

Once Again 271

Chapter 271

Exams ended, and it became a new month. It was June now. The grade card, which some had been anticipating, and most had been dreading, came out. Maru was 10th in his class. He was satisfied. After all, he was above average.

“Don’t forget to get your parents’ signatures.”

The homeroom teacher ended homeroom after that. As soon as he left, everyone started sighing.

“Haa, I’m doomed,” Dojin sighed as he put down his grade card.

He skimmed through it and saw that he was 27th in his class.

“Like I told you last time, you won’t get into culinary arts college without good grades.”

“Apparently, I can go to one with the interview and a practical skill test for junior colleges.”

It seemed that he had done a bit of research.

“Or, I’ll just forget university and just start from the bottom in a random restaurant.”

“You mean Iseul’s store?”

“No, that’s the place I have to take care of in the future.”

“Oh? I’m kinda confused because you sound so serious.”

“Really now?”

Dojin was commuting to his girlfriend’s, Iseul’s, family store to do a part time job. Although he started off with helping out with menial chores, it seemed as though he was learning how to cook from Iseul’s mother. Maru jokingly said that he’ll marry into her family, and the joke was no longer becoming a joke.

“Cooking was fun. It’s hard peeling onions and mashing garlic, but the satisfaction I feel when I finish a dish and put it out is considerable. If the customers say that it was delicious then that’s the cherry on top,” Dojin grinned.

It seemed that he had found his calling.

The general outline of the education system in South Korea went like this: elementary school focused on building humanism within the children; middle school focused on educating career paths, intended to induce them to think about what they want to do in the future; while high school focused on the specialized education according to their career path. Though, this logic didn’t apply in the current era.

There was one and only one objective upon entering elementary school. That was college. The question ‘what is your dream?’ had long been lost, and students wrestled with their pens and papers all the time in order to get into a better university. Middle school and high school were no different. None of those places taught about what life was.

Even teachers always said that 'you can do that in college'. Everything had to be delayed until after entering college. They did not teach the students anything about the world. Like that, the students would spend 12 years of studying to get into college and suddenly become adults. By then, they would be 20 years old. Even though 20 wasn't that young, the only thing students knew by that time was the ranking of universities within the country due to the 9 years of compulsory education and 3 years of semi-compulsory education.

They were supposed to think about what they want to do for a living, and find what they were good at, but due to the lack of care from the older generation, as well as the incompetence of education, students would have just become a machine that solves questions, with 'dream' something being out of sight.

In that sense, Dojin could be considered a lucky guy. He already found what he found enjoyable. He also had a place he could show his talents, so it was all the more better.

"Good luck with that."

"Thanks."

"But have you told your parents about it?"

"I tried bringing up that topic indirectly, but they don't seem to hate it that much. My dad liked it. He said cooking was also a skill set, and that there won't be any problem with living in this country with a good skill set."

"Your father is 100% right on that. If you don't find any hope in studying, you'd better start focusing on cooking instead. Look into cooking classes and the like. You should learn the basics at least."

"I'll think about it."

His friend, who had once been wondering about what to do with his life, had decided on a direction and was going forward. Maru felt proud for some reason. At the same time, he felt a sense of warning that he could not stay lazy. Today was the 3rd of June. It had been three days since the shooting of the movie began. He did not know how much of the story they filmed already, or whether or not there were any problems, or what it was like during the shooting, but he believed that no news was good news.

The shooting of the movie was scheduled to take two months. According to what he heard, the finalized movie was going to be released at the end of this year or at the beginning of next year after all the editing was finished. When he first heard about the schedule, he wondered if 6 months was all it took to produce a movie. That was because most movies had the tag '5 years of production' or even '10 years of production' when they were being talked about.

Geunsoo filled his curiosity on that matter.

-That's because the planning stage is included in the production time.

Aptly named 'pre-production', the stage that decides the general direction of the movie took the longest period of time. The movies with long 'production times' were apparently those that had a lot of effort put in in the pre-production phase or experienced trouble during that phase.

The production of the direction, the script as well as the research into the world-building of the movie had to decide everything about the movie, so it had to be done to perfection. Naturally, that took a long time.

After that was the crank-in, which was the actual filming phase, also called the production phase, followed by the post-production phase, where all the editing would happen.

-The filming period itself is not that long unless it's a blockbuster-level movie where each scene has to be created from scratch. In Korea, it's mostly around two to four months. With a good rhythm, it can take as short as a month. After taking all the video footage comes the editing part. I mean, the film rolls cannot be called a movie themselves. The quality of the footage before editing is not that good.

As this work involved the best staff and the best actors within the country, perhaps two months was a generous amount of time.

'18th of June,' Maru reminded himself of the date he would be shooting his scene.

Fortunately, it took place on a weekend, so he didn't have to miss out on school. Although it was a night shoot, he had to be there at the scene beforehand, so things would have gotten a lot more complex if it took place on a weekday.

'Is it about time I make a decision?'

Junmin had told him that he would become busy once he started working. What he meant is that his school attendance record might be affected. He would have to repeat a year if he missed out a third of the total academic year, so he had to take care of that as well. Of course, an actor who has not made a name for himself like him would never become that busy, but it was always good to prepare beforehand.

"Oh, yeah. Maru. I heard that the instructor isn't coming today."

"Yeah, I heard as well."

Daemyung spoke to him. The reason she couldn't come was probably because of the movie shoot. She had mentioned that she might be doing a new drama soon. She would do her instructor work on a level that does not hinder her career, and Junmin should have allowed that as well.

"We might have to do this by ourselves."

"Really? Then I guess I should put more consideration into it."

Daemyung accepted that fact without much hassle. Maru thought that Daemyung would complain, but he unexpectedly looked calm. There were people who became lazy when they came into power, while there were also people who became more capable when they became in charge of power. Daemyung seemed to be the latter. He had once said that he did not have any intentions on becoming a respectable senior in front of his juniors. He said that he just wanted to create a stage where everyone could enjoy acting.

He was a fellow that liked acting. He was plenty capable of filling in Suyeon's absence. Above all, the juniors trusted and followed him, so there wouldn't be any trouble at all.

“Maru, didn’t you say that you have a shoot as well?”

“Mine’s on the 18th. It’s just one day, so it won’t hinder us that much.”

“That’s a relief. Oh, starting today, we’ll take an hour off every day to create props and practice acting after that until 9. Are you alright with that?”

“No problem.”

“Dowook, how about you?”

Dowook, who was sleeping, slowly raised his hand and made a circle with his hands. Daemyung nodded.

“Since exams are over, I guess we can practice with a peaceful mind,” Daemyung stretched his arms out as he said that.

‘Matters outside school are important, but I can’t be negligent about this either.’

As the acting club was quite small, each member had to put a lot of effort in in order to create a play. It wasn’t that Maru was entirely carefree, but after seeing Daemyung, he felt that there wouldn’t be any big problems. Daemyung was just that capable in leading the club.

Just then, the speaker announced the start of the next class. Maru took out a notebook and the textbook from his bag. The exams were over, and it was back to a rather boring everyday life.

* * *

“Phew, thanks for all the work.”

“You too. Thanks for helping.”

“I’m doing this for money, you don’t need to thank me.”

Miso threw a can of beer to Ganghwan. Today was the last day the play ‘The Lottery Dream’ was performed. Throughout the morning, they took out all the props on the stage with their juniors and returned the small theater to the state before they rented it. Although it was only for a short time, standing on stage again was very fun. I wish I had more talent in acting - Miso thought as she drank the foam on top of the beer.

“What happened to the drama you told me?” Ganghwan asked.

He really was dumb-witted at times like these. Miso emptied half of the beer in one gulp before shaking her head. She managed to get her hands on a drama script through Junmin, but she didn’t get the okay from the director. Miso smiled bitterly when she was evaluated as ‘having good acting skills but her looks didn’t fit the character’. When she was twenty, she challenged auditions without taking much damage. She took to heart the old saying ‘failure is the mother of success’ as she took those challenges. However, once she became thirty and she started spending more time teaching other people how to act rather than acting herself, she turned her eyes to reality. She started professionally teaching aspiring actors.

“Aah, I guess there goes my dream of becoming a superstar.”

“You’re talking as though you’ve given up completely.”

“Hello? Mr. Yang Ganghwan? I might have a young-looking face, but I’m thirty-one years old this year. Don’t look down a lady after thirty. It makes me feel like the world is turning stiff.”

“Young-looking, she says, pfft.”

Miso crumpled the empty beer can with her bare hands and threw it towards Ganghwan. The can fell on the floor with a crisp sound after hitting Ganghwan’s forehead.

“I pity the teacher that’s going to marry you. I really do.”

“Do you want me to beat you up for real?”

“No, I’m still too young to part ways with this world, so I’ll politely decline.”

Ganghwan gave her a chicken skewer that was sold on the streets of Daehak-ro. They always used to come out and eat some chicken skewers with beer like this after finishing off a play.

“Have you met senior Junmin?”

“I did.”

“What about the contract?”

“I signed one.”

“So now, you and I, as well as Geunsoo, are eating off of one pot. Goodbye poverty!”

Ganghwan rejoiced. He was the type of person who would spend any money he earned, so he was always short on money despite earning a decent amount. He also spent most of the profits from the play this time paying his juniors, so he had enough to barely get by in his bank account.

“Isn’t it time you make a savings account or something?”

“Nah, there’s no woman to marry me, so I don’t need one. Life is about spending what you earn, you know?”

“Damned lunatic. Why do both you and Geunsoo live life the easy way?”

“Miss Yang Miso, why do you leave out your name from that list?”

“Unlike certain men, I worked hard to become a made-self woman you know? I have a house under my name as well.”

“Now that, I envy you.”

Ganghwan grinned.

“Do you really not have a girl you’re dating?”

“Nope.”

“Well, I guess no one would date a person like you who suddenly loses all contact. I was flabbergasted when you actually cut off all contact to experience homelessness first hand.”

“You’re bringing up old stories again. Don’t worry about me and worry about yourself. That teacher of yours is a saint so don’t let him go, okay?”

Miso punched Ganghwan’s waist since he got on her nerves. Ganghwan grabbed his waist in pain.

“Geunsoo started shooting apparently.”

“I heard.”

“Wanna go look?”

“Don’t get in his way and just stay here. If you’re so free, then try getting a girl in Daehak-ro. You’re not gonna live alone forever, right?”

“Please, just let me take care of my own romance, alright? You’re not my mom, nagging me like that.”

Ganghwan grumbled for a moment before standing up abruptly.

“Since I’m free, I should go see my first disciple.”

“Your first disciple?”

“The old-fashioned dude.”

“Oh, you mean Maru.”

“Wanna go?”

“Should I?”

Miso looked at Ganghwan and smiled. Maru had told him not to interfere with them too much, but just going to see them was not interfering, so it probably wouldn’t matter.

“Oh, wait. Kim Suyeon is there as their instructor, right? I suddenly don’t want to go.”

Just as Ganghwan was about to sit back down, Miso pulled him up again.

“You’re a man. Why do you change your decisions on a whim like that? Let’s go for now. I want to see my cute juniors.”

She hadn’t even greeted the new first years properly. She thought that she should buy them something nice and cheer for them.

Miso started the car after putting the unwilling Ganghwan in her car.

Chapter 272

After school was over, all members of the acting club gathered on the fifth floor. This was their first gathering after the exam period. No one mentioned a thing about exams and they went straight into practice. They did some exercise under Daemyung’s lead and was just about to start the read-through when Aram asked when they would wear the outfit that Suyeon lent them.

“We need to get them checked anyway, don’t we?”

She wasn't wrong so they decided to do so. Aram giggled and took Jiyeon to the bathroom while the boys changed in the class. As this was a play set in urban settings, there weren't any difficulties acquiring the outfits. For the police uniform, there was one their graduates left behind and for the rest, it was fine with casual clothes. The most difficult to prepare was the hostess, but Suyeon took care of that.

Maru also took out a full suit from his bag. It was something that he found while visiting shops that sold carryover products. The owner there sold the suit to him for cheap saying that it was damaged while the previous owner worked in a logistics warehouse.

"That's decent."

It was well-repaired. The old lady that told him to tell her his size and told him that he should leave it to her had some great skills.

"I-it does fit, I guess," Daemyung, who put on the police uniform with difficulty, spoke in front of the mirror.

A jumper with the police mark and black pants. He was also wearing a yellow vest with a walkie-talkie on it. He would perfectly be a policeman with a law enforcement baton.

"Thanks for all the work in drunk driving control," Maru spoke with a smile.

Behind Daemyung was Dowook wearing a leather jacket. He was the perfect stereotype neighborhood delinquent. He looked like the type of guy that people would offer money to out of fear if they walked by and saw him smoking in a crouching position.

"Be kind to others, Dowook."

"Don't bullshit me."

"Your foul mouth definitely makes you look like a delinquent."

"Ugh, I should just..."

He would be evaluated well for his delinquent acting as long as he did not get stage frights. Bangjoo tried swaying with his tie still on, but took it off after thinking that it didn't feel right. Instead, he undid the top two buttons and picked up the empty soju bottle.

"Do I look drunk now?"

Bangjoo's role was that of a drunkard.

"You can't be a drunkard with just the outfit alone. You'll have to do well with your acting."

"Right? But isn't this soju bottle good?"

"It's not like you can bring a soju bottle to a holding cell, but I guess it's fine since it's a play."

Bangjoo nodded back and tightly clenched the soju bottle.

"It would be perfect if I had a sip of soju before I went on stage, right?"

"I don't think so. If you don't think that you can do it, you should ask your sister. There's a splendid acting teacher close to you."

"I'd rather self-study acting than learn acting from my sister. My sister never lets things go undone. If I ask her to teach me then... urgh, just thinking about it is horrible."

Bangjoo shook as though he didn't want to imagine the scenario.

As Maru didn't have a complete understanding of Joohyun, he just nodded.

"But seonbae, the suit really suits you," Bangjoo told Maru.

Maru smiled and redid his tie. He wore suits an uncountable number of times in his previous life. If he looked awkward then that would be a problem in itself. He even remembered sleeping in a suit after coming back home from working into the night. He wore it that much so his body remembered how to look good in it.

They saw each other's outfits and checked whether there were any problems or not. Aram opened the classroom door and entered. She was wearing a vertical striped suit and a white t-shirt. As it was a casual-style suit, she didn't feel like a company employee. As her role was that of a scammer, she had to look neat and tidy, and the outfit that Suyeon chose for her fit that description perfectly.

"It suits me, doesn't it?"

"It's good for sure," Maru smiled as he spoke.

Aram took out some round glasses from her chest pocket and put it on.

"Don't I look more intellectual now? Like a proper scammer?"

"Where did you get those?"

"I got them from the instructor's house. I've never seen someone with a dress room before. I didn't know what to look for the last time I went there, so this time, I had a look at many things. But seriously, clothes filled a room half the size of this classroom."

Aram raised her thumbs up. At that moment, Jiyeon peeked out from behind Aram. Her body was still hidden behind the door, so her outfit couldn't be seen.

"And voilà!"

Aram dragged Jiyeon out and put her in front of herself. Maru made an awkward laugh. Jiyeon was wearing a jacket on top of a one-piece dress that was knee-length.

"He-hey!"

Jiyeon immediately hid behind Aram's back. Maru had a glance at the boys behind him. Dowook and Bangjoo were giggling as though they just discovered something fun while Daemyung didn't know where to look and his eyes were wandering everywhere.

"It suits her, doesn't it?"

Aram moved sideways and spoke. Jiyoong was now revealed for everyone to see. Her baby face was blushing and she was pulling down the edge of her skirt with all of her might. Meanwhile, Aram pulled up the skirt that Jiyoong pulled down.

"There's no sexy beauty if you pull it down."

"B-but it's too short."

"It's fine. That's normal these days. Just look at the people on TV."

Jiyoong gave up after arguing with Aram for a while. She looked down and walked a step forward.

"It's the outfit that the instructor chose. How is it, it suits her, doesn't it?"

Aram was more excited than Jiyoong for Jiyoong's clothing. Maru thought that Aram's purpose in coming to school was to tease Jiyoong. Maru scanned Jiyoong from top to bottom. For now, she fit the stereotypical 'hostess' image. Although she didn't give off a sexy beauty due to her baby face and her embarrassed actions, her clothes definitely fit the bill.

"D-doesn't it look strange?"

"You're acting strange. What do you think, Daemyung?"

Maru passed the question over to Daemyung. Daemyung, who was at the back, was startled.

"Wh-what do I think about what?"

"I mean Jiyoong's outfit. I'm asking your opinion on it."

"...It does suit her, but."

"But?"

"Uhm...."

"Say it. You'll have to do the fine-tuning yourself."

"I'm thinking that it's a little too lewd."

Daemyung looked away in embarrassment after saying those words. Jiyoong also flinched and stuck right next to Aram.

"Lewd, you say. I guess that works then. I think she's got the general theme right," Maru smiled as she spoke.

Her outfit might need some adjusting so that she doesn't feel uncomfortable in it, but there didn't seem to be any visible problems for the time being. Though, she looked cute no matter what she was wearing.

"Jiyoong."

"Yes."

"It's the role you wanted to do. I can understand that you're embarrassed but we can't have you flinching on stage. Also, do you know how a hostess acts?"

“N-no.”

Maru groaned. How was he supposed to explain such a thing to a girl who was raised in a good environment? She should be aware of the general things that hostesses did, but completely understanding such a person was impossible without seeing the person in question.

There were many cases where businesses were done in private rooms and occasionally, call girls would be called to such rooms. Everyone knew that it was a bad culture, but within the ecosystem known as society, ethics didn't always take priority. In Maru's faint memories, he remembered sucking up to a company executive that distributed the work. He induced them not to call women by having them drink a lot, but he ended up bringing girls to the people who didn't even glance at the contract form.

Just because a woman worked in a bar didn't mean that they were all seductive. In fact, most of the time, they looked neat and tidy and it would be impossible to recognize where they worked if they were brought outside. However, as their job required them to steal the hearts of men they see for the first time, those ladies had a seductive aura about them. They didn't blatantly try to invite men to themselves, but they made it so that the man would want them.

“Do I have to know?” Jiyeon asked.

Maru thought about it for a moment before shaking his head. This play was done by high school students. There didn't seem to be a need to go that far to be realistic. Although professional actors did all sorts of things to adjust themselves into the role, amateurs, much less people that just got into acting, didn't seem to require such a thing. It should suffice with just imagination.

‘I should keep the two separate.’

It would be foolish of him to ask his juniors to act on the level of Moonjoong's. He had somehow set Moonjoong as the standard after being deeply inspired by Moonjoong creating his character. His standards had become too high.

“The instructor will tell you that much. You'll have to listen to her advice.”

“Ah, alright.”

Maru scanned the club members that got into their outfit. Although they looked awkward right now as this was their first time, they would soon get used to it. Acting was like clothes, and doing it for a long time would make them used to it just like how clothes fit the wearer after a long time. What was left now was to act so that they fit the image that they were showing.

“Wow, are those stage outfits?”

Hearing the sudden voice, Maru turned around to look at the door. He saw Miso there who was peeking through.

“Senior.”

“I'm here, too.”

Ganghwan was there behind Miso as well. Dowook and the first years clearly didn't know them. Maru approached the two.

“What brings you two here?”

“I didn’t even get to greet them properly before because you chased me out. So I’m here to see the juniors today.”

Maru received the paper bag from Miso’s hands. He smelled dumplings from it.

“You guys haven’t had dinner, have you?”

“Not yet.”

“Then let’s eat first. We haven’t eaten either. Also, long time no see, Daemyung.”

“Haha, it sure has been some time, hasn’t it?” Daemyung scratched his head as he spoke.

Maru secretly asked Ganghwan who entered the classroom.

“You don’t have anything for us?”

“Hey, I bought those dumplings.”

“Aha.”

“But why are you guys practicing here? I saw a wide place on my way here.”

“Some things happened. That place is now the baseball club’s gym.”

“Really?”

While Maru talked with Ganghwan, Miso had everyone sit down and was in the middle of introducing herself. She was such a devil when she was here as an instructor, but now that she came here as their senior, she couldn’t be more kind. Perhaps that was Miso’s real self.

“But hey, you look like a total delinquent.”

Miso suddenly pointed that out to Dowook. Even the almighty Dowook slightly panicked when she said that all of a sudden and just smiled back awkwardly.

Maru thought that Miso was as direct with her words as ever. He sat down next to her. He set the dumplings that she brought and they started eating. Daemyung explained that Miso was a graduate of the school. Maru did not miss that Jiyeon’s eyes glistened when she heard that Miso was one of the founders of the club.

“Daemyung is really good at introductions. Oh, by the way, he is Yang Ganghwan, who is also in the acting scene. If you guys continue to make an effort into this field and develop your dreams as an actor, there’s a high chance that you’ll get to meet him. He’s quite a well-known actor after all.”

“What’s up with you all of a sudden? Flattering others like that.”

Ganghwan looked at Miso with a sour face. The rather stiff atmosphere died down a lot thanks to Miso and Ganghwan’s banter. The club members relaxed as well.

The one that had the most questions was none other than Aram. Of course, she wasn't interested in the acting part, but about Miso's private life. After hearing Ganghwan say that she might end up getting married to a teacher of this school, everyone widened their eyes and looked at Miso.

"Who is it?"

"Th-then you're marrying someone who taught you in high school?"

"Who is it?"

Unable to win against the onslaught of students, Miso mentioned Taesik's name. After finding out that the teacher in charge of the club was the protagonist of the story, Jiyoona and Aram exclaimed and started asking Miso to tell them more about the story.

Maru saw that there was a smile on Miso's face. It seemed that she was feeling good. They listened to Miso and Taesik's love story for a while. From time to time, Ganghwan interrupted, saying that Taesik was pitiful, and each time, Miso stuffed a dumpling in Ganghwan's mouth.

"It sounds like a drama."

"Right."

The two girls seemed deeply interested in the romance that surpassed the generation. They really were emotional when it came to things like these.

"But can you make a living off acting? Not just acting but related fields as well."

Dowook asked his first question. Miso started her reply by saying 'that's a sharp question', before continuing to explain about the overall situation in the acting field. It was definitely not an industry that was easy to make a living off of, and she also mentioned that resolve wasn't enough to become successful.

"But it's definitely fun. If you have the intention, then it's not a bad idea to challenge it. Of course, if anyone close to me told me that they wanted to do acting, or that they wanted to become an actor, I would try to stop them from doing so, very strongly too. If they still want to do it despite that, then I'll help them to the best of my abilities. Oh yeah, why do you ask? Are you interested?"

"No. I'm going to succeed my dad's petrol station."

"You're quite cocky."

"...."

Dowook looked away.

"Although I only spoke about the bad parts, there's someone successful right in front of you. I am making a living off acting. This fella next to me is the same. I can't say words like 'you'll definitely be successful if you put in the effort', but if you do get through that huge hurdle, then you'll have no problems in making a living off of it. Oh, this dude lives like a poor dude, but that's because he doesn't plan his life properly."

Ganghwan blocked his own ears with his hands. He didn't want to listen to it again.

“If you are serious then try challenging it. You’ll be a made-self woman like me. Don’t be afraid of failure. If you try, then you’ll be able to do it.”

The club members nodded their heads and exclaimed when Miso seemed full of confidence. She became successful both romantically and financially. Although Maru felt bad for saying this, he had to make the correction.

“It’s not a made-self woman, but a self-made woman.”

Maru had to avoid Miso’s sharp gaze after that.

Chapter 273

“I told you to be quiet. You guys aren’t here because you did anything good. If you have any shame then just stay quiet. Silence - don’t you see that word on the wall?”

The policeman stomped on the ground. The people in the holding cell competed to see who had the most desperate life but had to shut up when the policeman shouted. However, that only lasted a moment and they started talking again.

“You know... I... I mean, I lived quite a pitiful life.”

The girl that stuttered revealed that she worked at a bar. Her stuttering made her look awkward. Someone interrupted her words midway through.

“Just shut up already! I can’t sleep because of all the noise,” one of the youths, who was sleeping against the wall, suddenly shouted. His scary eyes scanned his surroundings. The other people in the cell whispered amongst each other so that the youth could not hear them.

“You’re in a place like this at your age. Don’t you pity your kids at home?”

When the youth shouted, the policeman, who was doing his work near the holding cell, frowned and stood up. He tapped on the bars of the cell with his file.

“Hey you, why don’t you stay quiet? Huh? You’re a frigging regular here. Why don’t you turn over a new leaf for your father and mother? Aren’t you tired of coming here every time? You’ll be going to the detention center at this rate, you know?”

“...I didn’t do anything that bad.”

“That’s even more of a problem then!”

The youth was a lion inside the holding cell, but was no more than a rabbit in front of the policeman. When the policeman left, the delinquent bared his fangs again, but the people inside only snorted at him. They realized the delinquent’s true nature.

“You lil’ bahstaaard!” Suddenly, someone spoke with a slurred tongue.

A man giving off the stench of soju was swaying as he approached the delinquent. The delinquent seemed afraid of the man whose eyes were out of focus and flinched back.

“When I was your age, huh! You know? Uh... huh!”

Perhaps he was too drunk to speak, or maybe he had other circumstances, but the drunk man kept repeating his 'huh's. After that continued for a while, the drunkard just collapsed onto the floor. His voice was loud, but his actions were no different from an actual drunkard.

The collapsed drunkard moved his hand around the floor before grabbing onto a thin ankle. The girl whose ankle was grabbed was a woman wearing a suit. She had darkened skin and was clearly annoyed as she tried to shake the hand off her ankle.

"I really shouldn't be here. Hello, prosecutor? I'm a woman related to Daeyang Corp. If you keep me tied here, you will regret it. You know about Daeyang Corp. don't you? It's the indisputable top company in the country! Aren't you scared of the consequences of keeping me here?"

The woman put emphasis on the words 'Daeyang Corp'. The policeman approached the woman who made an arrogant face as she pushed up her glasses.

"Someone who tried to run after getting the commission fee is actually related to Daeyang Corp? Let me hear it then. Who from which department are you related to? The chairman? The president? One of the directors? Who is it?"

"Wh-who says I tried to run after getting the commission fee? I just had some business at the bank so I was getting it for them and I was caught just as I withdrew the money. It's a misunderstanding!"

"Like hell it's a misunderstanding."

"But it is!"

"Geez, if you're so unjustified, then you'll see the victims tomorrow so talk to them."

"I told you to let me out, not call those people!"

"Do you think what you're saying makes any sense? If you keep being annoying, you'll be moved to one of the inner cells. Don't you see those people working over there? They're working hard to take care of the complaints. Geez."

The scammer puffed her cheeks at the policeman that just went away after clicking his tongue. The scammer called for the policeman several times after that, but the police didn't even listen and focused on his work. The scammer became tired of her actions and just sat down.

"You should've aimed it big if you were trying to scam someone. What's a meager commission fee gonna do?"

The man sitting opposite her spoke. The man wearing a neat suit looked at the scammer with a tired expression. The scammer then started blabbing again.

"Who the hell is a scammer? You're a funny one. Hey, watch your words, alright? I don't know who you are and where you work, but it won't be fun if you treat me like this here. I really am not a person that should be here. Why doesn't anyone understand?"

"Such a well-off woman is wearing such cheap clothes?"

“Cheap clothes? These are brand name ones! Well, not like a person like you would know anything about brands.”

“Brand name? You mean something like this?” Saying that, the man showed her the watch on his wrist.

The scammer widened her eyes and had a close look at the watch.

“That’s obviously fake, isn’t it?”

“You have bad eyes. Rather than that, tell me this Daeyang group guy you know.”

“Why? It won’t do you any good sucking up to me at this point, you know?”

The man shrugged and just stayed quiet. The scammer crossed her arms in victory. Just as she felt victorious, the policeman passed by next to her and approached the man.

“You’ll get to leave tomorrow at 9 when business hours start. People calling themselves your subordinates are here, do you want to meet them?”

“I’m good, thanks. Oh, rather than that, how was the guy with the swollen face?”

“We had a hard time turning him away since he was kneeling down and apologizing. And this is some food that he bought for you. Usually, it would be given out during meal time, but I’m giving it to you early because you’ll be leaving early tomorrow.”

The police pushed half a block of tofu between the gaps of the cell. Seeing that, the hostess spoke,

“He just came in, what’s up with the tofu?”

Her voice was much clearer than before. The policeman ignored the hostess and turned around. The salaryman smiled in disdain.

“It’s quite funny, you know? I’m the one who hit him, and he’s the one giving me presents and apologizing. Do you know the saying, money turns crime into innocence and the lack of money turns innocence into crime?” The salaryman spoke as he looked around with the bowl of tofu in hand.

The people in the cell looked at the salaryman with dejected eyes. It wasn’t a surprise since they just heard from the policeman that a subordinate of his was kneeling in front of the police station. It was likely that he was in a high position, and nothing good would come out of getting on his bad side. Although they were people who were put in cells because of violating the law, they were capable of common sense.

“It’s quite funny when you think about it. That subordinate said the right thing. Meaning, he used forthright words. Isn’t there a saying that you should keep a man that speaks bitter words nearby? That he is the most loyal subordinate? But you know? There’s a limit to being bitter. Can’t it be a little sweeter? Who the hell is he to tell me what to do? You don’t live in society with your mouth. This world is all about power, authority, and lastly, politics. You should know how to suck up to people, and mix lies within your words so that you can survive in this jungle like company. The young ones are only full of spirit. They only know about justice! Does justice give you food?”

The salaryman ate the tofu after laughing.

“Looks like he knows his stuff now. How good is that? He gets to enjoy life by giving up just a little. I do feel relieved since he kneeled down in front of the police station... but I can't forgive him that easily since he's the one who put me here.”

The salaryman's face clearly had 'obstinate' written all over it as he ate the tofu. While everyone stayed quiet, the hostess approached the salaryman.

“You look like you're someone good, oppa.”

The salaryman glanced at the hostess that had a smile on her face and spoke.

“I do work at Daeyang Corp. Though, I'm not in any position high. I'm just in the right position for my age.”

“Oh my god, you're so cool, oppa! I work near here. Come around some time. I'll give you some free service.”

The hostess licked her lips as she said that. At the same time, people around them started laughing. Why were they laughing? She didn't know. It was quite a peculiar scene, but everyone returned to their bitter faces again.

“Hey, ahjumma.”

“Who the hell is an ahjumma?”

“Then what, should I call you a scammer?”

“Who the hell is a scammer? Aren't you the one lying? Of course, I'm not saying I had a bone to pick with that, but just saying. You get what I'm saying, don't you? Let's just leave it on a good note, alright?”

The arrogant scammer avoided the salaryman's gaze. The salaryman also shut up as he didn't want to get involved anymore. The hostess kept trying to seduce the salaryman but returned to her corner of the cell after seeing that there was no reaction.

“Dammit. It's because of old people like you that there are pitiful youths like me. You know that?” The delinquent, who had been staying quiet this whole time, suddenly spoke.

He looked as though he had nothing to fear other than governmental authority.

“If you had made a fairer world, then... yeah? It's because people like you don't do their jobs properly that there's no point in putting the effort in!”

Hearing those words, the drunk man, who was lying down in a weird position, abruptly stood up and raised his right hand into the air.

“That's right! You have your way with words. That's what I wanted to say. What did I do wrong, huh? I haven't done anything wrong. I just commuted to my company and retired at the right age. I was just trying to open a small store and was going to live an ordinary life. But! I can't get any sales! It's fucking damned. I'm not drunk because I want to be. I didn't drink because I wanted to drink! The world made me drink!”

The drunk man started his sermon.

“What the heck? You have no right to say that, old man. If you came here after drinking under the bright sun, then just go sleep. You have no right to complain about the world when your life is in a dumpster.”

“You little bastard! How dare you talk back to your elders?”

“What the heck? You’re fucking senile.”

The two of them grabbed each other by the collar and roared at each other. The policeman, who was sitting at his desk, stood up and came to the cell.

“ALL OF YOU SHUT UP!”

Hearing the police shout at them, the two people let go of each other.

“You’re so badly worried about the world, and you come here because of stealing cigarettes? Why don’t you take care of yourself before worrying about the world?”

“...I’m sorry.”

“And also, mister. What the hell do you mean, ‘you don’t get any sales’? You screwed up a perfectly good store because of your stock trading and you came here because of your debt. I know everything about you and you keep saying lies.”

“...I screwed my stocks because the world is...”

“Stop complaining about the world. I’m busy as it is.”

The police gave him a warning before turning back. The scammer then spoke.

“Actually, I didn’t become like this because I wanted to. I was an orphan when I was young. I don’t even know the faces of my parents. I was raised up while getting beaten up. I... really had it hard.”

The scammer spoke in a pitiful voice. She even wiped away her tears. However, for some reason, she didn’t look that sad.

“If I was raised in a loving environment, I would’ve never done something like that. That’s right, I am a good person, but the environment I was raised in made me who I am. I wanted to lead a good life, you know? If I was just given the chance...,” saying that, she glanced at the salaryman.

The salaryman clearly seemed disinterested, though.

“Aah, I wonder what my father and my mother, who I don’t even know the faces of, are doing. I wonder if they even remember the pitiful child that they abandoned...”

At that moment, the police walked toward the cell before speaking.

“Oh, by the way, your father is coming to see you tomorrow so keep that in mind.”

After the police walked away, the scammer lied down on the spot after clicking her tongue.

“She’s a strange woman, isn’t she, oppa?”

The hostess grabbed the opportunity to say that. At the same time, the delinquent said, ‘see? Adults are the problem,’ and blamed everything on others.

“It’s the world’s fault, dammit!” The drunk man shouted.

“Just shut up if you’re poor! Poor people always had loud voices, urgh,” the salaryman shouted as well.

The holding cell became noisy again. Everyone was pointing at each other. Just then, the police became angry.

“I told you to shut up already! You guys are no better than each other. Don’t you think that you were in the wrong? Everyone’s blaming each other. That’s a good life you have there. Nothing’s your fault. Why don’t you have a look at yourselves? I mean that you should reflect on yourselves a little. Aren’t you embarrassed in front of all the people that live forthright lives?”

The police shook his head as he sighed. The holding cell became quiet again. Everyone mumbled and just looked at the policeman. At that moment, the police picked up his phone.

“Yes, senior. What? The report?” The policeman seemed flustered. He immediately started rummaging through his desk before picking out a piece of paper. The paper said ‘report’ on it.

“I-I don’t have it with me. I told our new one to send it to you. Eh? No way. Aha, it looks like that new recruit forgot about it. Sheesh, he’s no good, is he? He makes so many mistakes? Eh? You’re asking me if I’m blaming our new blood again? Senior. Who do you take me for? I never blame others for my mistakes. Of course. You know better than I do that there’s nothing on me if you take my justice and faith away from me. Yes, yes. I’ll educate the new recruit and have him give you the report immediately. Yes, thank you for all your work, senior.”

The police fumbled after hanging up.

“Dammit, I made a mistake because of you all. Geez, those that blame other people are the worst.”

The people inside the holding cell glared at the police.

* * *

Miso glanced at Ganghwan. Ganghwan nodded his head as though he had read what was on her mind.

“They’re quite good, aren’t they?”

“This... is well, their teamwork is really good.”

“The insufficient parts just make them look cuter. If the one in the lead is that good, then I guess even the insufficient parts look charming.”

“If everyone was making mistakes, the mistakes in speech or bursting out laughing might seem like a flaw, but it didn’t feel like a flaw since it continued so smoothly.”

“I was honestly surprised. Since when did they become so good?”

“There are some parts I want to give advice on, but that’s it. Just advice. Whether they listen to it or not is up to them. Wow, looks like he learned quite a few things from sir Moonjoong.”

Miso crossed her arms and looked at Daemyung. Daemyung’s personality shifted dramatically once he went up on stage. His shy personality seemed like an act and he got into his character very deeply. Right

now, his intonation and action have levelled up and had become even more natural that it surprised Miso. Last year, there were more people, and as such, there was more variety, but compared to this year, last year's people lacked unity. The former club president, Yoonjung, was the mood maker of the club, but she lacked the skills to lead everyone. On the other hand, Daemyung had a full grasp on the job.

'But then....'

Miso had a look at Maru. The play had a depth to it thanks to that child supporting everyone from the middle. The awkward hostess, the delinquent who only knew how to shout, the drunkard that didn't even pronounce his words properly, the scammer that didn't look intellectual at all. All the other characters had something off about them, but Maru's character seemed to make everyone look realistic. Maru's concentration was affecting others around them. The characters that conversed with Maru came to life, and as a result, the play didn't become a mess, though it wasn't perfect either.

If he was better than them by just a little bit, everyone else would negatively affect his performance, but thanks to his overwhelming skills, he positively affected everyone else's performance. Daemyung's leadership and Maru's charisma. The two were the perfect combo.

"Gather round," Daemyung spoke.

The club members gathered around. Miso kept watching. They say silence was golden. It seemed that her advice wasn't needed here.

Chapter 274

"How were we?"

They had a break after a round of practice. Maru asked that question to Miso and Ganghwan who were sitting in front of the window, watching them practice. They didn't have perfect control over their lines, some people burst out laughing, and it was far from perfect, but this was their first run that they showed to others. He wanted to hear their honest opinions.

"You guys need a lot of practice. It's far from perfect. Especially the first years. Confidence is good and all, but skill is something different to confidence. Are you sure that you're putting all your effort?"

"Honestly speaking, it's not as hot as it was last year."

"You were never hot though."

"That's true," Maru replied with a smile.

Last year, they had an objective that was to win the nation-wide competition. In the first place, Miso had the students practice with the competition in mind, so the atmosphere was very competitive and practice was arduous.

However, this year was different. The first problem was the lack of practice space. As their practice space had become smaller, there was a limit to their training. The instructor in charge, Suyeon, was also different from Miso in regards to the way they handled things. Suyeon did not care about the achievements. To her, being an instructor was just a job that Junmin gave her. She never had the

ambition to recreate the past glory like how Miso did. Lastly, the members of the club also had their own circumstances, leading to lack of practice.

"It'll be good if we win, but I'm planning to listen to their opinions first. Also, Daemyung's opinion is very important too."

"I do want to see Woosung High School winning the nation-wide competition, but well, I'm not in charge anymore. They look like they're enjoying it and it's not bad."

"They're all good kids after all," Maru looked back as he spoke.

Daemyung was giving the others an explanation regarding the script. The members were concentrating on him as well. They definitely had a higher sense of unity than last year.

"If you guys are satisfied with the fact that you guys are preparing for a play and don't mind about the results, then I guess this is enough. You're doing well. With a bit more practice, you might be able to aim for 2nd prize."

"What if we aim for the grand prize?"

"Then, like I said, you guys are far from perfect."

At that moment, Ganghwan, who was listening this whole time, spoke,

"It's good to enjoy it. Maru, you are well aware of how Miso can be tiring if she decides to put her mind to it."

"That I do."

"This woman's standards are too high. She wants perfection from those starting off. Working with her will make her teammates tired. However, I can say this: she will make them proud of what they did. After all, the sadness and the joy are multiplied according to the effort and time invested. If you do as you're doing now, then you'll neither be extremely joyful nor extremely depressed after the competition. After all, that's what doing things 'moderately' entails."

"That sounds very charming for me."

"Really? Just moderately doing things?" Ganghwan asked in surprise.

Maru made a bitter smile.

"Honestly speaking, I want to invest as much time as I can in this on the condition that it doesn't get in the way of my work. No, I want to focus more on it even if I have to push myself a little. You know? I actually felt very frustrated that I wasn't able to go on stage last winter. I'm only saying this now, but I would sometimes stare at the clock while stroking my broken leg, thinking that the others should be on stage by now."

"That's because of the effort you put in. That much investment leads to that much loss."

"You're definitely right. If I did things moderately back then, I wouldn't have been frustrated either."

"It didn't feel that good, did it?"

“It was horrible.”

“Doesn’t that make you desire to win even more?”

Hearing that question, Maru shrugged his shoulders. Victory. How many people in this world liked to lose? Any human would want to wear the crown if they could. He was unable to go on stage due to his burns. After moving around vigorously until he smelled sour; reciting his lines until he could hum the words, it felt even more frustrating after it all ended in vain.

He did become ambitious. This year, everyone’s talents were better than last year and they were better unified as well. They definitely had what it takes to challenge the competition.

However.

“Maru, can I see you for a sec?” Daemyung called out. Maru looked at his two seniors as he spoke.

“The club president is calling for me, so if you would excuse me.”

Miso smiled back at him.

“We should get going too, right?”

Miso pulled Ganghwan up. The members of the club realized what was going on and stood in front of them.

“Work hard. And enjoy yourselves. Don’t leave behind any regrets.”

“I’m not a graduate from this school, but I’ll be cheering for you as someone working in the industry. Good luck.”

The two left after saying their goodbyes. Everyone was going to see them out, but the two refused them.

After sending the two off in the corridor, the club members returned to the classroom.

“Miso-unni was so cool,” Aram said as she raised her two thumbs.

Jiyoon also nodded.

“If you spend time with her, you’ll find out that she’s not as cool as you think she is.”

“That’s true.”

Maru and Daemyung smiled at the same time. It was ‘memories’ in retrospect, but at that time, they had an extremely hard time.

“Can I have your attention again?” Daemyung sat down and spoke.

“It’s definitely worth complimenting that you aren’t making as many mistakes as before. First years, well done. However, you still have a lot to go. Lines are something that’s hard to memorize by themselves. You need to engrave them into your body according to the flow of the story. It’s just like how song lyrics are hard to memorize without the melody, and it’s easy to learn it if you try singing it. Acting is the

same. Don't just memorize your lines but try to learn the lines before and after your lines. Going further, try to remember the flow of the story."

The members nodded.

"Aram, your pronunciation and vocal power are perfect. You sound full of confidence as well. However, I want you to bring out the traits of a scammer some more. I'm saying that you should be dynamic with your words. Normally, you should lower your voice and erupt out loudly at the most important moment. That gives you more impact. You'll see what I mean if you try watching videos of people giving speeches. Scammers are people whose voices are very important so bear that in mind."

"Yes, seonbae."

Aram wrote the things that Daemyung pointed out on her script.

"Bangjoo, I like that you aren't shy when you're acting. However, you're mashing your pronunciation too much because you're too absorbed into the situation. Right now, there's only us here and we all know what you're going to say, so we can understand what you're saying, but it's likely that it's not the same for the audience. You'll have to show that you're drunk with your actions, and make your speech a little clearer."

"Yes!"

"As for Jiyeon... I think it'll be better if you let yourself go a little more. The script says this, but the hostess is a charming woman to the point that the people in the cell are giving her glances. But what's important here is that 'charming' doesn't just mean pretty. But right now, you're trying too hard to look pretty. Hm, was that too difficult for you to understand?"

"No. I think I get what you're saying. I'll try to fix it."

Jiyeon nodded as well. Daemyung smiled and continued onto the next person.

"Dowook, you are doing really well. I don't really have anything to point out. If there's just one thing, I wish you could react to your conversation partner's words a little more. You have the tendency to interrupt others mid way because you're too focused on your words, but while that fits the character of a delinquent, it might make your conversation partner panic a little."

"So you want me to restrain myself a little?"

"Simply put, yes."

"Got it."

Dowook accepted it as well.

Daemyung definitely had a wide field of vision. It wasn't easy giving every single person feedback, but he put in the effort every time to give advice. His advice wasn't something vague either, but was incredibly detailed. He was doing something that many people couldn't.

"How was I?"

After his part, Daemyung always asked what he himself could improve upon. There would be an awkward silence if Daemyung was the tyrannical type of club president, but as his personality was so good, the club members could point things out with ease. Daemyung even wrote down even the most minute of things to fix his acting.

'He's one amazing guy.'

He's the type to do well no matter what he did. Daemyung encouraged everyone before they started practicing again. They spent another hour practicing. This time it was much better.

"It's past 8 already," Maru spoke as he looked at the clock. Daemyung gathered everyone around, looking somewhat unsatisfied.

"Well done everyone. Have a safe trip back home."

"Thanks for your work."

Maru waved his hand to Dowook, Bangjoo, Jiyeon and Aram who left the club. Jiyeon and Aram had to go home by 9, so they couldn't stay any longer to practice. Bangjoo lived alone, so they couldn't keep him late, while Dowook was here to fill in the members, so it was hard to ask him to do anything difficult.

Maru spoke to Daemyung, who didn't leave yet.

"If you think about it, last year was amazing."

"You're right. Instructor Miso had us practicing until the last bus."

"We practically lived in school."

"Even if I look back on it, I can't help but wonder. I mean, the girls didn't have a curfew either."

"If they had, then I'm sure senior Miso would have called their parents to lift the curfew and tell them that she would take responsibility."

"You're definitely right."

Maru looked at the clock before speaking.

"You're doing a triple role today as well?"

"It's a pity to leave it here."

Maru picked up the scripts on the floor. It would be good if everyone could practice together, but it was hard to do so. In the end, the only thing the remaining, passionate people could do was to do double or triple roles.

"When should we go back today?"

"I dunno."

Daemyung scratched his head and smiled. He was quite tenacious in the most peculiar things, so it was likely that he would stay here until the last bus if no one said anything to him. And that was just what Maru wanted.

In acting, there was no clear scoring standard. There was no way to know how far one had come or how well they did. However, there came a point when even the actor realizes that he or she had improved.

To experience such a thing, Maru had to spend his time very wisely. He intuitively knew that these practice hours will come back to him in the form of stable acting skills.

“Then let’s start.”

“No interrupting mid way, okay?”

“You don’t need to tell me that.”

After taking in a deep breath, Maru started off the first line.

It was getting late into the night, yet the lights at the school did not turn off.

* * *

Joonggeun always found his filmography to be a pity.

At first, he had no grand dream of becoming a movie director. At first, he started off as a new recruit at an outsourcing camera shooting company. His job was to take videos while wearing camera equipment that weighed several dozen kilograms. He started that job because he found it interesting that he could film the picture he wanted in that square frame.

Then, he chanced upon a movie director that had retired, developing his new dream.

-What good is filming a picture? You need to film a story.

That director, who he now treated as his teacher, moved Joonggeun’s heart. After that, he started studying film production. First, he bought a book titled Filming 101 from overseas and started reading it. After that, he read books related to scenario making. As for using the camera, he had his experiences and learned from his seniors on the field, so he was confident in that.

With his self-study and his unique connections, he spent two years studying what a movie was. At that time, he came to a conclusion.

“Dammit, if you film, then it’s a movie.”

He ignored all of his seniors who used all sorts of English words and aesthetic language to describe how great and how abstract movies were and started shooting movies with an 8mm camera and a single light panel. He grabbed actors he got close to while he worked as a cameraman as well as a junior of his who knew basic audio mixing, and finished a movie in just one month. Then, he submitted the movie in an independent movie award and received a prize.

After that, he worked as a new recruit in the production team under a famous film director for a brief moment and quit because he wanted to be in charge of the megaphone. After that, he went round

knocking on the doors with various production companies with the scenarios he had saved up for some time and he received his opportunity.

That was how his first movie came to be. The results were quite good. For a movie that didn't cast famous actors, the achievements were quite good. However, he badly screwed up his next work and was unable to hold the megaphone for the next 5 years. He started working in film production from the bottom in order to make a living, and shot another movie thanks to an opportunity, but he screwed up that one as well. He was tagged the 'failing director' and he continued writing scenarios for five years after that. By then, he was forty.

He had a place to work, so he didn't have any difficulties in everyday life, but he despaired seeing that all of his work after his first work had failed. However, he did not know how to give up. He was forty-five when his next opportunity came to him. The total budget was 6 billion won, and he decided to take the job with the mindset that he would never grab the megaphone again if he failed this one. The result? It had 7 million views. It was a great success. After that, every film he directed had more than 5 million views. He gained the nickname the 'golden hand'. However, at the same time, he was tagged the director 'whose work had no cinematic quality.'

Cinematic quality. Joonggeun remembered back to his first ever work. No one talked about the lack of cinematic quality for that movie. Even though it was shot in a crappy 8mm camera, had less-than-perfect visuals, and the actors in it were not the best, it was evaluated good for having a 'strong message'.

Ambition. Joonggeun became ambitious. Just as he thought that he was at a level he could show the world, Junmin, a close friend of his, gave him an offer.

-Do you want to try using sir Moonjoong as the main character?

The day after he heard those words, he put the scenario he was writing inside his drawer.

And right now.

"How was I?"

Seeing Moonjoong with an intense glint in his eyes through the monitor, Joonggeun spoke.

"Let's try that again."

He was ruthless.

Chapter 275

The newest member of the lighting team was drinking his coffee while crouching down when a drop of water hitting his head made him look up.

"I think it's gonna pour."

During the morning, when they were shooting the street scene, the weather was perfect, but rain clouds started appearing after five o'clock, and now that it was past eight, it looked as though it was about to pour at any moment. Even the people who were watching outside the restricted zone started leaving one by one. There were people holding umbrellas as well.

“What do we do with the lights when it rains?”

The newest member asked his senior, who was smoking and drinking coffee next to him.

“Obviously, we’ll have to finish before it rains.”

“But I don’t think they plan to finish yet.”

“Then we have no choice but to get ready.”

The senior stood up after sucking on the cigarette for one last time. The newest member also followed suit. The lighting director was coming back after talking with the director.

“Hey, get the rainproofing equipment from the car.”

“God dammit, is it overtime?”

“The director is not satisfied so do you think he’ll end it here? That old sir is amazing too. He’s planning to stick with us until the end. Oh yeah, you over there. You know that we’d be doomed if the lights go out, right?”

“Yes, I do.”

“If the lamps break, we’ll get roasted as well. Look after the generator and the power supply. Let’s cover up the main light first. Also, get ready to pull out since he said we’d be pulling out if the rain starts getting unbearable.”

“Aren’t they making us do too much work?” The senior grumbled.

“Hey, they give us the money at least. Don’t complain and start working. Oh yes, you, once you’re done, then come to my side. You were interested in movie production, right?”

The youngest member brightened as he asked back,

“Can I really?”

“Just make sure you do your job properly.”

The lighting director returned to where the main camera was. The youngest member inwardly rejoiced, clenching his hands.

“Don’t you think you joined a good team? There aren’t many lighting teams that take care of their new blood. I’ve visited a few places but every single time, their new recruit just ran errands. But he’s different. He takes care of people under him.”

“I’m a lucky child, then?”

“That’s right. You’re lucky that you entered this team. Well then, let’s put on the rain covers and clean up the cables. Don’t forget to dig drain passages so that water doesn’t pool. You did this in the military, haven’t you?”

“Of course.”

He then took out the rainproofing equipment from the car and installed them. The shooting scene became busy. The other teams were also preparing their equipment just in case it rained.

'This is how movies are made?'

As the temperatures dropped, people started installing electric heaters for the actors. People that seemed to be managers brought towels and gave them to actors who were getting ready to act. The filming team was busy installing rainproofing equipment while the place where the director was watching the monitor had a canopy set up.

"How many times are we doing this again?"

"That was the fourteenth time."

"That's insane."

The script supervisor's voice entered the youngest member's ears. As the script supervisor was in charge of recording the progress and the order of events that occurred during filming, there was nothing more annoying than repeating each scene several times over. Even more so, because of the change in weather and the following change of equipment. The new recruit looked at the script supervisor who exchanged a few words with the director before quickly walking away. Just as he returned to the car and was cleaning the devices that got wet from the drizzle, the lighting director appeared.

"We're changing the backlight. Get the one at the very back."

"Yes!"

The youngest member took out the light stand and followed the lighting director. From how the actors were standing up and starting to exercise, it seemed that the filming would resume soon.

"Over there, hold the boom mic properly!"

The person that seemed to be the sound director suddenly shouted. The person holding the boom mic flinched and adjusted the directions of the boom mic.

"Director Kim, what did you do with engineer Park, and why is a newbie holding the boom?"

"Engineer Park got a ruptured appendix. He told me he'd be joining us after the surgery and sent me that guy, but he's not up to par."

"Just make it so that I don't capture some fur on my camera. It was drooping down before too. Why don't you hold it?"

"I'm not lowering myself to hold that."

"Quit your yapping. Director Choi Joonggeun is in a bad mood, so let's be careful."

"That dude gets in a bad mood on a whim though. It's nothing new. Oi, director Choi! Stop being so angry!"

The youngest member supported the lighting director as he listened to the conversation. When he first came to the filming scene, he didn't know what to do. People were calling each other from places, but

he couldn't understand them properly and wandered around without knowing anything to do. Sometimes, he helped out a team that wasn't his own and was scolded because he didn't do his own job. Though, he got used to the job now and there weren't any more problems.

"Everyone on stand by!"

The youngest member of the production team shouted. Seeing that person checking up on the state of every actor, the lighting team member cheered for him inwardly. Let's do our best as the youngest members of each team.

"Hey hey! It's starting to rain."

"Don't let the outfits get wet!"

"Watch out for accidents!"

It started raining, but not enough to put up umbrellas. However, that only applied to people, as even that amount of rain was fatal for the equipment. As such, the filming location became more bustling. Despite that, there weren't any big accidents thanks to all the preparations they had done before.

The youngest member of the lighting team approached the main monitor in secret with his senior. They saw that the director, the script writer, and the camera director were frowning. They were clearly giving off the unapproachable aura. They were retaking each scene many times. Seeing wrinkles on director Joonggeun's forehead, he gulped.

Moonjoong was sitting on a bench in the streets, and on the other side were extras that would just pass by. This was the main character's soliloquy scene. When Joonggeun signalled with his eyes, the assistant director gave the signal to the youngest member of the production team.

"Get the clapper ready."

With the assistant director's signal, the youngest member of the production team stood in between the camera and Moonjoong, holding a slate. He waited with the slate open. After the recorder gave him the signal, a small electrical noise sounded throughout the scene. Then, the vice-director gave him the signal.

"Three dash two dash fifteen!" He shouted with the slate.

At the same time, the camera gave off some vibration sound before turning on. He clapped the slate. He then quietly got off the scene and there was a very short period of silence. Eventually, Joonggeun, who looked at the front with a serious face, spoke.

"Action!"

The youngest member of the lighting team watched the filming scene without even being able to gulp in fear of making a noise. Along with the director's shout, the extras that were standing far away started walking at a steady pace. The boom mic closed in on Moonjoong. Although there were dozens of people in the location, it was quiet to the point that the sound of rain was the loudest.

"Looks like it's gonna pour."

Moonjoong started his line. This was a short part of a scene, but they were doing this for the fifteenth time. Although this was the last cut of the scene, it was flabbergasting seeing how many times each scene was retaken. The obstinacy of the director could be felt strongly. The youngest member concentrated on the main monitor. As he was looking at it from an angle, there was a slight distortion, but he did manage to see the whole picture. The figure of Moonjoong in the frame closed up from a full shot to a bust shot. The youngest member concentrated on the movement of the camera. Camera movement was the basics of film direction, nay, the essence of it. It was what evaluated the director. As he was studying framing, this kind of opportunity where he could see such a thing in person was golden.

Moonjoong, who was sitting down, stood up as he picked up the waste cardboard and looked up into the sky. At that moment, the rain started thickening. His head, which was urgently dried after the previous scene, became wet in an instant and rain started covering his face. The low-brightness light faintly shone upon Moonjoong's figure, and the camera framed Moonjoong's face in depth. The extras just passed by and Moonjoong shook off the rain from the waste paper with a bitter smile. The rain from the sky and the droplets that Moonjoong shook off intermixed.

"It's quite a vicious downpour."

The youngest member of the lighting team clenched his fist. That line just now was different from the original. The script supervisor seemed to have noticed that and started checking. The assistant director was also looking at the script. Then the director?

Joonggeun was looking at the monitor without a word. It looked as though he wanted to pierce the monitor with his gaze. Moonjoong slowly walked towards the direction the extras came from. The cardboard dragged on the ground, leaving behind a long trail.

He couldn't look more pitiful. This wasn't a scene that was in the script. Perhaps this was agreed upon beforehand? Or was it an ad-lib on Moonjoong's part just like his line? Then, Joonggeun gave instructions to zoom out from Moonjoong steadily, producing an effect where Moonjoong and his trail wandered off into the distance.

"Cut!" Joonggeun spoke.

His voice was different from the 14th take. It sounded like it was filled with more vitality, or perhaps, joy. As soon as he said those words, the youngest member of the production team stood in front of the camera with the slate.

He immediately clapped the slate and shouted 'three dash two dash fifteen'. The cameras all stopped and the audio recorders became quiet as well.

The rain started thickening.

Everyone looked towards Joonggeun.

"Alright! Thanks for your work! Pull out!"

The director gave the okay. The shoot had ended.

"Hey newbie! Let's put things away!"

The youngest member of the lighting team ran towards the lighting director. As he was running though, his focus was on the director and Moonjoong.

“Senior, why did you give me such a hard time when you could do that much better? We ended up doing fifteen takes!”

“But at least we did it. How was it?”

“It’s awesome. Not just amazing, but awesome! I’m going to use that last take for this part.”

“I liked it as well. My mind cleared up a little when I got wet.”

“I guess we can only shoot in the rain in the future. You see this part here? There’s a trail left behind by dragging the cardboard. That left a deep impression.”

“Such a thing happened? I didn’t know that.”

Moonjoong laughed heartily. The youngest member of the lighting team believed that that trail wasn’t entirely a coincidence. It was the result of trial and error. It was a treasure that they would not encounter if they ended it with a single shot.

“Hey, get working.”

“Ah, yes!”

The youngest member of the lighting team came to himself and lifted the tripod.

* * *

Moonjoong drank some warm drinks in the car. The warmth flowed into his body, melting both his body and mind.

“Thank you for all your hard work.”

“It wasn’t that hard.”

“Should we go?”

“Wait until I finish drinking.”

“Okay. I’ll visit the convenience store for a bit.”

The temporary manager left the car. Moonjoong closed his eyes as he listened to the droplets of rain hitting the car. The shoot ended without a hitch. Although there was a small hurdle, they at least didn’t have to leave that scene to shoot later. They were finishing off the cuts that were scheduled for that day. Although it took some time for him to get adjusted into the role since it had been such a long time he last did such a thing, he was slowly getting a grasp on things.

‘There were quite a few familiar faces too.’

Some old friends of his had grown up and were directing the scene. The one that surprised him the most was the assistant director under Joonggeun. The high school student he met when he was about to retire from the movie industry and go back to the theater was now the assistant director. The reason he

remembered him despite the fact that it had been such a long time was because that boy had declared to him that he would one day meet Moonjoon on the scene. Other than that, there were many other familiar faces around, so he had fun during filming.

Camera and audio equipment were upgraded compared to before, and some parts that were usually managed by people before were now being taken care of by machines, but movies were still filmed by people. There was no difference in the fact that there was a lot of discussion, dispute, and arguments. That part was what relieved Moonjoong. It felt like finding something nostalgic so he was very thankful.

Just as he was thinking, someone lightly tapped on the window of the car. The lady, who had a leisurely smile on her face, looked to be in her late thirties, and the youth standing next to him seemed to be just over twenty.

Moonjoong scrolled down the window. As the people outside had umbrellas, rain didn't get into the car.

"Hello, sir. I'm here to say hi. Can I have a moment of your time?"

"I don't know who you are, but you're welcome to."

"Thank you. My name is Park Narim, and I'm the president of NL Company. Next to me is one of my actors, Park Sungjae, who is also appearing in this movie. Sungjae, this is sir Moonjoong."

"Hello, sir. I'm Park Sungjae, and I'm a new actor," the youth greeted with a clear voice.

He was a handsome youth with a good-looking face and wide shoulders.

"Hello there, nice to meet you."

Moonjoong opened the door and left the car before offering a handshake to Sungjae. Sungjae grabbed his hand with both of his hands.

"I hope to learn a lot from you in the future."

"Don't forget what you just said now and do your best. I'll be cheering for you."

Moonjoong lightly shook hands with him with a smile.

Chapter 276

Sungjae stood in front of the mirror that took an entire wall of the practice room. Sometimes, he felt rather unfamiliar when he looked at himself through the mirror. Who is this man in the mirror?

"Let's rest for a bit, it's so damn exhausting!"

Hearing the words from the oldest member, Lee Hyuktae, Sungjae moved his eyes off the mirror. The members all lied down on the floor after dance practice.

Aah, that's right. I am TTO.

Sungjae looked at the blond-haired man in the mirror again. A man who lost all of his puerility from the time of his debut was staring back at him. It had been six years already. For some, it was a short period of time, but for others, it felt like an eternity. In the case of Sungjae, it first felt like an eternity, but these days, time passed by in a flash.

He remembered back to the moment when he entered TTO following Narim, who told him that she was the CEO of NL Company. Narim told him that she'd give him an opportunity when he was blindly practicing acting. She didn't tell him to blindly follow her. She had her own vision. Although he was young back then, Sungjae believed that Narim's words weren't all empty talk.

-You want to hop over the high hurdle of actors? You'll be able to if you're lucky. But you should be aware that just being good at acting is no longer enough to attract public interest. Of course, the well-known actors that have made a name for themselves in the movie industry did so through acting alone, but that's just a minority. They are people loved by the god of acting. Of course, luck is also a factor. You know? I don't like gambling. Actions with big risks aren't my thing. What I want is an inevitable, perfect success. You want to do acting, right? Then you will first have to learn dancing and singing. You should first make yourself known to the public. Only then can you start acting. It's a foolish thing to walk down a difficult path from the beginning. People should learn to take detours. At first, the public will look down on you, saying that a singer wants a portion of the actor's pie. However, once you become popular, money says it needs you. You just need to prove yourself at that time. You need to show your acting skills to the people that looked down on you. You can do that, right?

Sungjae thought about it for a day before deciding to follow Narim. He packed up his stuff that day and entered his dorm. There, he met the members of TTO. Hyuktae, Jangsoo, Soho, Kangjoon. They were all people that Narim picked herself. The only person that aspired to become an idol was the eldest member, Hyuktae. The rest were all people that used to do dancing, acting, or band activities. On their first day of sleeping together, Narim explained her plan. Their team name was TTO. Their objective was to become an omnipotent idol. Narim's ambition was to create a group that can be used in all areas of the television media. She said that they might be starting off as idols, but they will be provided with support to do whatever it is that they wanted to once they gained popularity as idols.

After that, arduous training began. The most elite instructors, that raised previous idol groups belonging to NL Company, all worked with them. They started practicing at 8 in the morning, and continued to do so until sunset. When even that wasn't enough, they sometimes continued late into the night and well into the next day. It was a continuation of pain. They practically lived in the practice room and practiced over and over. They had no sense of achievement either because they couldn't show themselves to anyone else. There were many times when the members talked about running away during the night. They were practically living in prison, and the end was nowhere in sight. They also had to listen to insults everyday. Their very meaning behind going through all that pain started becoming faint.

It was about the time when 'running away' became a common topic. The moment they thought that they should really run away with the five of them, Narim came to the practice room. She left the practice room door wide open and spoke with cold eyes.

-How long do you think you'll live? It's been a year. Only, a year. If you can't endure even that and want to run away, then get out right now, and live the rest of your life as a loser. I can guarantee that there's no one other than me that can make your talents blossom. I am the one who found all of you, and I am the one that's raising all of you. You will all become stars. Stars that everyone would be envious of! However, right now, you're just pathetic little trainees. If you want to end your trainee life, then you may leave. It'll be painful for me to lose you as well, but I can start over. After all, I have the money, and I have the resources. You guys are definitely ores that will become jewels, but you guys aren't the only

jewels out there. With enough time, I can find new ones. It's just that taking the time to look for them is a waste.

That night, Sungjae thought that president Park Narim was a scary woman. She was someone that was incredibly well aware of what others were thinking. She left after setting up an inescapable trap and Sungjae erased the word 'escape' from his head that day. The other four did the same. After that 'running away' and 'escape' became a taboo in the practice room.

Another year passed like that. TTO managed to have their debut after 2 years. The music program was full of their seniors. They visited many waiting rooms and bowed their heads. They did so as well to the idols that debuted years before. Then, they went on their first recorded stage. There were no mistakes, there was no nervousness. They just came back down with rather dazed expressions. They spent two years in order to reach that point, but actually going up on stage didn't feel like anything much. Every member felt the same. They didn't wish for a sense of achievement on the level of hugging each other and crying hot tears. They just wanted at least some sense of achievement.

Narim was waiting for them when they came down from the stage with confused minds. She spoke with a smile.

-That wasn't anything much, was it?

It was just as she had said. It was nothing much. They had spent 2 years aiming for something like that? They returned to their dull dorm from the TV station. Then, practice began again. They even forgot that they had their debut and started arduous practice again. On the weekend, the members gathered in front of the TV. For that day, they got special permission to eat fried chicken with sweet and spicy sauce, pizza, snacks and all sorts of junk food. The music program started and TTO was revealed in the 'NEW & HOT' corner. Sungjae was resting his chin on his hands when they watched themselves singing on TV. Even back then, he had no sense of achievement. In fact, he was annoyed because he could see trivial mistakes through the screen. Objectively speaking, TTO was very awkward when viewed through a screen, even after all the practice they did.

After the program ended, the members started practicing without a word. They didn't do anything like exchanging opinions on their performance. Their dorm life was without any internet or any forms of communication with the outside world. They did not know how TTO was in the view of the public, and the next time they appeared on TV was a month later, in a program called Music Net. It wasn't a live show just like before. When they arrived at the TV station, Sungjae managed to see three girls holding pamphlets. They were their fans. There were 3 fans, even less than the five that made up TTO. Sungjae felt both thankful for them and suspicious that they might not be able to live up to their expectations.

However, exactly two months later, Sungjae was able to see a view filled with green balloons. The moment he saw an overwhelming amount of green balloons that signified TTO, he felt that he had done it. Sungjae cried due to the joy of 'having done it'. The four others cried with him. It had been half a year since their debut. TTO rose rapidly in the ranks of artists, and now possessed a fandom larger than any other idol's. Another three years passed on top of that. Albums with their name on it sold more than one million copies. Even their fourth album, which was released after consumer MP3 players were widespread, sold a million copies. TTO had survived the fall of sales that other idols experienced.

-You have proven yourselves. Now, it's time for you to do the things you want.

Just as she had promised, Narim stopped their activities as an idol group. The members started doing the things that they each wanted. Some sang folk songs rather than the usual fast-paced ones, and some held guitar solo concerts. They appeared in sitcoms and attracted even more popularity, and eventually went to China to become commercial advertisement stars.

Sungjae studied acting for a traditional drama. Not long later, he appeared in an oriental drama that was going to be broadcast on public TV. His first challenge in acting was a traditional drama. When he first went to the gathering for the drama production, he received cold gazes. Everyone was greeting him with a smile, but they were clearly looking down on him. It was something he had expected, so he didn't mind it that much. The six years of hardship made him unshakable.

-An idol, huh.

-He wouldn't even be here if he wasn't an idol.

-I'm sure he's crap at acting. He's the type of person who would blow himself up due to his lack of skills.

He could hear such words from around him. Sungjae smiled. The more he was looked down upon, the better he felt. That was because the revenge would be that much sweeter. Narim was right. They looked down on him because he was an idol. However, he was going to show them that he was different.

After the filming began, Sungjae acted with a desperate resolve. He prepared everything, from the tone of his voice to the language and environment of the time the drama was set in. Before the filming began, everyone was worried about his acting, but none of that happened once the filming began. In fact, an actor around Sungjae's age was scolded for awkward traditional language.

He finally arrived at a time where he could smile.

As he was doing his job, he met a friend of his on the set who he used to go to an acting academy together with. That friend's role was 'military officer 1'. When they were young, that fellow's acting was known to be the best in the academy. Everyone had to watch him with their breaths abated when he did his monologue. But now, he had a role that required him to wait several hours for him to act in front of the camera, and it was unknown if his appearance would even go on TV. The moment he saw him, Sungjae was reminded of Narim's words - it is very hard to open the door to stardom with acting alone.

Sungjae spoke to him. After being startled for a moment, that friend started to look at him with disdain. He said that Sungjae was leading a pathetic life who got the role not through his acting skills, but through his popularity.

Sungjae admitted that with a smile. Seeing Sungjae admit that without getting angry, that fellow started scolding him talking about useless idealistic stuff. Are you really happy achieving success with your methods? That's not how an actor should be. You have lost your pride as an actor, et cetera.

Just as that fellow finished his words, the director came to them. Sungjae smiled at the director who put his arms around his shoulder, saying that he was great that day. He then looked at his friend. That friend, who had been talking about foundations and whatnot, was looking at him and the director with shaking eyes. Then, the director proceeded to speak - who's he?

That friend immediately bowed and started to explain what his role was, but the director shook his head and said that he wasn't interested. The director then proceeded to tell Sungjae to come to the get-

together before leaving. After the filming was over, the actors all greeted him before leaving. Sungjae greeted back warmly and during all that time, that friend of his was unable to speak a word.

As the staff was getting ready to pull out, Sungjae asked his silent friend just one question.

“So, you’re satisfied with your life?”

Talent moves the world. However, people with that kind of talent were very few and far in between. This meant that what was left was just a fight of ordinary people. With that being the case, what was it that ranked people after ‘talent’?

It came down to ‘environment’. Sungjae believed that his decision to grab Narim’s hand back then was the moment that widened the gap between him and his friend. If that friend had the talent that could surpass the environmental factors, then the meeting that day would have turned out differently, but in the end, the result was a meeting of a main character who was evaluated well with a side character who only appears once.

All that speech was nonsense in front of results. Sungjae projected himself onto his friend. What would he have become if he did not grab Narim’s hand and continued to focus on acting? He would have become just like his friend, barely getting by with daily expenses. Perhaps, he might have given up midway and have gone to a college or have gone to the military.

After that meeting, that friend of his could no longer be seen at the filming location. He left after a short “arrest him!” line. His name also wasn’t inserted into the credits at the end of the episode. His life just disappeared after a single shout.

‘In the end, popularity is above acting skills.’

Those were some bitter words, but Sungjae no longer denied them.

Acting was just a side skill.

In the end, the public wanted to see stars, and they liked whatever the stars did. They would get complimented unless they had completely horrible acting that broke the whole flow. How simple was that?

“Let’s drink some water and get back to practice. Sungjae! I know that you look handsome so stop looking at the mirror and come back!”

Sungjae came back from his memories after hearing Hyuktae’s voice. When he had a look at the blond man in the mirror again, Sungjae smiled.

I am TTO.

I am the popular idol Sungjae.

That’s right, that’s who I am.

He gave a fistbump towards himself in the mirror before turning around. He thought that actors that can shake the world with acting alone were a rare species in the current age.

Chapter 277

He introduced himself as Yoo Jiseok. Sungjae received the greeting of the high school boy in front of him.

“He’s one of our talents. He’s the one the president is trying to push. Oh, he’ll be appearing in the same movie as you, Sunjgae. Though, I guess you two won’t get to meet each other. Just saying.”

The head manager from Yellow Star left after saying all those words. The two came across each other by coincidence when Sungjae came to Film Academy in Gangnam to learn acting.

“Well then, let’s begin.”

The instructor came in. Film Academy had raised many talented actors. As its primary objective was to teach actors that will actually work in the industry, it was a peculiar academy where money wasn’t enough to get into.

Sungjae glanced at the boy named Jiseok. If he was receiving lessons in this class at his age, it meant that he was no ordinary person. Well, Yellow Star should be aware of that as well when they recruited him. If NL Company and Jewel Entertainment, two of the three major entertainment companies, became large thanks to their idol groups, Yellow Star was the group that became successful with their actors. The fact that this boy belonged to that place at such an age, as an actor to boot, meant that he had an incredible talent as an actor.

He became jealous for a brief moment, but he just smiled it over. Right now, they were in the same position. He was well aware that the public did not want people with good acting, but people with the popularity. As long as he did the basics, he would not be looked down upon by the public. In fact, there were some advantages coming from the fact that he was an idol. He could get the ‘he’s good at acting even though he’s an idol’ judgement. It wasn’t that good of an evaluation for sure, but Sungjae believed that it didn’t matter that much. He had long since abandoned useless reasoning. In the end, only the popular survived. That was what success was.

After practice began. The instructor told the students to release all of their inner desires. Sungjae acted as though he had become some savage, swearing and rampaging around. Although it was a short time, Sungjae thought that Jiseok was definitely different from the rest. They say that the sparrow near a school sings the primer. Sungjae may not have the skills, but he had the eyes that could evaluate others due to all of his experience. According to his eyes, Jiseok was young, but definitely had the talent.

His personality was overly cheerful. It didn’t even take 3 minutes to drop the honorifics with him from the first greeting. Thankfully, Sungjae did not dislike his proactive attitude, so the two could have a fun conversation.

During rest, Jiseok kept muttering something while staring at a script. When Sungjae had a look, he saw that it was the script of the movie he was shooting. From his body movement and the lines, it seemed that he was one of the delinquents. It was one of the most minor roles.

“I think what you’re doing is enough,” Sungjae said to him.

The line was short and there were only three cuts as well. There was a limit to how profound an act could look in such a short time. He believed that Jiseok was doing plenty. However, Jiseok shook his head as he replied,

"I'm still lacking."

"Really?"

"Yes. I already lost once. The role I originally wanted was delinquent 2. I competed with a friend of mine after going to the very last audition, but I lost to him. I was quite confident too. But I don't feel that unjustified though, since I lost cleanly. I had to admit. He did more research than me regarding the delinquent character at least. He should be trying his best to make his scene better even now, so I can't be resting. He's not someone who I can try to match if I do things moderately."

"He's better than you at acting?"

"That's probably how he got the role I wanted, don't you think? I already lost to him once. I don't want to lose to him twice, so I'm putting in all this effort."

"Really?"

Hearing those words, Sungjae inwardly laughed at him. They were competing over a minor role. There was nothing amazing about it. It was likely that this boy lost to that friend of his on his looks, not skills. After all, that was what minor roles were about.

"Let's resume," the instructor came back.

Sungjae exercised his neck before standing up.

* * *

"I told you it's true. Isn't it funny?" After saying those words, Yoojin sighed and lowered her head.

Was she doing well? If it was before, she would be satisfied with just that and go to the next bit.

"Funny, funny, hmm, funny!"

She repeated the same word several times before throwing the script on the ground before sitting on the chair in front of the mirror. She was cast in a youth drama and the filming would start soon. Her role wasn't anything major. She was just one of the complaining kids in the main character's class. This was her third drama shoot. It didn't seem like she was walking in the wrong direction considering how she gained more lines each time she shot a drama, but recently, her heart became chaotic whenever she looked at the script, making her unable to focus.

The reason was simple - she saw someone with a qualitative difference.

"Haa."

When she watched her senior actors doing their acts, she only felt respect for them. How could they unfold the characters' emotions like that? How did they manage to bestow a meaning to each movement of their fingers? Their pronunciation, their attitude, their expression - everything about them said 'uniqueness'. Just watching them motivated her to do better.

However, after seeing someone of her own age doing something similar, it wasn't respect she felt, but a sense of inferiority and unease. It was something she had never felt before. Yes, there were people better than her in the academy she went to. However, never did she lose her confidence while watching

them. In fact, she became passionate and competitive. She resolved to become better than them and put more effort into practice.

Colleagues that were slightly better than her became her motivation. The overwhelming skills of her seniors became her guidepost.

However, an overwhelming colleague only triggered her to look back at her weak acting. Of course, it didn't mean he was bad or was in the wrong. In fact, seeing him made her fall into despair and made her feel pathetic. She encouraged herself, saying that she would be able to catch up if she put in as much effort as before, but the only thing on her face was a self-loathing smile.

"Ah, this isn't right!"

She stomped on the ground as she stood up. She thought that she wasn't acting like herself. She took out her phone and called the guy that was the source of her problems. It was 8 p.m. It wasn't that late, so it should be fine.

-What is it?

She was annoyed when Maru said that as the first line, but she was the one who called so she decided to endure it.

"How did you do your practice? Tell me now."

-Didn't I tell you last week?

"Yeah, but tell me properly!"

-I told you, you have to be reborn.

"Is this how you wanna do this?"

-How else do I explain it to you? I studied the script?

"You really are cocky."

-This isn't the first time you saw me as a cocky guy so don't mind it so much. Rather than that, what's up with your attitude? Someone might say that I did you wrong.

"You did do me wrong! Alright, here's how we're gonna do things. You're gonna practice with me. I have to see what you're doing."

-I don't have any time to hang out with you.

"Really? That's good. I have a lot. I'll give you half of mine."

-...But seriously, there's nothing special about me. Just do what you always did.

"See? You're hiding something from me."

-Why can't you trust someone for just one second? Also, I wasn't joking when I said I don't have the time. I thought you were doing a drama as well. If you account for your school club on top of that, you should be busier than me.

“I’m not in the acting club anymore. Rather than that, you’re in the acting club this year as well?”

-Yeah, I am.

“But you got a company though. It’ll be difficult for you to keep up with your club once you start working, and you still decided to stay there?”

-Who’s gonna use a newbie like me? I also have a lot to learn about acting as well.

“Hm, newbie, huh?”

-Anyway, it’s not like I have some special method or anything, so let’s just each do our best in our respective places. Good luck on the drama.

“Wait!”

Before she even shouted, Maru hung up. Her voice echoed in vain before disappearing. Yoojin smirked and uttered his name as though she was deciding on an enemy.

“That’s how you wanna do this, huh.”

* * *

To indicate that the summer was approaching, the red line on the thermometer was indicating 27°C, even though it was mid June. The heat seemed to fade a little from the rain, but it started rising again as though it had never rained. The natural shade that was the clouds could not be seen anywhere so it became a season where walking just a little would make anyone sweaty.

The students who had to study under such an environment were already experiencing a mental breakdown, and the competition to get under the air conditioner was more heated than the crusade. The class president said that they should do a ballot to be fair, but with a ‘screw fairness’ attitude, they decided on seats with a match of soccer.

Maru complained thinking that those guys only had brawns and passion in their heads, but desperately shot the balls into the opponent’s net. The weather was enough to make him desperate.

“Han Maru. You’re the best.”

“We’re saved thanks to you.”

As the winner, their team got the best seats. Embracing the cool winds from the top, Maru spent the day comfortably and was able to go to the club with a fresh body and mind.

The acting club had gathered on the fifth floor just as usual. They did a run through after some light exercise.

Just then, his phone rang. Maru had a look at the name on his screen before answering the call.

“Aren’t you calling too frequently these days?”

The caller, Yoojin, suddenly asked.

-You practicing?

“Yeah, why do you ask?”

-Which floor are you on?

Those words made Maru feel uneasy. Maru opened the window in the self-studies room and poked his head outside. Among the students that were going home late was a girl wearing a school uniform. As Woosung High didn't have a school uniform, the school uniform that the girl was wearing was quite eye-catching. She was blatantly watching the school buildings while she was on the phone, so she was at the center of attention for those leaving school as well. Above all, Bosung Girls High was famous for having a fancy uniform.

“Are you insane?”

-What? I heard you went to her house late at night just like I'm doing now. On top of that, you confessed there, didn't you?

“You two are close enough to talk about that as well...?”

-Because we're friends!

Her smiling face somehow lingered in front of his eyes. Maru sighed and said that he was on the fifth floor. She was the type of girl who would visit every single classroom starting from the first floor even if he ignored her. According to what he knew of her from the amateur actors class, she was obstinate enough to do that.

“What's up?” Daemyung approached and asked. Maru pondered a little bit on how to explain before speaking.

“An alien invasion.”

“What?”

A while later, the door opened before Yoojin came in. Seeing Yoojin in her uniform, the members of the club made a confused expression.

“Hi everyone! I'm Lee Yoojin from Bosung Girls High. We are both schools that lost to Myunghwa High last year so maybe you remember?”

Hearing those words, Daemyung realized and made an 'aha' sound. But that only lasted for a brief moment.

“But why's she here?” He asked Maru in a small voice.

Maru wanted to know as well, so he couldn't give him an answer. Just why was she here?

“So, why are you here?” So he asked.

He wasn't someone who liked being roundabout, so he asked directly.

“Field experience. I'm not doing it for free.”

Yoojin took out some cosmetics from her bag. Maru tilted his head since he didn't know why she took them out, but Jiyeon and Aram widened their eyes. They recognized what those were.

“Wow. Those are some very expensive cosmetic brands.”

“I think they’re the same ones that my mom got as a gift.”

The two juniors usually didn’t put on that much makeup, but they seemed interested in cosmetics regardless.

“Allow me to watch you guys act. I’ll take care of the makeup in exchange. You know that my mom takes care of only the top stars, right? I learned a thing or two from her, so I’m quite good as well,” Yoojin boldly claimed.

Maru made a ‘ha’ sound. She was really quick to act, and she also knew how to make deals. They were lacking someone to do their makeup since Yoonjung and Danmi had left the club.

“Daemyung, what do you think?”

“So she’s giving us makeup in exchange to watch us practice?”

“Yeah.”

“Why?”

“I don’t know. Anyway, what do you think? I don’t think it’s a bad deal. We’ll also be a little nervous if we have an audience. Above all, we do need someone to do our makeup, right?”

“That’s true.”

“She’s quite random, but she’s not a bad girl. So I hope you can give her the okay.”

“There’s no reason for me to refuse her. I’m just slightly confused that she came to us all of a sudden.”

They came to a decision. Yoojin seemed to have heard their conversation as she spoke,

“Then please take care of me. I won’t get in your way so just do like you normally do. Just like usual.”

Yoojin looked as though she was going to analyze every last detail. Maru shrugged his shoulders before saying,

“Let’s resume practice then.”

* * *

Yoojin crossed her arms and stared at Maru. She alternated between reading the script and seeing the stage to see what was different and what made such a change.

However, that only lasted a brief moment. She became dazed when she saw that the stage was flowing so smoothly. Maru seemed different from the time he just read his lines on the spot. Seeing him, Yoojin realized that Maru’s gaze, acts, intonation, breathing and everything else was on a different level than her.

‘It’s only been half a year since last winter. Only half a year!’

She tensed her eyes while gripping the script in hand. The boy in front of her had changed completely during the past half a year. He was a freak, so to speak. That was the only word she could think of to

describe him. She judged that it was a good thing to have come to watch. Yoojin started thinking about what she should do in order to bridge the gap between him and herself.

Chapter 278

“Thanks for all your work everyone.”

After the run through, Daemyung gathered everyone around.

“Well then, can you tell me what you found lacking in that run? Let’s start with Bangjoo.”

Practice was important. It was the first step towards maturity. However, retrospect was just as important as practice. If practice was akin to walking down a path, retrospect was the process to check if the path they walked was the right one. Bangjoo spoke without hesitation. He mentioned that his pronunciation was lacking and that Jiyeon was too shy with her actions.

After Bangjoo came Aram’s turn. Aram also mentioned the things she found lacking. There was no hesitation as she mentioned the mistakes. Whether the mistake came from herself or from others, she mentioned them out loud regardless.

After a round, Daemyung summarized the things he had just heard in his head. They now had the problems, so it was time to look for the solution. That process did not involve any emotion on his part. He summarized the problems in a simple manner.

After telling the club members the problems that they had found, he started to give them advice just like he always did. Although he was giving out advice, they weren’t clear answers. There were numerous cases where the problems contained the solutions, and Daemyung only made it simpler for everyone to understand.

Giving them directions. It wasn’t like there was a clear answer like it was some mathematics question, so he just proposed some actions that they could take - what if we try doing this? As everyone was smart, they immediately understood what he was trying to say and solved their problems themselves, so Daemyung continued to use this method.

Of course, not everyone saw benefit through this method. There was always someone that was excluded from the discussion. It was none other than Maru. In this method where the members pointed and fixed each other’s mistakes, Maru was not mentioned even once. Strictly speaking, it wasn’t a bad thing. It just meant that Maru was digesting his role that well.

However, Daemyung found it a pity that he wasn’t of help to Maru at all.

“Should we stop here for today? It’s getting late.”

It was just past 8 o’clock. Daemyung asked Dowook to take care of the girls. After the first years and Dowook left, he sat down, breathing deeply when,

“You guys end really early.”

Daemyung flinched when he heard those words from behind him. He looked behind him and saw that Yoojin, who he had completely forgotten about, was standing here. Yoojin introduced herself as a friend

of Maru. Today was her fourth day here already. At first, he thought that she would stop coming after the first couple days, but now, she came to this room earlier than even the club members.

“Aren’t you going?” Maru asked as he looked at the script.

“I’m going to wait until you guys leave.”

Yoojin sat down.

“You are going to practice with the two of you again, aren’t you? Then put me in this time.”

Daemyung gave Yoojin, who was extending her hand out with a smile, a copy of the script. At first, she just silently kept watching practice, but starting yesterday, she participated in it as well. As she was very skilled, Daemyung was happy to have her on board.

Maru took the salaryman and drunkard roles, Yoojin took the scammer and the hostess roles, and Daemyung took the policeman and the delinquent roles. As they lacked members, they didn’t do any actions.

The practice that began a little after 8 ended at 9. Daemyung folded the script in half and looked at the two others. They really had solid acting. Although the acting club kept practicing, Dowook and the first years made a few mistakes here and there. Above all, they were people who had zero interest in acting beforehand so they weren’t used to acting either. Considering that it hadn’t even been a month since they properly started practicing, they were doing incredibly well, but at the same time, they were lacking compared to the two in front of him.

Yoojin was especially proficient in the hostess and the scammer roles to the point that Daemyung wanted Aram and Jiyeon to study from her. It had only been four days since she started watching them practice, but after those four days, she was better than his two juniors who had spent a month practicing.

Indeed, a fully-fledged child actor was different, alright. She was a professional who even appeared on dramas.

What was interesting was the way Yoojin looked at Maru.

Desire. That was the emotion her eyes had when she looked at Maru, even though she was doing very well.

In Daemyung’s eyes, Yoojin seemed like a splendid actor who was equal to Maru. Despite that, it felt as though she had some kind of inferiority complex against him. He might be mistaken, but from what he saw from her during the past four days, it was definitely the case.

Just why was she looking at Maru with such eyes? After pondering, Daemyung came to a conclusion.

‘Perhaps I’m not seeing all of Maru’s skills.’

In Daemyung’s mind, both Maru and Yoojin were splendid actors. However, if they were similar in level, there would neither be reason for Yoojin to come to their school to observe Maru, nor any reason behind her eyes that looked at Maru with inferiority. He came to the conclusion that he himself wasn’t capable of looking at Maru’s full skills.

Daemyung looked at Maru.

Within the acting club, Maru took the role of the leader who guided everyone else. To compare it to a family, Maru was analogous to the father while Daemyung was the mother. The mother's role was to look after the children in a more caring, up close manner. Consoling crying children, praising them for good actions. The father was a little different. The father does not get involved in the detailed things, but leads the family as a whole. They say a child grows in the bosom of the mother and lives looking at the father's back. Although he might be mistaken, Daemyung thought that was how the current acting club looked like.

Everyone was developing their skills through seeing Maru's acts. Daemyung did not doubt that this acting club should soon enter its stable period and that the members would bring out their fullest skills, becoming capable of showing a high-level play for others to see.

However, he realized that he was wrong.

Yes, their overall skill set would improve. Perhaps they might be able to aim for the grand prize that they weren't able to get last year.

However, the gap between them and Maru would never be bridged. If he was at a level where Daemyung couldn't even see, it would be almost impossible for the others that just started off to stand on his level, no matter how much effort they put in.

Was that a good thing? For the acting club as a whole, it wasn't a bad thing. After all, from the outside, it looked as though the whole club was improving in pursuit of a dominantly good person. If it was a competitive situation, there might be some trouble thanks to Maru's skills, but in acting, unity was the only way forward, meaning that the probability of such problems occurring was very low. Moreover, Maru wasn't the type of person who liked to boast about himself. He only brought out his skills at the necessary times, but did not actually show off or want compensation for it. In other words, the acting club would be stable in the future as well.

However, what if the perspective was changed to that of Maru's?

'If he's in a situation where he could show better acting but cannot do so due to the limitations of those around him....'

It would be excruciating to not be able to bring out his fullest skills. No, leaving aside the frustration and the pain, it was just inefficient. After all, it meant that he wasn't getting any progress because of the ones around him.

"Should we rest a little?"

Hearing those words, Daemyung came to himself. It was his turn to say his line. Daemyung shook his head with a bitter smile. The only thing he could do right now was to go along with him. If he couldn't even do that, he would feel too apologetic.

"Let's take a break after finishing this round. It was my turn, wasn't it?"

"Yeah."

Daemyung nodded his head and continued with the script.

* * *

"It's past ten already."

Daemyung spoke as he looked at the darkened sky. It was about time they went home. It would be a pain to walk home after missing the last bus as it would take almost an hour by foot.

Maru left for a brief moment, saying that he had to go to the bathroom. Daemyung, who was left alone with Yoojin, felt embarrassed and went to a corner of the classroom and started staring into the script.

"Just what do you think Han Maru is?" Yoojin approached him as she asked.

Daemyung blinked several times as he looked back at her.

"I get that the atmosphere of the acting club is good. The way you guys practice is also good. You guys are serious too. I can't find any flaws, but that's not enough to explain it," Yoojin said flatly.

"What do you think?"

"A-about what?"

"About Han Maru. Just what did he do to improve so much? Aah, this is driving me crazy. I thought I'd find a clue here, but it's getting even more complicated," Yoojin said as she scratched her hair into a mess.

Daemyung stared back at her. As he had expected, Yoojin was saying that she was lacking compared to Maru. It seemed that Maru was good beyond his recognition after all.

"What, why are you looking at me like that?"

Daemyung shook his head saying that it was nothing when Yoojin closed in on his face, but Yoojin kept asking questions with suspicious eyes. Eventually, Daemyung had no choice but to reveal what he was thinking; that he felt a little pity because he couldn't help her despite the fact that he thought that Yoojin was feeling somewhat inferior when she compared herself to Maru, as well as the fact that the club members might be holding Maru back from doing better.

"Your eyes are good."

"What?"

"I'm saying that you have good eyes. Moreover, you know how to analyze stuff. I felt this while watching you all for the past few days, but I think direction or production suits you better than being an actor."

"Y-you think?"

He suppressed his urge to say that that was actually the case and that he was preparing something else. That was because he believed that he wasn't close enough to her to reveal such things yet. It would be quite embarrassing if things got awkward because he said some unnecessary things after all.

"You're right. I do have an inferiority complex towards Maru. I mean, wouldn't anyone? He seemed like he was on a similar level to me just until a while ago, but now he's far ahead of me. You can't blame me for him hurting my pride."

For a person saying pessimistic words, Yoojin looked quite calm. No, her eyes were filled with a challenging mindset and it looked as though her eyes were glowing even though it was the night.

"If I'm lacking, then I must learn. If the gap widened, I must bridge it. I don't know how Maru acquired such a good expressiveness, but don't you think I can get a hint if I keep watching him? Of course, I felt annoyed as well. I mean, it does feel like the heavens only gave him the talent and not me. However, I don't want to become a fool that blames others. I'm going to do everything within my powers first. Don't you think so?"

Yoojin grinned. A faint image of Miso could be felt from her. Although it was for a brief moment, Daemyung felt that he would be able to be good friends with this girl. Someone who uses her inferiority complex as motivation. She was someone worth admiring.

"I guess I should do better too then," Daemyung lowered his head a little as she spoke.

"Hey, since it's like this, do you wanna go as well?" Yoojin widened her eyes and asked.

Go? Where to?

"The 18th. That's the day Maru is filmed. Let's go and see how he does. Maru's acting here and Maru's acting on location is quite different. How is it? Don't you wanna go?"

"I do, but... wouldn't that inconvenience him?"

"It's fine. We won't be distracting him or anything. Let's just say we're Maru's manager for the day."

"I-is that really okay?"

"It's worth a try."

Yoojin raised her thumbs up. She was just like Miso in her recklessness.

"What are you two doing?" Maru came back from the bathroom.

Daemyung shook his head saying that nothing had happened.

"Daemyung."

"Yeah?"

"Is it okay if you stay the night out?"

"Stay the night out? I can tell mom and she'll probably be fine."

"Really? Then let's go eat something."

"You need to stay the night out when you're eating something?"

"It's in Seoul. Oh, you should get going already. You live in Seoul, don't you? It'll be quite a pain once you miss the last bus," Maru said to Yoojin.

Daemyung made an awkward smile. Usually, it was customary to invite everyone on the scene, or just tell that person when they were alone, but Maru was really direct with his words.

“I’m tagging alone.”

“A brat like you doesn’t belong here. Go back home obediently. Your parents will be worried about you.”

“I’m the same age as you, you know? Daemyung, can I tag along as well? I can, right? It’s probably fine, right?”

Daemyung didn’t say anything as Maru had an awry expression on his face and Yoojin seemed so eager to go. It was obvious that he couldn’t satisfy both parties.

“...If you do wanna tag along, then pay for your own meal.”

“Alright!”

Yoojin stood between Maru and Daemyung and linked arms with both of them. Daemyung was startled and tried to pull out, but he couldn’t do so because she had a strong grip.

“Let’s go! For our friendship!”

“Who the hell is friends with you?”

Daemyung sighed seeing that the two had a staring contest like they were a cat and a dog.

Chapter 279

“Yeah. I’ll be going back late after hanging out with some of my friends. I might go back tomorrow. No, mom. Your daughter isn’t that bad. What? Okay. Alright, don’t forget to lock the door.”

Yoojin hung up.

“Your parents must be worried sick about you.”

“What the heck are you saying? They have such a capable daughter.”

Maru clicked his tongue and looked away.

They were inside a bus. Although the decision to go to Seoul was rather sudden, there weren’t any problems. Yoojin checked the time on her phone. It was nine minutes to eleven. The day was almost over.

The bus was filled with people dozing off. Yoojin liked this kind of scene. That was because she felt like it was a moment of break for the people who had spent their days to the fullest. It was quiet and cozy. She liked silence better than bustling activity.

She turned her head a little and looked at Daemyung and Maru. She was able to get a seat because the two of them, being boys, gave up the seat for her. The two were talking seriously about acting. She then turned around to look outside the window, pretending not to focus on their conversation, but her ears were perked up. She felt like they wouldn’t talk anymore if she looked at them.

“Then you decided on the setting and the characters?”

“Yeah. But it’s not 100% decided yet. Gwak Joon-hyung told me that the structure of a story can change at any time. He said that it was important for me to be as free as possible when writing since this is my first work.”

“So I guess it’ll take some time if you want to transcribe it into script form then.”

“I never planned to finish it quickly anyway. I should take my time, learning about various things.”

“Still, I guess things turned out well. I was worried since Joon-hyung has a stiff side about him and thought that he might not help you.”

“I was really nervous when I first sent him the message. I was even more nervous when he told me that he wanted to see me. But when I met him, he wasn’t actually that scary. Though, he does look like the type of person you wouldn’t want to talk to. Haha.”

Yoojin couldn’t help when she heard the name ‘Gwak Joon’ and interrupted.

“Is the Gwak Joon you’re talking about the Gwak Joon I know? Is that how it is?”

“Who’s this Gwak Joon and who’s that Gwak Joon?”

“Don’t pretend to be ignorant in front of me. Are they really the same? Are you really talking about the original author of our movie?”

“Yes.”

“And Daemyung is studying under such a person? Is he what, a disciple or something?”

Hearing that question, Daemyung waved his hand in a fluster.

“What disciple? It’s nothing so grand.”

“If he’s teaching you, and you’re studying under him, that makes you his disciple. Wow, you guys are quite good.”

Yoojin pondered as she tapped on her lower lip with her index finger. From what she saw of Gwak Joon, he was the type of person that was hard to approach. He was wearing black glasses, a black t-shirt, and black pants. Even though the weather was hot, he was wearing all-black, and his eyes were very desolate. The only people that talked to Gwak Joon during the read-through were Moonjoong, the director, and some of the journalists who had to get an interview from him. Yoojin briefly watched him doing an interview with a journalist, and never did she see such an insincere interviewee.

To the question, ‘how do you come up with the storyline’, he answered, ‘to the best of my abilities’; to the question, ‘how do you come up with characters’, he answered, ‘with all of my effort’. According to the proverb ‘good answers come from good questions’, those questions weren’t good questions at all. After all, they were bland and ordinary. However, what was up with those answers?

Yoojin overheard the journalist muttering ‘does he think he’s Hemmingway or something?’ after the interview.

It would be bad to evaluate a person just based on that, but Gwak Joon definitely wasn't the type of person who would talk about literature with just anyone. And here, Daemyung turned out to be such a person.

'Maru is one thing, but perhaps he too...'

She overheard their conversation and found out that Daemyung was writing a story, and was even preparing a script. Maybe it was a movie? Or a drama? No, it was highly probable that it was a play. He was writing such a thing at such an early age.

Perhaps the reason Maru's acting skills improved so much was because he had a friend like this close to him. Now that she thought about it, there were always amazing people around Maru. He seemed to be acquainted with Joohyun, Suyeon, Geunsoo and even Moonjoong. That was despite the fact that he was a high school student who had never participated in filming a movie or a drama. How did he come across such people despite having no relation to the field at all? Perhaps it was thanks to his company's influence?

'Should I find a company soon as well?'

Her mom's advice was that she should gain more experience and further her career before entering a company since the first contract was very important. She said that there were numerous performers who never saw the light of day after signing a contract when they were still nameless.

However, seeing Maru, entering a company didn't seem like such a bad idea. Good companies had good actors, and she would naturally gain the opportunity to meet those people. Those encounters would widen her vision, and her widened vision would enable her to act better.

"Should I go to JA?"

"What's that all of a sudden?"

"I think that's your secret."

"I don't get what you're saying, but do whatever you want."

Seeing Maru ignore her, Yoojin pouted.

Maru looked outside the window before pressing the stop bell. It seemed that they had arrived. She followed Maru as he got off the bus. Maru left the big roads with the big buildings on it and walked towards the place with small houses. He went even deeper and eventually arrived at a road where even streetlights were rare and old commercial buildings were standing right next to each other.

Maru's walking pace was quite fast and he was always quite far ahead. Yoojin thought that this was an opportunity and talked to Daemyung.

"Hey."

"Uh, yeah?"

"Why are you so startled?"

Daemyung smiled awkwardly. Yoojin thought that this guy was really honest.

“Have you ever seen Maru practice by himself?”

“Practice?”

“His skills suddenly got better, you know? I’m wondering if he was receiving lessons outside of school or something.”

“Well, I haven’t heard him mention such a thing before.”

“Really? Then what the heck is it? Anyway, I’ll tell you my assumption.”

Yoojin told Daemyung the reason that she thought Maru’s skills improved so dramatically - that he had good friends around him, and that he had people he could learn from. Daemyung nodded after hearing her words. He seemed to agree with her words. However, he spoke differently.

“It’s true that there are a lot of amazing people around Maru. But if you ask me if they helped Maru improve, then I would say no. The order of events are different.”

“The order of events are different?”

“Maru originally didn’t have any interest in acting at all. When he first came to the acting club, he said that he wanted to be a stage staff. Indeed, he had never done any proper practice until the end of summer vacation in his first year.”

“Really?”

“Yeah.”

“Then what made him do acting? I thought he didn’t have any interest.”

“I don’t know what exactly changed his mind. However, it is true that the instructor tried to persuade Maru to do acting. She must have seen through Maru’s talents. After that, he met president Lee Junmin. So strictly speaking, it’s true that he became more proficient thanks to those people, but you could say that he already had a talent large enough for them to take interest.”

“Then what? A guy that had no interest entered the amateur acting class after just half a year of practice?”

Yoojin sighed, feeling powerless, and looked at Maru’s back. In the amateur acting class held in Myeongdong, he won the role of the main character. He was so good that everyone else admitted their loss. But now, Daemyung was telling her that that was the result of half a year’s worth of practice? But just then, the words Maru said to her popped up in her head.

-The method to improve? You have to be born again.

Maybe he said that to express his innate talents.

“He’s so cocky! That makes him a genius!” She said it out loud because she felt a little frustrated.

Maru, walking at the front, frowned as he turned around.

“What is it now?”

"I'm saying that you have it good!"

"I hear that all the time," saying that, Maru turned left.

"Some spend five years to reach this point, but someone else just catches up within one year. Isn't that too unfair?" She asked Daemyung.

"W-well. I never felt that it was unfair."

"Why?"

"Because Maru puts in more effort than me. He practices more diligently than me. Of course his skills are good. Yes, there may be some talent involved. However, no matter how talented a person is, there is no result without practice. Maru did everything in his powers to study and practice. If you get the opportunity, try reading Maru's script once. You'll see the traces of all of his thoughts crossed out, then rewritten, crossed out and rewritten again. I can't imagine the amount of time he invested into studying the script."

"...I can't deny that."

Yoojin thought back to Maru's script that she had chanced upon while preparing for a play with Maru in the Myungdong Theater. He analyzed every single character in depth, and just the sheer quantity made her dizzy. Nothing in the script was written without going through his thoughts. Just thinking about how much analysis he had to do in order to create something like that made her dizzy.

She was grumbling that Maru had all the talent, but she didn't actually mean it. No matter how much talent one had, not polishing those talents would make the talent stale. This was easily proven when looking at the lives of those so-called geniuses known to the world. Only the ones that polished their talents rose to the ranks of geniuses.

"But still, he's so dislikable. He's too good."

"That's true."

Maru stopped in front of a restaurant. It was a very shabby-looking restaurant. When they went inside through the wooden sliding door, a spicy air assaulted their faces. Yoojin coughed before looking inside. There were people who looked like salarymen. There were green bottles on many tables as well.

"I'm here," Maru greeted as he entered.

The middle-aged man, who seemed to be the owner of the store glanced at him before pointing at an empty table with his chin. Maru smiled and sat down at the table.

"What is this place?" Yoojin asked.

The owner was not nice, and this place looked like a mess as well. The TV hanging on the wall was broadcasting the news, and people shouted various things while looking at it. This place seemed like chaos.

"He cooks some amazing Jeyuk-bokkeum here. Excuse me, three portions of Jeyuk-bokkeum for the three of us."

The store owner stood up slowly and walked towards the kitchen. Along with a sizzle, white smoke started coming up. The spicy air inside the restaurant seemed to be from the Jeyuk-bokkeum.

“Why did you bring us to a place like this?”

Yoojin frowned because her eyes felt prickly. The smoke was intense. The customers sitting near the entrance opened the sliding door and shouted ‘Hey, owner! There’s too much smoke!’ It didn’t feel like he was upset or something. After all, he had a smile on his face.

“Go take a breather outside,” that was the owner’s reply.

“It’s good here.”

“What? This place is good?”

Seeing Maru smile, Yoojin then looked at Daemyung. She expected that Daemyung would say something about this strange restaurant.

However, Daemyung seemed to be on Maru’s wavelength.

“It smells good.”

“I don’t mention this place to anyone. Actually, a bottle of soju is perfect with the Jeyuk-bokkeum, but the owner here is a law-abiding man.”

“How dare you call me owner when you’re just a spring chicken?”

The owner of the store smacked Maru on the head before putting the Jeyuk-bokkeum on a grill on the table.

“You should really stop coming. Young people like you don’t belong here.”

“I’m here to raise your sales.”

“I don’t need your money.”

Snorting, the store owner then sat down on an empty chair. Yoojin couldn’t get used to the mood of this store. The air was mixed with the smell of food, alcohol and sweat, making her feel dizzy, and it was very noisy as well. She had a hard time getting her voice through to Maru and Daemyung.

‘And he’s not acting nicely!’

The first thing that Maru did after the meat arrived was to scoop some rice from the rice cooker, and get some Kimchi and pickled radish from the fridge.

“It’s all self-service?”

“Yeah.”

“No way.”

This was a cultural shock for Yoojin. This was something unimaginable in stores that she visited with her mother. Even the stores near her school that she went to with her friends weren’t as bad as this.

“Don’t tell me we have to do the dishes as well?”

“We do, if the owner tells us to. Hey, hey. It’s cooling down. Daemyung, eat a lot. Yoojin, you shouldn’t eat that much. Oh wait, you’re the one buying right? I guess you should eat a lot too then.”

“Haa...”

Yoojin looked at Maru and Daemyung with flabbergasted eyes. They could eat at a place like this?

“Hey, Park Daemyung. You okay with this?”

“With what?”

“This restaurant.”

“Yeah. I think this place is good. It’s filled with vitality.”

“Oh my word.”

Yoojin had a look around again. There was not a single woman. Obviously, very few women liked this kind of environment. Yoojin flinched and put her nose against her sleeves. It was reeking of meat already.

“I told you it’d be better for you to go home.”

“You’re doing this on purpose, aren’t you? Is it because I’m annoying you? Is it?”

“Do you take me for a petty person? Or do you think I care that much about you? Just shut up and start eating. Tell me what you think afterwards.”

Maru was holding out a sesame leaf ssam. She was about to refuse out of spite, but she felt that she would lose just by saying those words since Maru had an evil smile on his face. Yoojin narrowed her eyes and put the ssam in her mouth after picking it up with her chopsticks.

She thought of one thing when she ate it - she would never say that it’s delicious. She had the confidence to say that her taste buds, trained from visiting numerous famous restaurants, would not lose to something like this.

“.....”

Yoojin became silent. Then, she looked at Maru. Maru made a satisfied smile before speaking,

“One of the reasons I don’t hate you that much is because there are no falsities in your expressions. Daemyung, look at her face. She’s quite something to look at since she’s fighting her inner demons. I’m not expecting you to say that it’s delicious so just keep eating. You must be hungry because you haven’t had dinner yet.”

Yoojin turned her head around and sighed. Then, she picked up the chopsticks before speaking.

“Excuse me, manager. Please give us one, no, two more portions of Jeyuk-bokkeum.”

This was the first time she resented her taste buds for being so honest.

Seeing Maru with a victorious smile, Yoojin picked up some meat. Well, she had to fill her stomach first.

“...It’s not good at all.”

Realizing that those words were useless defense for her pride, Yoojin decided to give up.

Let’s just eat. Food is innocent, after all, right?

“But I heard that meat has high calories,” Maru sneaked that line in there.

He was really hateful until the very end.

Wrap, but with lettuce or other vegetables.. for more info. Here, sesame leaf is used instead of lettuce.

Chapter 280

The makeup artist’s hands were busy. She used dark-toned foundation to make the skin under the eyes darker and covered the chin up with a tone lighter than the skin to create a feeble-looking figure.

Joohyun turned her head around a little to look at the mirror.

“Here, I think you need to emphasize the wrinkles a little more.”

“You mean the nasolabial folds, right?”

“Yeah.”

“Unni, aren’t you going too far with the makeup? You’ll look old in the camera.”

“I’m doing an old role, so I should look like one.”

“I guess so, but isn’t it funny? She’s not even ten years younger than you, but you and she are mother and daughter. They should’ve just cast a younger actress.”

Joohyun ignored the makeup artist’s grumble and continued to check up on the makeup. It didn’t matter how old Suyeon, who was Joohyun’s daughter in the movie, was. The director chose Suyeon. That was enough. Also, the range of action that Suyeon could show in the movie wasn’t that narrow. She had the role of a high school girl who was unafraid of the world that falls into despair after witnessing the deaths of her parents, crying desperately, before being killed by the elder.

Compared to Suyeon, Yoojin, the second daughter, was much easier to do. After all, she just had to act like a nice girl. There was a moment when she fell into a state of loss after discovering the deaths of her mother and sister, but the scene was set to fade out while filming her back, so there was no need for delicate emotional acting.

Regardless of how Joohyun thought about Suyeon, her acting was satisfactory. She had a young-looking face as well, so there wouldn’t be any problems as long as she did not distract her from her own acting.

“It’s done, unni.”

Joohyun thanked the makeup artist before standing up. Looking at the feeble-looking lady in the mirror, Joohyun made a cold smile. She liked that expression of hers. The makeup was good as well. She had dyed her purple hair back to black, and straightened out her curly hair. She looked neat, but she looked cold and rational thanks to the makeup making her eyes look sharper. She got the impression she wanted.

The second son's wife, which was Joohyun's role, was a self-centered figure. She was the one that told her husband, who wanted to look after his elderly father, to abandon him instead. She tried protecting the group that was family, but that was only because she treated it as a place she could find shelter. She was the type of person who would abandon everything at the last moment if it could get her to safety. Although the second son dies together with his wife in the novel, it was edited during the making of the script and only the wife died first. The director said that it was done so in order to show the audience the miniscule amount of fatherly love in the elder, as well as to emphasize the lunacy when he kills the first son.

"I hope I can die well."

She couldn't die 'cleanly'. She had to be as desperate, as dirty as possible so that the audience would feel awry about her death throughout the entire movie. The wife of the second son wasn't the character that accepts her death without regrets. It would be for the best if she could show the audience the extreme depths of human nature so that they could empathize with the elder a little more.

When she left the makeup room, she met actor Kang Sooyeol, who she would act together with, in this movie.

"Whew, aren't you looking too scary?"

"That's good, that was my intention."

She was at ease with Sooyeol, who was in his early 40s, since they had experience working together before.

"Then let's go, my wife."

"Sure."

Sooyeol extended out his hand as though to escort her. Joohyun shrugged her shoulders and just passed by. The set was in a place near Seoul and was modelled after a stereotypical apartment. Joohyun took a walk around the set. Although there were on-location shoots, there were on-set shoots like this as well since they couldn't scream in public. The rather calm scenes were shot on location and the dynamic scenes were shot on sets like this one. Complaints would delay the whole shooting, so the staff had already prepared everything.

She saw that the art director was checking up on things. It looked as though he was very busy minding about the placement and even the angle of each item.

"Hey! I told you this isn't the right wallpaper!"

"Sorry."

"Apply it again quickly. Where the hell do you see an apartment where each wall has a different wallpaper? And those dishes! I told you we can't have cheap-looking dishes, didn't I? Also, that tablecloth! It doesn't suit the environment at all!"

The art director was on the edge. It was probably because he got into an argument with the assistant director a few times. Shooting this movie required many members in the staff. Of course there wasn't a single day where it was quiet.

"I'm Lee Yoojin, a new actress. Please take care of me! Oh! I'm Lee Yoojin, a new actress. Please take care of me!"

She saw Yoojin, who was greeting everyone as she entered the set. It was something that every new actor or actress experienced. It was the time when one had to utter their own names out the most.

"Joohyun-unni! Hello."

She had told Yoojin that there was no need to call her senior. She greeted back at the smiling Yoojin before sitting down. Yoojin sat next to her.

"Did you practice?"

"Yes!"

"You sound confident."

"I'm never going to make a mistake."

"Now that reassures me. But don't get too nervous though. You'll screw up if you become too stiff."

"Yes!"

Yoojin had told her that this was her first movie shoot. She told her that she had a slightly hard time getting adjusted to the atmosphere since it was different from a drama shoot, but also said that she was okay now. With dramas, the script changed constantly according to the feedback from the audience, and time was key since there was a set broadcasting time. It was important to do each cut quickly.

In contrast, movies had a lot more time. Though, it was the same that time was key since spending longer meant that the human resources cost would rise as well.

"My daughter, you're here."

"Hello, sir."

"Let's have a good day today, alright?"

"Yes."

Sooyeol sat down as he smiled. It seemed that the set had almost finished.

"Sorry we caused a delay due to our mistake. We're extremely sorry."

The youngest member of the arts team started making rounds apologizing to everyone. Sooyeol told him that it was okay and that he should go back to his post. As Sooyeol was well-known for his kindness in the movie industry, each of his words sounded really kind. This was why even Joohyun, who stopped at nothing, was quite careful when she was around him.

Yoojin, who was sitting down, abruptly stood up and went to the director, who was far away.

Seeing that, Joohyun was reminded of her old days.

It was when she gained the title 'youth star' in her early twenties through a short movie. She was excited, thinking that she would not have to experience suffering anymore. Back then, Joohyun was a polite and nice girl who helped others a lot, just like the ideal woman that South Korea thought.

One day, when she was looking at a script, she was told that she was scheduled for a meeting with a very important person and left her house in delight. There was a black sedan outside her house, and the car took her to a high-class bar in the city.

She was naive back then - Joohyun smiled in self-loathing. That day, Joohyun was forced to entertain that 'important person'. That important person kept stroking her thighs constantly. She couldn't even think about running away. Her head had turned white due to fear. Her fear-stricken expression must have seemed like coquetry to that man since that man acted even more boldly than before, and Joohyun moved away due to fear.

With a big laugh, the words 'you're acting coquettishly' entered her ears. Although a decade had passed since that event, Joohyun could still remember the smell, the temperature of the air, the noise, the food and wine on the table, and even the texture of the floor.

When she came to herself, the thought that she had to leave filled her head. However, she couldn't put it into action. The one that created that meeting had approached her and said thus,

You need to look good in front of him. Otherwise, you'll have a hard life in the future. You must shoot that movie, right? There's also the drama. You need to give up here, my dear actress Ahn. Isn't that right? Do you really want to go back to the old days when you couldn't even make a name for yourself? Back to the days when your face would be forgotten after mere moments?

Joohyun collapsed when she heard those words. She still had a strand of reason left and desperately refused the hand that tried to comb her body.

After the hellish dinner was over, Joohyun returned home after hearing from a movie director that she was going to walk the path of success. If that man asked for her body, Joohyun wouldn't have been able to rebel against him. It was that kind of place, and it was that kind of mood. Unless she was prepared to bite her tongue off and die, that was a horrible net that an ordinary woman couldn't escape from.

When she returned home her eyes met her brother Bangjoo's, and Joohyun desperately looked away as she rushed into her own room. Bangjoo, outside the door, asked what was up with a worried tone, and eventually even started crying, but Joohyun couldn't open the door. She felt that she would collapse on the spot if she did.

Joohyun smacked her head against the wall and fell into contemplation. What was she to do in the future? On her phone, there was a message saying that she got a commercial. It was surprising. Although she was seen in good light after her first movie, a new actress like her wouldn't usually get an opportunity as big as shooting a commercial. But now, she got one through 'lending' her thigh once.

At that moment, Joohyun felt that something within her shattered to smithereens. When she lifted her head off the wall, she saw that the sun had risen already. The awry feeling from before was gone and she felt more refreshed than ever.

A few days later, Joohyun shot the commercial. She did her best as well. After that, she did not refuse a single commercial that came her way. She even took the ramyun ad commercial, and a snack commercial that was publicly viewed as 'breaking a woman's good image', and even shot ones that didn't even air in Seoul. She was lucky enough to shoot a commercial for an apartment and a cosmetic product, but those only happened once. By that point, she was receiving insults from all around. The ones giving her insults were those that paid expensive internet fees to write on forums like Naunuri, Hitel, and Cheollian. Joohyun realized how the traits of the public worked.

She even dropped out of dramas that she passed the audition for and focused on shooting commercials. She once heard a director saying that she was an evil woman who only liked money, but that didn't matter to her. The man that scheduled the bar event approached her once again and tried to coerce her into doing that thing again, but Joohyun swore at him and kicked that man's thigh. That man shouted back at her with 'do you want to leave this industry this instant?' and Joohyun replied with 'Go fuck your mom'. She was surprised that she could speak such foul words, but she soon became used to it. Defying authority gave her an indescribable sense of pleasure.

There was only one reason Joohyun was so desperately earning money. It was due to the fear of running out of money, and the consequent hardships of life, which was why she was called to such a place in the first place. There was only one way to solve that problem - she had to have money.

Joohyun successfully gathered money, and with enough money in her hands, she had nothing to fear. She swore at the producers of commercial screenplays in all of her magazine interviews, and started taking the roles she wanted to do. When she came across some old men who wanted to 'look after' her, she was able to give them the middle finger.

After that, Joohyun was putting effort into making sure that young actresses didn't experience the same thing she did, but it wasn't easy to change the industry where 'service' was a form of etiquette and 'entertainment' was a form of business. This was why she always became worried when she looked at young fellows like Yoojin.

She hoped that she would grow up uncompromising with others.

Spending time in this industry makes one realize that not everything about being an actress was beautiful. Though, since Yoojin's mother ran a famous hair shop, she shouldn't fall into such a dirty temptation, but to actresses who had a hard life, such temptations were hard to overcome.

She couldn't tell those actresses to do what she did either. Although she felt nothing about it now, the disdainful gazes of the public and the people she worked with were like an invitation to a nightmare. Their eyes were horrific and dirty.

'But the fact that I'm still here must mean that I was born to be an actress.'

Joohyun flipped a page over. At that moment, a shadow was cast over her script. When she looked up, she saw Suyeon, who was her first daughter in the movie.

She was someone who survived this industry in a way different to hers. She had no intentions of looking down on her methods and describing them as 'dirty', but she also did not feel the need to get closer to her. Joohyun's motto was to starve if she was going to be fed by a pig.

“Hello, senior Joohyun.”

“Welcome, Suyeon.”

“Thank you.”

Suyeon smiled.