. Of course, she just got ignored. On their way to the exit, they ran across a teacher. Jiyeon thought the teacher would tell them to stop because this was dangerous. But...

"Take it slow, girls."

That was it, to top it off, the teacher was actually smiling. Jiyeon wanted to cry, she just gave up by the time they got outside. Whatever, she didn't care about what would happen anymore. On their way to

the cafeteria, she spotted three boys just standing still on the way. No, they weren't just standing, they were posing.

"What is that?"

"Don't know."

Her friends seemed to be curious as well. Right then, Jiyeon felt trepidation. In fact, those bad feelings worsened as they got closer.

'T-they're seniors from the acting club!'

The plump senior's name was Daemyung, she recalled. She had never seen the smaller person before, but he had to be in the club as well. Then there was the person who was posing as if he was picking something up from the floor.

'Senior Maru.'

- Ask yourself that question, not others. The answer's surprisingly easy. Keeping through with it's what really matters.

She instantly thought of the advice he gave her, she really didn't want to display herself like this to someone who talked so seriously to her.

"Looks like the acting club."

"What are they doing?"

"Don't know."

None of them seemed interested. Thank goodness. Jiyeon tried to hurry her friends under her, she didn't want to be seen like this to her seniors.

"L-let's go."

"Hey! Our little miss is hungry!"

"Leggo!!"

Her friends ran forward with a shout.

* * *

"I wonder if they're sports students."

"N-no idea."

Daemyung smiled thinking of the girls that just passed by. To think they'd enter the cafeteria while carrying a girl...

"There's more coming," Bangjoo said.

Daemyung looked at the door of the first floor, there was a new group of students coming towards them.

'Second years.'

There were a lot of familiar faces, a few of them wished them 'good luck' on their way inside as well. That alone gave Daemyung energy. Just as he readjusted his position, he heard a very familiar voice.

"Eh? What are you guys doing?!"

It was Iseul, she was here with Taejoon and Soyeon. Daemyung wanted to speak very badly, but he had to endure.

"What the, you should've told me that you were doing this. I would've helped!"

"Yeah!"

Daemyung was thankful for his friends for their support, it looked like they figured out what was happening since he and Maru weren't saying anything as well.

"Good luck. Call us if you need anything."

"Work hard."

"Good luck!"

Daemyung nodded very subtly, the three of them smiled as they walked into the cafeteria. Daemyung was actually planning on calling them for help at first. Maru stopped him, saying that it was important for actual members to be the ones working during recruiting season. Daemyung understood why after a bit of thought. Sure, they'd be able to get more attention if they got their friends' help. But their friends were no longer club members. If some of the first years got into the club because of their friends, that could end up becoming trouble.

'We need to solve this ourselves.'

Daemyung tried to adjust his posture one more time. Right then, a shadow drooped over him, it was Geunseok.

"Ridiculous."

That was all the boy said as he left, the students around him were muttering confusedly.

"Geunseok, aren't you in the acting club? Like them?"

"They're promoting the club because no one's coming."

"Really? Why aren't you doing it, then?"

"I told them to do it. Plus, there needs to be someone to explain to the students who come after seeing the promotion. That's my job as the president."

"Ah, you're the president?"

"I didn't want to do it, but the seniors said there was no one more suitable."

"I see."

Geunseok walked away with a smile, Daemyung felt a bit bitter. He did ask the boy to join in as well. All Geunseok said was that such a childish act would accomplish nothing. Daemyung wanted to say something. Again, Maru stopped him.

“Daemyung.”

“Yeah?”

“Still face.”

“.....”

Daemyung sighed as he fixed his expression as he admired Maru. The boy was scarier than anyone else when he got mad, but most of the time, he was able to let things pass with a smile.

‘Same with the fire.’

Daemyung *was* a little suspicious that Yurim might be the culprit, everything from the timing when she moved away and the fact that Soyeon never mentioned the girl was proof enough. Miso wasn’t talking about it either. Maru looked like he knew who the culprit was and he even set up a plan with Miso. It looked like everything was resolved in the end, though Daemyung couldn’t even imagine what happened in the process. So he decided to ask Maru about it the day before school started. Maru avoided the question as much as possible, but he did leave a clue.

- The person in question received their punishment.

Daemyung didn’t ask any further, he was kind of afraid to know.

“Senior Daemyung.”

“Y-yeah?”

“Isn’t the person who just passed by senior Geunseok?”

“That’s right.”

“So why isn’t he doing this with us?”

“N-no idea.”

Daemyung didn’t respond properly, he didn’t know how. He didn’t want to say there was tension between them, but he also didn’t want to say Geunseok was excluded from this activity due to his presidency.

‘Hopefully we can smooth things out with him.’

Geunseok was definitely a necessary element of the club, but how should they deal with him now that his inflated ego set in?

“Oh! They’re coming,” Bangjoo said.

Daemyung gave up on thinking for now.

* * *

“What was that white sauce again?”

“Tartar sauce?”

“Is that it? Whatever it was, it was good.”

Jiyoong stepped out as she nodded, that was definitely the best meal they had from school. As she walked back towards her classroom with a feeling of happiness, she saw the acting club seniors in her vision again.

“Wow, they’re still doing it.”

“Yeah.”

It was a windy day in March, these guys were probably standing here for 30 minutes at least.

‘No one’s looking at them.’

Many of the students just passed by them. Jiyoong felt like she could feel what the seniors were feeling right now, despite being so far away from them. They must be feeling horribly disappointed.

“Ugh, so cold. Let’s go inside.”

Her friends walked forward with their arms crossed, Jiyoong once again got dragged by them. Just as they passed by the seniors, she noticed Maru’s fingers trembling slightly. It must’ve been incredibly tiring for him to keep that pose for thirty minutes straight.

“What’s wrong, Jiyoong?”

Jiyoong stopped. Was it alright to pass by like this?

‘He gave me word of advice back then.’

They were all laughing along with Geunseok at the time, no one cared about a quiet girl like her... except Maru.

“C-can we take a look real quick?” Jiyoong asked as she looked at the club.

This was the first time she suggested anything to her friends, she felt very conscious of them as soon as she spoke. Maybe she should’ve kept her mouth shut?

‘What if they say something?’

Maybe she shouldn’t have tried to overstep her boundaries.

“Sure, let’s go.”

Her friends turned to the club with no hesitation, Jiyoong sighed in relief.

“What’s with the sigh?”

“Eh? Ah... I was just wondering if I said something pointless.”

“Pointless?”

“Well... I thought I was wasting your time... Especially when we’re going to class...”

“Hey.”

“Yeah?”

“You need to relax. And treat us like real friends. Right?”

“Right. Jiyoong, you’re always way too serious.”

Her friends dragged her by her hand, Jiyoong took a step forward with a slight smile.

Chapter 177

“We came because of her!”

Maru looked at the numerous shoes that were suddenly in front of him. He couldn’t raise his head, so he didn’t know who had arrived. He could only infer from the voices and legs that these were girls.

“U-um, we’re not bothering you, are we?”

From what he could hear, the girl sounded nervous. Maru thought that she might be one of the first years who visited the club two days ago.

“Oh, they have posters here. It has chocolate, too.”

Maru remained silent, the girls chatted a little more before grabbing a poster for themselves.

“Wow! Thank you!” Bangjoo excitedly dove and prostrated himself before the girls. Even Maru was surprised at that. To think Bangjoo would go so far... he hadn’t expected it at all. Maru rose slowly and took out a piece of chocolate for each of the girls.

“Wow. You’re giving them to us?”

Of course, he didn’t speak.

“Must be one of those silent performances.”

“Wait, then what about this senior?”

It seemed that the girls had misunderstood Bangjoo, the boy nervously stood and returned to his spot. He made a distraught expression that seemed to win the girls over.

“Haha, that senior’s hilarious.”

“Did you see how he was glancing at us nervously?”

The girls had infectious laughter, and one by one, other students started crowding around the acting club.

“What the—what are you guys doing?”

“Hey, try taking a poster from here. It’s pretty hilarious.”

“What’s hilarious?”

“The frog!”

“What?”

The students each took a poster with bewildered looks. Maru glanced at Bangjoo and the boy peered back at him like a frightened puppy.

“Just do it!”

“Okay!”

The encouragement worked, Bangjoo leapt into the air. His jump was incredibly high, like some sort of martial arts instructor, before coming back down onto the floor. The students around them clapped, impressed.

“What the—?”

“I think they’re doing something over there.”

“Hey! They’re doing something over there!”

The students congregated in a flash. Bangjoo started jumping repeatedly, smiling, and Maru did his best to pantomime a frog as he handed out pieces of chocolate. Before they knew it, the box of posters was completely empty. At this point, even the teachers were watching their performances out of sheer curiosity.

Some of the girls even poked his body nervously. The boys just smiled from afar, but the female students were getting braver.

“You aren’t going to move even if we do this? Or this?”

Iseul popped out of nowhere as the number of students like this grew, she put her chin on top of Maru’s curved back.

“Hey, take a pic of me, please.”

Iseul was lightening the mood. With that, they thankfully managed to ingrain the acting club into the minds of the amassed students. It was a success, for sure.

“Is this good enough?” Iseul whispered.

Maru gave her a silent thumbs-up, Iseul was beautiful and her doing this was even causing some of the boys to take pictures.

“It’s the acting club.”

Taejoon joined in as well. With the two of them guiding the atmosphere, more students began taking pictures. Despite the event being nothing special, the students were still enjoying it to their fullest.

“We are the acting club! Our clubroom is next to the central staircase on the fourth floor! Please come whenever! We’ll have our arms open at all times!”

Bangjoo started promoting the club, he and Maru had discussed beforehand the use of loud voices to announce their presence once enough people gathered. Bangjoo's voice rang throughout the school.

* * *

"Did you see what happened during lunch?"

"Ah, the acting club?"

"Yeah. I thought there was an accident! There were so many people."

"Me too."

Jiyeon had a slight smile. School was finished, and everyone was talking about the acting club. For some reason, she felt her heart flare up with pride.

'I think I helped.'

Jiyeon held a registration form in one hand, it was the form she had decided not to turn in after filling it out. She would've just gone back home if nothing happened, but she did end up seeing something. It was the members of the acting club smiling joyfully, surrounded by people. They weren't on a fancy stage or anything, but the air was hot with passion at the time. After seeing that, she decided to take the chance.

She might not be of any help, she might even be called a hindrance. Even if she couldn't do it, it was the first time she had something she wanted to do. She had gone so far as to refuse her friends' offer to watch a movie for this, she walked up to the fourth stair in anticipation and nervousness. Each new step she was taking only added to her anxiety. Why was turning in a simple sheet of paper so nerve-racking?

When she came up to the fourth floor, Jiyeon was greeted with an empty hallway. Why? So many people had been there earlier, but she was the only one in the entire hallway now. Right then, the club room opened and a tall senior walked out. It was Geunseok.

"You're..."

Jiyeon felt a chill as he directed his gaze onto her.

"What, you're thinking of joining?"

"What?"

Jiyeon hid the registration sheet behind her, Geunseok seemed greatly disappointed for some reason.

"Why are you hiding it? You're registering as a stage manager, right?"

"I-I... want to be an actress..."

"Actress?"

The sound of him laughing pierced deep into her ears, It felt like a massive wall was rushing towards her. Jiyeon took a step back without realizing it.

“Well, I suppose you can, since this is just a high school. But it’d be quite troublesome if you can’t even say a single word on stage.”

“Can’t I just try hard?”

“Ah, right, right. Trying hard. Sure, sure. Well, give me the form. We can think about that later. We just need members right now.”

Jiyoon glanced at Geunseok, the boy appeared incredibly annoyed to have to deal with this. He extended his hand to her as if the only thing he wanted from her was the form.

She thought back to the play she saw in December, the actor who cheerfully talked to the audience from back then... He was unique and Jiyoon was absolutely a fan of his acting, he had instilled a spark of interest in her for acting. The seniors of the club told her that Geunseok was the best at acting, so the person in question must be him.

‘So his acting is completely different from his actual personality.’

She felt depressed all of a sudden, hearing that she wouldn’t be able to succeed from her idol sapped her energy. Her past bravery suddenly seemed so foolish.

“Hand it over. I’m busy.”

“Ah, uhm...”

She shook her head as she took a step back. She was suddenly afraid, observing how different the acting club was in reality. She even felt a little betrayed, thinking that the shining stage was really like this.

“This is precisely why you can’t do it,” Geunseok commented.

Jiyoon flinched.

“Your actions right now are the reason why you can’t succeed as an actress. Why are you so annoying? Trying hard? Why don’t you just think for a second? You think trying hard solves everything? I can just tell what you’re going to be like when I look at you. Do you think you’ll be able to stand on stage? When you can’t even talk to me right now?”

“That’s...”

“That’s why I’m telling you to give up and become a stage manager instead. Your hands look nice. Do you sew? Sewing is good for a woman. Don’t try to succeed in something you have no hope in.”

Geunseok stretched out his hand as he took a step forward. Jiyoon stepped back, shaking her head.

“You’re annoying. Just leave. Stop being so iffy. Are you trying to pull a prank on me or what? I knew you’d be trouble since I first saw you. I remembered your face even though I didn’t know your name. You were annoyingly introverted. Can you even survive in society like this? Or make friends? You’re pathetic. I’m only giving you this advice right now because I want to give you a chance. You need to fix yourself. Fix your entire personality.”

When she heard the word 'advice', she felt a burst of rage. How was any of this advice? There was no way those words were meant to help someone. Were hurtful words like that advice? Jiyeon was furious. For the first time, she felt angry enough to talk back to someone.

Why was she so mad? Ah, after a bit of thought, she got it. Pathetic. That word kept spinning around in her chest.

"...I'm not pathetic."

Geunseok smiled mockingly.

"That's what they all say. I gave you a way to fix yourself. You just have to go 'ah, I get it', and do it. Tsk."

"So becoming a stage manager is that method?"

"This is why idiots are so annoying to deal with. You'd be able to learn something if you work as a stage manager. You can use that experience to become an actor next year."

"But you just told me trying hard wouldn't do anything."

"Well, I guess you'll stay as a stage manager then."

"What about my dreams of being on stage?"

"What the hell would I know about your dreams? Hah, you're hilarious. Why don't you try becoming a comedian instead? You're clearly talented in that department."

"....."

Her throat became dry, she didn't know what to say. She knew he was being unfair, but she couldn't say anything to refute him. She felt like she was about to go crazy with resentment. She felt like she would cry if she stayed any longer, so she decided to give up. She definitely didn't want to go to a club with someone like this in it, she didn't even want to say farewell to him. Instead, she just turned around to leave.

"You're so impolite. Do you think seniors are a joke? Hey, what class are you in? Talk to me."

Geunseok grabbed her shoulders.

"Are you trying to rebel?"

He looked terrifying, he was squeezing her shoulders harder and harder. She couldn't say anything, she was paralyzed with fear. Right then, she felt someone put their hand on her back. She looked back sharply in surprise, Maru was reading her registration form.

"Your writing is quite pretty."

"...What?"

"I'm jealous of people with good writing. I suck. Here, take this back."

Maru handed her form back and Geunseok released her shoulders.

"Geunseok."

“What?”

“If you aren’t thinking of working, just leave. I’ll take care of the rest.”

Jiyoon found herself hiding behind Maru, the two seniors glared at each other so intensely that she forgot to breathe for a second.

“Who the fuck do you think you are, trying to command me around like that?”

“If you don’t want to be told what to do, why don’t you work properly? Why do you have to be so half-assed?”

“Hah, look at you speak. Hey. Han Maru.”

“Don’t say my name threateningly and just work. You said yourself that you were here to consult potential members. So just do your job properly.”

“You son of a....”

The atmosphere was only getting fiercer. As Geunseok stepped forward to leer down at Maru, Maru tilted his head back to glare up at him. Jiyoon looked around. She needed someone to dissipate the situation, but there was no one in the hallway save for the class of third-years.

‘If something happens...’

She stared at the third-year classroom, she would run over there if things went awry.

“If you’ve made up your mind to do something, then take responsibility. If you don’t want to, then just don’t do it at all.”

“Are you crazy?”

“Don’t try to change the topic and answer me. Will you work properly, or will you just give up?”

Jiyoon couldn’t see, but she could somehow tell that Maru had a chilling expression on his face. Geunseok scowled at Jiyoon from over Maru’s shoulder, she flinched and looked down.

“Are you trying to look good in front of that girl behind you? Is that it?”

“You’re making my mouth hurt at this point. I’ll ask this one last time. Will you work, or will you give up? Just answer me.”

“Han Maru, you son of a bitch. You have a fucking weird fetish, don’t you? Sure the girl’s cute, but going that far? Fucking hilarious.”

Geunseok raised his hand to push Maru’s shoulder, but Maru swivelled at the last second and Geunseok’s hand swiped through thin air. When the boy lost his balance and stumbled forward, Maru grabbed his hand and pulled him back.

Jiyoon couldn’t help but think of a scene of a woodsman felling a massive tree. Geunseok collapsed forward awkwardly, making quite the noise. He looked up at Maru with a savage glare.

“Sorry. My neck hurt having to stare up at you like that.”

Maru was grinning.

“Y-you bastard.”

Geunseok threw his bag aside and sank into a charging stance. Jiyeon readied herself to sprint to the third-years, thinking that this was it. But before the other boy could start running, Maru opened his mouth.

“I noticed you’re the first in our grade. Your parents must be happy.”

“.....”

Geunseok hesitated.

“You should know about what happened last year regarding school violence. The chairman and the principal are incredibly sensitive to it right now.”

“W-what are you talking about?”

“I’m just talking about the what-ifs. What do you think the school would do if you committed an act of violence? I don’t think they’ll take it lightly given what happened before, don’t you?”

“....You son of a bitch.”

“Hey, don’t get mad. Again, these are just the what-ifs. Personally, I don’t think there’s anything wrong with boys growing up throwing a few punches around. It forms this wordless connection between them.”

Maru casually stepped forward and Geunseok took two steps back, the atmosphere had tilted in Maru’s favor in an instant. Jiyeon felt uncomfortable. Geunseok was obviously the rude one here, but Maru didn’t seem like such a good person either. He seemed like a very scary person who knew how to take advantage of other’s weaknesses.

“I heard you persuaded your parents saying it would be easier to go to college through an engineering school. Is that right?”

“....How do you...”

“Just found out as I spoke with senior Geunsoo. Ah, let me ask you one more thing. Do your parents know about you acting? I understand that senior Geunsoo’s pretty much a forbidden topic at your house. So how are you fine?”

Geunseok’s face swiftly paled as Maru took out his phone from his pocket.

Chapter 178

“You weren’t planning on telling them you studied hard at the library, were you? There’s no way you’d be that foolish.”

“S-stop spouting bullshit.”

“Ah! One more. I noticed your parents didn’t come to nationals last year. How cruel of them. Or... did you perhaps not tell them? I think almost everyone’s parents came except yours.”

“They were just busy...”

“Alright then. I might as well call them and say you’re doing an excellent job at acting. I’m a friend after all.”

As soon as Maru opened his phone, Geunseok dashed forward, eyes wide with a hint of insanity. Jiyoona froze, terrified.

‘Senior Maru!’

Just as she thought Maru was in trouble, he stepped forward and thrust his shoulder forward, striking Geunseok squarely in the chest. Geunseok crashed backwards with a gasp. Jiyoona covered her mouth in shock as she watched Geunseok on the floor. The boy struggled for air, all the breath knocked out of him from the collision. Maru crouched in front of Geunseok and patted his back.

“You idiot. How would I even know your parents’ phone number? You’re so bad with stuff like this.”

“Cough, cough.”

Geunseok was starting to regain his breath at this point, but his eyes were full of tears. Maru pulled him up by his arm, handed back his bag, and brushed him off. Jiyoona was afraid that a fight would break out again, but Geunseok only observed Maru’s movements warily.

“Geunseok, why don’t you just cool down at home today, and we’ll talk it out tomorrow? We have a lot to talk about anyway, I can only take your childishness for so long.”

Maru loudly slapped Geunseok’s back, the boy jumped before silently slinking away. Jiyoona stared at Maru, dumb-founded. She had thought they would start throwing punches like the other boys she had seen in school, but none of that took place. It was a brief conflict, but Jiyoona couldn’t help but feel it had been a dirty one. That wasn’t a fight just now, it was a...

“Sorry, you were surprised, weren’t you?”

“What? Ah, n-no.”

“You’re probably not going to hand in that registration form, are you?”

Maru scratched his eyebrows with a troubled look. He was quickly returning to his normal, relaxed state. Jiyoona looked at the form in her hand. She originally came to turn it in, but now she just wanted to leave. She had been insulted by the one person she admired and the senior in front of her scared her as well. Although the club didn’t seem safe, it felt wrong to just say no and leave right away, so she tried to change the topic instead.

“U-uhm, is there no one else here other than me?”

“Unfortunately. I thought we succeeded in promoting the club, but it’s too bad. Ah...”

Maru smiled.

“Thanks for what you did this morning. You made our performance a huge success.”

“...You knew it was me?”

“When you were being carried or when you were in front of me?”

“Y-you saw?”

“I saw your friends running. They were fast.”

She thought he hadn't been able to see her. Jiyoong sighed dejectedly, it felt like a dark secret of hers just got revealed.

“I'm joking. I didn't actually see. I just heard from the other two later. Here, since you're here, have a bottle of Yakult.”

“Ah, yes.”

She didn't feel relieved by his words at all. Maru opened the clubroom door and Jiyoong saw a full row of Yakult inside, each with a straw inserted in them.

“What are you going to do with all of that?”

“Guess I'll give it to the third-years. I can't drink at all myself.”

“.....”

She felt a little bad after that, but it seemed rude to give the Yakult back, so she drank it anyway. She exhaled loudly after finishing the bottle.

“You didn't have to drink it so fast.”

“What? Ah, I'm sorry.”

“It's nothing to be sorry for.”

“S-sorry.”

Maru didn't seem to like her attitude and pouted, causing Jiyoong to tense up nervously.

“I know I might be overstepping my boundaries here, but I'll say this. Don't say sorry habitually like that. You might not be able to apologize properly when you really need to.”

Maru took the Yakult bottle from her hands and Jiyoong almost said sorry again as she covered her mouth in surprise. Maru smiled at her and at that moment Jiyoong felt the nervousness flee her body completely. This person may be intimidating, but he had a gentle side, she knew that for sure now.

“Um, senior.”

“Mm?”

“Can I ask you something?”

Maru nodded, Jiyoong's question was simplistic but important.

“Is it possible to become an actress through hard work? It doesn't have to be a major character or anything. I just want to try being on stage.”

She was surprised at how easily the words flowed from her mouth, she hadn't dared to speak like this when faced with Geunseok. Jiyeon watched Maru's mouth with bated breath, she couldn't wait to hear his response and she hoped he would encourage her again.

"No one would know the answer to that."

"...What?"

"There's definitely a chance you might not make it even after trying hard. After all, there's a lot of people who fail despite trying hard."

Jiyeon nodded in understanding. Thinking about it, he was right. If everything went perfectly, simply because people tried hard, then no one in the world would be sad. Geunseok was correct. She didn't have talent, so hard work would be useless for her.

"It's the same as what we did earlier today. The three of us stood in the cold for an hour, but nothing came of it. You appeared, but you aren't about to register, so it's ultimately pointless."

"I'm sorry."

She shook her head immediately since he had told her to stop apologizing, but the apology had already left her mouth.

"Did you see us on stage?"

"Yes."

"Thanks. It must've been quite amateurish."

"Not at all! I enjoyed it very much. Really."

Both the actors and the stage shone brilliantly back then. She wanted to join them, but it looked like she'd have to give up on that dream.

"I'll come to watch when you guys are on stage again. Really."

"Thanks. That'd be great."

She thought about leaving then, but something rose in her chest. She had been told the same thing twice in a row, that some things couldn't be accomplished with only hard work. Was that really the case? Then what of the people who actually did try hard? She wanted to speak up, but she lacked the courage to do so. She stayed silent, not knowing what to do for a few seconds.

"In reality, the phrase 'hard work' is a trap."

Maru spoke as she grabbed another bottle of Yakult from the clubroom. He offered her a third, but she shook her head.

"What do you mean, a trap?"

"You can't be an actor without hard work, it'd be impossible. 'You can do it with a bit more hard work'. You know, stuff like that. Why do you think people say these things?"

Jiyoon pondered for a bit before answering.

“To cheer up those who work hard.”

“That’s the trap.”

“What?”

Work hard, try harder, and harder, and harder. How were these words a trap?

“The phrase ‘hard work’ only exists for those who watch the people that try hard.”

“Those who watch?”

What was he talking about?

“Let’s say there’s an important test happening. You end up passing that test with hard work. Then you’d hear people around you say ‘See? Hard work pays off.’”

Jiyoon nodded, she’d heard that phrase countless times in her life, ‘hard work pays off’. She had to wonder how many people hadn’t heard it before.

“Then, on the other hand, won’t the people say ‘you just didn’t try hard enough’ if you fail?”

The idea that hard work pays off and someone failed because they didn’t try hard enough sounded logical to Jiyoon.

“Do you know how easy it is to say these words? The phrase ‘hard work’ contains both success and failure. That’s why you can easily tell people who already work hard to work even harder. Because the phrase works for just about any situation. If things go well for you, it’s thanks to hard work. If things go poorly for you, it’s thanks to the lack of hard work.”

She suddenly felt betrayed by the phrase, to think that was the reality of it...

“There’s no good analysis required when you use it. It just crushes everything and instantly justifies what you said. How great is that? It’s incredibly difficult to give people a good answer to their current situation. After all, you would need to analyze everything about what they’re going through. But the phrase ‘hard work’ just lets you skip all of that. You failed your test? You didn’t try hard enough. Your English sucks? Try harder. You keep failing your interviews? Maybe you didn’t try hard enough compared to the others?”

Strangely, Maru’s expression changed as though he had sinned against someone.

“The phrase is like an escape route. It lets you judge someone without knowing anything about them. You don’t have to think hard about their issues at all.”

Maru scratched his head with an apologetic look.

“I’m the same, actually. I want to give you a good answer, but I’m still very lacking. In the end, I can only tell you to try hard. But I hate having to say that, because if it turns out that your hard work was for naught, then no one would be there to pay you for the time you’ve wasted. That’s why I don’t talk optimistically. I’d rather tell someone that hard work might not pay off. It’s the least I can do.”

Jiyoon stared at Maru, who shrugged back. In the end, he was saying the same thing— that he didn't know what would happen—but the way he conveyed it was completely different from Geunseok. His words reassured her more than anyone else's.

"So my hard work might not pay off."

"That's right."

"But it also might pay off?"

"Eh... so what I'm saying is..."

Before he could finish his sentence, Jiyoon handed him her registration form.

"I'll try. I-I can't talk very well and I'm very shy, but I'll try my best."

"Did you understand what I told you?"

"Yes!" " ...Are you sure?"

"Yes!"

She didn't care if she couldn't stand on stage. It felt like she'd have a great time if she could work with a senior like this one, and hey—she might actually be able to get on stage again!

"And senior?"

"Y-yeah?"

Maru looked at her awkwardly.

"Were you there on the stage at Anyang during the competition in December?"

"I was. Since my leg was fine back then."

"What role did you take back then?"

"Me?"

Maru took two steps back before jumping up from his spot, he ambled playfully for a bit before raising his hand into the air. He motioned as though he was grabbing something from the air, then bowed deeply. Jiyoon instantly recognized who he was.

"I did something like this. I wonder if you can remember me."

"The one that spoke with the audience..."

"Oh, right. You barely remember, do you? I didn't have a name. Just a teenager."

She couldn't suppress her smile. The person from back then wasn't Geunseok, it was Maru. Her heart seemed to be melting, her dream was coming back to her. If this person helped her, she'd be able to flourish for sure. At the same time, she found herself becoming flustered and didn't think she could even look at Maru.

"I-I'll be leaving now."

“You’re leaving? Why don’t you have some more Yakult...”

“No, no. I-I’ll be going now.”

Jiyoon turned around with a bow, her smile didn’t disappear even as she descended the stairs. She was unable to keep her heart from pounding in excitement, she couldn’t wait to experience what the club had to offer.

‘I can do it. I can do it!!’

Jiyoon bounded down the stairs in delight.

Chapter 179

He felt humiliated. He wouldn’t be this embarrassed if this happened just between him and Maru, the problem was that their junior was standing behind him. Thinking of how he was humiliated in front of something he was actively looking down on angered him to no end. He kicked a trashcan next to the bus station, looking at the trash spill out made him feel a little bit better.

“Hey, you bastard!”

Just before he could leave, he heard a deep voice from behind him. It was a scary-looking old man, Geunseok glanced a few times before picking the trash up.

“It was a mistake. Just a mistake.”

“Really?”

Geunseok smiled awkwardly as the man scanned him. He was swearing as much as he could inside, but he couldn’t show this on the outside; today was an unlucky day. Once he came back home, Geunseok opened the door with a frown, he kicked his shoes off and tried to get in. Once he saw his father reading the newspaper in the living room, he straightened his shoes carefully.

“You came back early.”

“Ah, yes.”

“Studying?”

“I was going to pick up a notebook from home.”

His father gave him a nod, the man was still looking at the newspaper.

“Geunseok.”

“Yes.”

“I enrolled you in an academy. Go there.”

“What?”

“It’s a Chinese language academy, English isn’t enough nowadays. You need English as a base and Chinese as a secondary language.”

“...Um, father.”

Geunseok was about to say self-study was enough, his father slowly closed his newspaper and looked straight forward. The man’s eyes, shining behind his gold-rimmed glasses, was full of disappointment. Geunseok closed his mouth straight away.

“You made a face very similar to ‘that guy’ just now.”

‘That guy’. There were many people his father referred to as ‘guy’, but there was only ever one ‘that guy’. Geunseok’s brother.

“What, you want to rebel against everything I say and leave the house, just like him?”

“N-no.”

“Then what should your answer be?”

“I’ll go to the academy.”

“Of course you will.”

Only then did his father looked away, his father folded the newspaper and took out a wallet.

“Here. Take this. A reward for taking first place amongst all of the first years.”

His dad was giving him a card. A black card.

“You’ll need a lot of money if you want to hang out with the smarter kids. Don’t make them pay for anything, always offer to pay. That’s how you start differentiating yourself from them. You can only make real friends once you get out in society. School friends? Such things don’t exist. The only people you can find in school are competitors, people you need to beat. Rise in the society that the winners have built and make your mark in it, only then can you make friends. Don’t waste your time on emotions, not if you don’t want to end up like him.”

Geunseok took the card with both of his hands. The card only granted him more freedom, so why did it feel more like chains?

‘But I can’t do anything about it. So be it. I’ll keep on living like this.’

He bowed and walked back to his room. Once he put down his bag, he let out a deep sigh.

“Fuck.”

What a shitty day. It felt like his dad was mad *because* of Han Maru. If only the boy didn’t get in his way... Geunseok chewed on his fingertips as he took out his phone, he punched in Suyeon’s phone number and started a call. Suyeon delayed their lesson for two days and went radio silent. He thought he’d be able to meet her just the next day, but she didn’t send him anything.

- Excuse me?

“Um, coach?”

- Yeah. What?

Suyeon was breathing incredibly heavily. Geunseok rolled his eyes as he spoke.

“When can I get my lesson?”

He was annoyed at everything, he felt like meeting Suyeon was the only way to rid himself of this annoyance. Suyeon would use her maturity to console him well, like always. But...

- I'm not planning on doing any lessons for a while. You're talented, so learn by yourself for a bit.

“What? What do you...”

- I'm busy. Bye.

With that, she hung up. Geunseok caught an old man's voice from the other side just before the call ended. Bang. Geunseok punched his table angrily. He flinched in surprise and looked at his door. His father didn't hear, did he? He put his ear against his door nervously. Thankfully, all he could hear was the sound of classical music. A sigh of relief slipped out of his mouth before he sat down on the bed. Everything had gone wrong today. Today was easily one of the worst days of his life.

‘Han Maru, that bastard... He's not going to tell on me, is he?’

If his father finds out about him acting... He didn't even want to imagine the consequences. He still remembered his father from back then, the man delivered an incredibly hard slap to his brother's face when he came back during college. Geunseok felt like his heart was going to stop whenever he remembered the pair of blood-shot eyes that his father used to glare at Geunsoo at the time.

“He can't know.”

Geunseok had a plan, Junmin promised a reward if he brought in results by his third year. A full scholarship was one thing, but he was also promised a network of actors and even a chance to act on a big project. Geunseok saw his future in that promise, he would be a star outshining all else. Money, women, and fame would follow him on this path.

His father didn't suggest any particular path to follow in life, all the man wanted out of him was ‘success’. To his father, the easiest path to success was in studying. Even after Geunseok's brother left home in rebellion to this philosophy, his father didn't even bat an eye. In fact, the man said that his brother would come crawling back in just a few days. Ten years passed by like that and his brother was still a no-name actor.

His father was correct, foolish challenges held no meaning. Perhaps things could be different if success was guaranteed, that's why he thought he'd be able to persuade his father with Junmin's contract. Junmin was well known within the entertainment industry, someone who had connections with many huge companies. His father should be accepting of his actions if Junmin was backing him.

But now was not the time. Right now, Geunseok had nothing to show. If his father found out about him doing acting at this moment, the man would say ‘use that time to study’. Of course, Geunseok didn't have much affection for acting. It didn't really matter if he went into acting professionally or if he just studied, but if he took the latter route, he wouldn't be able to get in the spotlight. He wanted recognition, rather than just to earn a lot of money. Just look, even at his position right now, he was able

to be with a beautiful, charming woman like Suyeon. There were just too many things to lose if he left a field like this.

'I just have to stay quiet just this once.'

If he laid low a bit, then Maru would cool off as well. He could use the juniors then to attack Maru, the idiot would explode just like last time, because he was a 'guardian of justice' or whatever.

"Alright, I just have to endure just this once. That's all I need to do."

Maru and the girl who was hiding behind him... He could just expel them to the stage manager roles. Honestly, he was more pissed at the girl. He wouldn't even have gotten into a fight with Maru if she stayed silent. Right then, he heard the front door open. There was no way his mother was back already. Did his father order delivery food? Just as curiosity seeped into his head, he heard a voice.

"Father! It's been too long."

A bright and jovial voice, it was his brother. A frown instantly formed on Geunseok's face. How dare his brother sound so happy, especially when he was practically kicked out of the house? Was he just trying to show off? How pitiful. His dad should shout soon enough. Or perhaps his brother would get slapped again.

But all he heard was silence. What was going on? His dad wasn't someone who could endure an occurrence like this for very long.

"Let me introduce you. This is senior Lee Junmin, someone who I greatly respect. I believe he's around your age?"

"Hey, watch your language, Geunsoo."

"It's fine, senior. I was practically born like this from the start, so my father should understand. Isn't that right?"

Geunseok widened his eyes. Junmin? He slowly opened his door and peeked out through a small crack, it really was Junmin. He was holding tomato juice, a long-time favorite of their father.

"Who are you?" his dad asked stiffly.

Then again, there was no way his dad would look too kindly on an acquaintance of his brother.

"My name is Lee Junmin. I work in the entertainment industry. Geunsoo kept begging me to come, and I acquiesced. Pardon my intrusion."

His father looked at Junmin for a second before letting him take a seat. As soon as they sat down, Junmin took out a piece of paper from his bag.

"This guy was saying some odd things about how he needed to show you this contract."

"What is this?"

"Please read it."

Geunseok could see his father read the contract slowly. What was it about? After what felt like forever, his father slowly put the paper down on the table.

“You must’ve suffered quite a bit because of my foolish son.”

“You’re right. He’s very childish even at this age.”

Geunseok was shocked, his father was smiling, brightly at that. His father took off his glasses before continuing.

“You see, I’m someone who absolutely despises failure. I was born in what seemed worse than even the city sewers and grew up selling gum and cleaning shoes on the streets. Back then, I only thought of one thing. Success. Money.”

Father looked at the contract again, the smile on his face only deepened.

“No matter what other people may say, money comes before all else. After all, you’re worthless without it.”

“You are correct.”

“I succeeded, at least to a degree. I studied in that pool of mud, using a piece of charcoal as my writing utensil. I used my first pencil until it literally crumbled in my hand. I studied and studied to get where I am today. To me, studying is the easiest way to success. That’s why I was furious when that guy told me he’d succeed through acting, because I knew he wasn’t stupid. He just wouldn’t listen no matter how many times I told him to study.”

“So he was stubborn since back then.”

“Right. That’s the sort of boy he was. I still remember when he ran out of the house. He told me he’d succeed with acting back then. I felt like he was rejecting my entire life right then. Ridiculous. Was success through acting easy? Not at all. The way I see it, succeeding through art in this country takes a ridiculous amount of work and luck. Don’t you think so?”

“Very correct.”

“That’s why I waited until he would come crawling back to my house. I trusted that he would come back to study. But he didn’t. Not even after ten years.”

Geunseok’s brother smiled brightly.

“Twelve, to be exact. I’m thirty one now.”

“You’re already that old?”

“Of course, father. I’m already starting to get wrinkles just like you.”

An unthinkable number of jokes were being exchanged between the two. Their father, who should’ve stood up flaming with rage at any other point in time, smiled brightly. Because Junmin was here? No. Geunseok’s father wasn’t one to care about who was watching when he got mad.

“Twelve years. After all those years, he finally brings home success.”

“How is it? Don’t you think he’s lived a worthwhile life, with this? Well, while money isn’t the sole metric for a person’s entire life, it *is* a decent metric, after all.”

“You are right. Not many people can score something like this in their early thirties. This is a success, for sure. Indeed.”

Father pushed the contract back towards Junmin. Geunsoo was the one to retrieve it.

“We’ll take off, then.”

His brother stood up from his spot, Junmin seemed a bit confused.

“Leaving already?”

“Of course we are. Father, I can go, right?”

His father put on his glasses again before replying, the smile from before was wiped off from his face.

“Leave. I don’t want to see you ever again.”

“At least I didn’t get slapped today. That’s a success in my book.”

His brother turned around with a grin. Right then, Geunsook’s eyes met with his brother’s. His brother shrugged before stepping outside.

“Please take good care of him from now on.”

His father bowed towards Junmin once his brother went outside. His father, bowing? Geunsook felt his head turn blank, he’d never once seen this in his life.

“You don’t even have to ask. Geunsoo has a very good head on his shoulders.”

“I see. He was very free from a young age for sure. He did everything by himself. That’s why I disapproved of him. Because it felt like he was constantly trying to escape my grasp.”

“Even so, don’t you feel proud now watching him succeed like this?”

“There’s no parent who would feel anguish at their children’s success. However, I do feel a little annoyed that he succeeded without my help. It feels like he’s completely escaped me at this point.”

“Boys only miss their parents once they leave their homes. I tried to send him over by himself today as well, but he was very embarrassed.”

“Haha, embarrassed, after hurting me like so all those years ago? What a bad child he is.”

“Probably because he takes after you.”

“He takes after me, you say?”

“Where do you think that stubbornness and strength from your younger years went? He probably knew himself that studying was a safe route to success. He would’ve just found it boring.”

Junmin stood up from his seat, prompting Geunsook’s father to follow.

“Here is my business card. Let’s go for a drink sometime. I feel like we’ll get along.”

“This is the first time I’ve gotten a business card from someone in the entertainment business.”

“What an honor.”

The two men walked to the front door, smiling like they were very old friends. Geunseok closed the door with a trembling hand. This wasn’t right, his brother shouldn’t be the one to get recognized by his father.

“Ah, your second son, by the way.”

He could faintly hear Junmin’s voice. Geunseok felt a bolt of lightning strike his head right then.

“Geunseok?”

“Yes.”

“How do you…”

“You didn’t hear? The boy’s under my tutelage for acting at the moment.”

“Aha, I see.”

“Please come to my theater together with him when you get the time. I’m sure you’ll enjoy it.”

“I understand. I’ll try to make time.”

“Farewell, then.”

Geunseok heard the front door close, he gripped the door handle of his room with trembling arms. Right then, the door barged open. His dad was staring at him with a cold expression.

“You lied to me.”

“U-u-um, father.”

“Your brother rebelled against me, but at least he didn’t lie.”

“Father! Father!”

Geunseok kneeled. His father quietly entered the room and closed the door slowly behind him.

“We should talk.”

Click. The door closed behind them.

Chapter 180

The first thing Suyeon saw upon waking up was a group of bugs she has never seen before on the windowsill, there were caterpillars with exotic patterns dotted with little spikes and something that looked like an enlarged cricket. There was even a time when she looked out the window wondering if she had found a bird sitting on it, it turned out to be a moth bigger than the palm of her hand.

Suyeon walked down to the first floor; this marked her fourth morning in the villa. The location manager, film director, editor and the storyboarders all left on the first day. The only people living here were Moonjoong, Junmin, Geunsoo, and that author she still didn’t know the name of. Junmin and

Geunsoo actually left for Seoul shortly yesterday morning, so there were actually just three of them in the house right now. Thanks to that, Suyeon was the one to prepare breakfast. She walked over to the kitchen with a little bit of expectancy, but there was obviously no one inside.

“Ugh, a lone lady’s cooking for three people by herself and that guy has the gall to stay inside?”

Just thinking about that author pissed her off. She tried her best to strike a conversation with him during the past few days, but she’d been ignored all this time. Was he just incapable of socializing or something? What was shocking was the fact that the man actually has a girlfriend. What was even more shocking was that he was incredibly cold to his girlfriend as well. Just what kind of a person was his girlfriend to be able to take that kind of attitude? Was she buddha?

“You’re treating me like a cafeteria lady? Ok, fine.”

She rolled up her sleeves and got to cooking, she was planning on making some seaweed soup and an omelette for Moonjoong. She had been living by herself for seven years now and had quite the confidence in her cooking. She set the table with food before walking back upstairs.

“Sir, you should have breakfast.”

A little while after she knocked, Moonjoong walked out.

“You didn’t have to think about me.”

“How could I not?”

She put her arms around his naturally as if she was his granddaughter, Moonjoong nodded and walked over to the kitchen.

“Oh my, you’re quite good at cooking. Whoever marries you must be very lucky.”

“Don’t just say that. Can’t you introduce someone good to me?”

As they talked, the author slowly made his way down to the kitchen as well. The man gave Moonjoong a curt nod before coming to the table. Suyeon didn’t prepare a bowl of rice for the man, it was her own way of paying him back for his attitude. Just thinking of the man looking at her in surprise made her feel good already.

The author blinked as he looked at the table, Suyeon smiled. If he wanted breakfast, he’d have to talk to her first. Right then, the man walked over to the fridge and casually took out milk and cereal.

“Why don’t you have some warm rice?” Moonjoong asked.

“That woman doesn’t seem to want to give it to me. They say eating food made by someone unwelcoming can make you sick, so I’ll settle with this.”

Moonjoong turned to Suyeon with a little laughter, Suyeon grit her teeth as she spoke.

“What are you talking about? I was about to get you a bowl right now.”

“It’s fine. I don’t like seaweed soup.”

“That’s odd. I thought I saw you eating it when Mr. Geunsoo made it a few days ago.”

“I’ll correct myself. I don’t like unappetizing seaweed soup.”

The author silently started eating his cereal without saying much else. Moonjoong smiled before getting back to eating himself, the man seemed to be enjoying the situation quite a bit.

“I wonder why that man dislikes me so much. Do you know, teacher?”

“Who knows. They say not even god can know the happenings between a man and a woman. I can’t even begin to imagine what’s happening here.”

“Hah. Teacher... Can’t you just tell me his name? He won’t answer me and I kind of feel foolish for asking at this point. And apparently that name on the book is just a pen name?”

“He’s just very shy. You should take your time with him.”

Moonjoong stood up as well, having finished his meal. Suyeon started organizing the table with a sigh, she’d gotten used to this life already. She thought she’d be back home in just a single day, but she was already headed towards her fifth day here.

‘At least I’m getting a lot out of it.’

Her tension with the author wasn’t anything special, her real objective here was to observe Moonjoong. The man would usually go on a walk after breakfast, along with the author. Today was of no exception. Moonjoong stepped out of the villa with the author.

“Let me join.”

Suyeon walked outside with the book in her hand, the three of them walked the garden path behind the building. After a few minutes of silence, Moonjoong came to a stop in front of a rotting tree.

“There’s a scene where the second son gets murdered with a baseball bat.”

“Yes,” the author replied.

“How do you think he felt?”

“The implication was that he was taking back what was originally his.”

“Originally his?”

“Yes. The sentence that best describes the crazed old man is ‘what’s so wrong about training wild dogs, using my life as bait?’ The old man simply felt that he was taking back what he gave to his sons in the first place.”

“Taking back, huh.”

It’s begun, Suyeon quietly followed the two from behind. The reason why they were here right now wasn’t just to scout out a good location for the movie, they were also fleshing out Moonjoong’s character. Apparently the author was the one who demanded this method. He said his book couldn’t be turned into a movie unless he got to speak deeply with the actor, which was why Junmin prepared this place.

In some ways, the author was an amazing person. How did he have the courage to demand such a thing when this was just his first work?

'Then again, he isn't all talk at all.'

He would've been shot down immediately if he was an amateur writer, but his book was the real thing. The book was incredibly immersive despite it being his first work. The night Suyeon got the book, she stayed up all the way till four reading. She couldn't even go to sleep right away afterwards because of the chills she got. The crazed madness of the old man, the disgusting side of humanity, and yet, the love humans still carried for each other... The book had everything, she wouldn't have hesitated to fund a movie based on this book if she was an investor as well. It was just that good.

"He's a very pitiable human being."

"The problem is that there are too many people like him."

"Committing murder towards the son that cast him out... Thinking about it keeps making me question what is true justice."

"That's why we need to keep talking about this. Even my views have changed as I keep talking with you, teacher. I'll have to consult the director, but I did feel like we might want to get rid of some of the dark feelings in the movie."

"So you're thinking of normalizing murder."

"Sort of. I think the message will carry through regardless."

"Sure, sure. I don't have much of a say in terms of production, so do what you want."

The two started walking again, Suyeon organized her thoughts as well as she stepped forward. These two in front of her were setting up the framework of the movie. Even the investors and the producers had to give weight to Moonjoong's opinion, so their conversation here was very important.

The author was especially tempting to Suyeon the more she looked at him, the man said that he'd use the conversation here to talk to the scenario author later on. He even seemed to be preparing for his next work using his ideas from here, Suyeon had a lot of expectations for his later works because of this. Junmin seemed to want to turn this man into something big. There was no way he'd let the author have his way with this otherwise. This meant that the author's later novels had a high chance of getting a drama or a movie based on it. If she managed to give him a decent idea, he might even base a character off of her. That would automatically give her an edge over everyone else.

The wind was getting colder. The two men made their way deeper into the mountain, Moonjoong slowly looked up to the sky as he passed by a pine tree.

"Is killing a person really that bad?"

Suyeon felt a chill go down her back, the man was eerily calm. Suyeon has been observing how Moonjoong tried to take hold of his character ever since she got here. His method was very simple, method acting. The thing was... Moonjoong seemed to become more and more like the old man in the novel as time went on. Every time she saw him say something frightening so calmly, she couldn't help but feel a little envious and be impressed at his skill. She even wanted to steal his practice method.

Of course, there was nothing she could do to steal something that could only come through age and experience. The best she could do was to try to learn from the side, she could only observe what Moonjoong did to focus.

“No, no. Killing a person is wrong.”

“I share that sentiment, but I do find myself getting confused at the edge cases. If a family of a victim kills a serial killer, is that really a wrong thing?”

“I suppose it’s a matter of ethics and justice.”

“I occasionally think this, but the law is far too inhumane. Laws carry no love. Living in this era where personal revenge is forbidden romanticizes the violence in movies.”

“Was the old man right in his acts?”

“That’s what I’m hoping you would express. I don’t have a feel for it at all as of now.”

They walked forward with a mutual nod of understanding. Suyeon could only think of one thing when she saw them, a damn bunch of lunatics.

‘But that’s what makes them so charming.’

The world wasn’t for normalcy, it wanted the crazies. Suyeon followed them quietly today as well, hoping she could imitate some of that craziness that these two were expressing.

* * *

“It’s all because of you.”

Maru had to think for a few minutes about what he should even say when Geunseok told him that out of nowhere.

“You ruined everything. God damn it.”

Geunseok disappeared out of his sight with just that, Maru only found out the day after from Taesik that Geunseok quit the club.

“He switched clubs?”

“The study club, yes.”

“Why so suddenly...”

“He said he got bored of acting.”

“Bored?”

Maru couldn’t understand what was happening for the life of him, so he went to visit Geunseok at lunch. He tried to talk to the boy but was met with complete silence, it would’ve honestly felt better to just speak to a wall.

“Let’s see how you guys can thrive without me.”

That's the only thing Geunseok told him in the end. Maru didn't even feel the need to respond to that smirk, so he just left.

"So what now?"

"You, me, Bangjoo, Jiyeon. And the four third years."

"We still need two more people."

Daemyung had a crestfallen face. They turned to look at the calendar at the back of the classroom, it was Saturday. The last day the students would get to choose their clubs. If they didn't turn in forms by today, they would lose their clubroom.

"The filmmaking club was requesting their own clubroom. The vice president of the school council told me."

They got some information on current events thanks to a friend. At this rate, the filmmaking club would take over their clubroom.

"I suppose we'd have to find two randoms."

"Yeah, there's no other way."

"I mean, we need to keep our clubroom first and foremost. We can just change things again next week."

They had no choice but to recruit first years next week. Maru stood up from his seat and walked to the front of the class, he gathered everyone's attention by knocking on the blackboard.

"Anyone down for a part time job?"

They needed club members before anything else.