

Once Again 371

Chapter 371

“Take this as well.”

He received the clothes that were thrown at him. It was a set that made up a white cooking uniform. Although the sleeves looked a little long for him, it didn't matter. He was now used to adjusting clothes. He folded the end of his sleeves and fixed it in place with safety clips. When he had a look in the mirror, it didn't look that out of place.

“We must be fated. Don't you think so, Maru?” Gwangseok, who was touching up his hair, spoke.

Maru smiled and nodded. He might have to deal with this guy several times in the future, so there was no reason to cause trouble.

“Do I look good in this?”

“It suits you.”

“I'm good at cooking too. I would've been successful even if I decided to cook as my career.”

Gwangseok strongly snapped his wrist as though he was flipping ingredients inside a Chinese wok. Maru inwardly applauded the immature kid's hopeless dream. He wished him good luck. Who knows? He might actually become successful as a cook. Life was fun precisely because it was unpredictable.

He tidied his clothes before leaving the bathroom. The shoot would begin as soon as the main actors arrived. The actor that still hadn't arrived yet was Lee Miyoon. From what he overheard, it seemed that she was going to be around 10 minutes late because of a traffic jam. A senior said that she was going to be late, what could anyone do? Although many complaints could be heard throughout the set, those complaints would turn into flattery the moment Miyoon arrived.

“I haven't seen that woman arrive on time.”

“She might act all cocky if she does, so isn't it better that she's late.”

“That's true. Geez, if you're old at least act like it.”

Producer Kim and the assistant director went to the bathroom. Today, they looked like they were on good terms. Since the captain and the vice-captain of the ship were in good shape, the ship should sail smoothly today, as long as they didn't hit rocky waves.

Gwangseok entered the ranks of the staff using his unique social skills. The staff received him with smiles as though they didn't know who he was yet. It would be great if that lasted for quite a long time.

“Hey.”

He turned around when a voice called out to him. Gyunglim was scanning him from top to bottom.

“What is it?”

“Don't you have anything to say to me?”

"I don't."

"Really? That's strange. I thought you had a lot of things to say."

He avoided the producer that was coming out of the bathroom. Gyunglim moved with him. He was just watching the producer and the assistant director who were talking about going to have a drink together after the shoot when Gyunglim talked to him again.

"Why did you act like that back then?"

"Act like what back when?"

"Back at the restaurant. Why did you ignore me?"

It seemed that she was upset. Her eyes indicated so. Maru wondered what he should say before scratching his eyebrows and spoke,

"I'm not sure if I'm getting what you're saying, so can you please elaborate?"

"You're doing this on purpose, aren't you?"

"What?"

"You shouldn't do that, pretending to ignore me when you're actually interested in me. But you went too far. My heart will only move if you show your kind side, you know?"

"Uhm, excuse me? I think we're on different tracks here. Or am I the only one thinking that?"

Gyunglim showed glimpses of a smile.

"I said I know everything."

"Like I'm saying, what is this 'everything'?"

"You lent me an earphone because I looked a little unstable back then, right?"

"That, I did."

"And you're still going to deny it? I'm saying you went too far. I found out everything already. You don't have to keep up your pretenses anymore."

Gyunglim put her hands behind her back and leaned forward slightly.

She didn't look like she was playing around either, so Maru stepped back and spoke,

"I'm asking this just in case, but you aren't misunderstanding that I like you, right?"

Hearing those words, Gyunglim burst out laughing.

"Misunderstanding? How childish. It was so obvious, and you still pretend that it wasn't. You're cute. But you won't score any points like that if you treat me like how you did at the restaurant. You successfully attracted my attention, but you didn't finish it off well."

Maru tried his best not to laugh at her. After all, it would give her a bad impression. However, it seemed that he might not be able to. He couldn't stop his mouth from leaking out a laugh. So she acted like that

back then because she thought of this? He remembered back when he was glared at by her because he didn't talk to her. He couldn't even begin to estimate the depths of her misunderstanding.

"What are you two doing without me?"

Gwangseok came and hooked his arm around Maru's shoulders. Gyunglim, who was acting coy until now, immediately acted like she was doing something else. She pretended like Gwangseok wasn't even there. It seemed that she really disliked Gwangseok.

Gwangseok talked about the things he talked about with the staff. Most of them were rumors about various actors.

"He told me that if you work with that actor..."

He stopped midway through his story. The reason was simple. Lee Miyoon had arrived.

"You're here."

"Sorry, I'm a bit late."

"You're not late at all. We just finished our preparations."

"Really? Then I guess it's good that I was late then."

"Haha, yes, well."

The assistant director welcomed her. His expression and actions were very polite. Maru had a look at producer Kim who was standing on one side of the set. He seemed to have noticed that Miyoon was here, but he didn't move first. Only after the assistant director brought Miyoon to the back of the lights did he approach them as though he just noticed. Perhaps this was a form of a power struggle as well.

While Miyoon and the actors greeted each other, the assistant director called for the minor actors. It was for a rehearsal.

"Come here, too, Youngjin."

A man amidst the actors walked towards them. He seemed to be around the same age as Maru. He wasn't here the last time that Maru shot this drama.

"Watch carefully. You are going to walk past this counter. Who here is team member 1?"

"I am."

Maru raised his hand. The assistant director gestured to him to come.

"Watch this. Once he goes past this place, Youngjin, you grab his shoulder. He's carrying a tray in his hands, so don't grab him too hard. And then, start firing your questions at him, asking whether it was him that sprayed salt all over it. Okay?"

"Yes."

After hearing Youngjin's answer, the assistant director went over to the next person. It seemed that he didn't need an answer from the minor actors. They went to the storage room on the 2nd floor following the assistant director.

"Team member 1."

"Yes."

"The camera will shoot from above here. You know what the situation is in the drama, right?"

"I would receive compensation if I successfully ruined the main character's dish."

"Yes. You get what it's like, right? It's not like we're going to shoot for a long time here, so don't overdo it."

"Yes."

He exchanged lines and moved according to instructions with the main character. The producer came later and instructed them in detail. Of course, he focused on the main character.

"Well then, get into positions."

Many people were seated around the tables on the 2nd floor. They were all extras. The lead and supporting roles moved around busily amidst the tables of extras that acted like harmonious families. This scene was where they handed out dishes and surveyed which dish was the best.

"Cut. Over there, look like you're enjoying the meal a little more. I'm going to shoot a background scene."

The camera started shooting just the extras that were eating food. The camera captured a scene where they happily fed their children some food. When they shot a few scenes like that, the assistant director waved at Maru.

"Team member 1."

Maru put on the toque and received a plate from a staff. Next to him was the producer.

"Spray the salt, and come out through there. Don't make a mistake."

"Yes."

The antagonistic character, who was a child actor, stood next to him. He had seen him during the last shoot. When they stood in front of the camera, he made a vicious expression. It was as though he was saying 'I'm the villain of the story' with his face.

"Ready, cue!"

Maru looked at the lights before quickly turning his face to the actor in front of him.

"You heard what I said, right?"

"Uh, yeah."

"If you do this well, I'll pull you up in the next round. Trust me."

The youth tapped on his shoulder before looking at the salt container. Maru slowly turned his head to the side. It was about time he unleashed his emotions.

It was a god-sent chance. He knew that it was a risky decision, but his success would be guaranteed as long as he grabbed it. It was the smell of success. The tips of his body started trembling when he thought that he would be able to smell success with the entirety of his body. His ethics and conscience intertwined inside him. However, he had no choice. He wished to climb higher than anyone.

The pressure made him flinch, but it also made him smile. He shook just thinking about the sweet rewards he would get from walking on the tightrope. The salt container looked like gold to him. Yes, this was an opportunity.

'This feels pretty good.'

There was another copy of 'himself' that was calmly observing his 'self' that was letting greed overwhelm him. Maru thought that this scene would receive a 'cut' without much difficulty. When he took the audition before, he was very confused when he encountered a situation like this, but he had gotten used to it recently.

An observing me that is objectively watching the acting me. He thought that he should continue acting like this.

Just as he was reaching out and grabbing the salt,

"Cut."

Producer Kim's voice could be heard. Maru's observing self intercrossed with his acting self as though he was waking up from a dream. The 'team member 1' who was thirsty for success stepped aside.

"Again."

The producer's eyes were on the support actor. It seemed that he made a mistake. Maru calmed down his breathing and prepared to act. The same situation unfolded again and then cut at the exact same moment.

Maru looked at the producer once again. He was still looking at the support actor. Just what was the problem? Did he get sworn at by Miyoon or something? The producer looked very displeased.

He put down the salt and looked at the support actor in front of him. The guy that smiled at him before the shoot was now glaring at him. What was with him now? Maru smiled bitterly when he saw the eyes that were clearly dissatisfied with him.

It seemed that he didn't have much luck with acting today.

"Again, Hochul, do it properly this time."

It seemed that the support actor's name was Hochul. After straightening the ends of the navy blue cooking uniform, Hochul stood in front of Maru. The producer's cue sign could be heard.

"You heard what I said, right?"

"Uh, yeah."

“If you do this well, I’ll... sorry.”

Hochul turned around to see the camera mid-way through his line and bowed in apology. Mistakes could happen. Things would turn bad if it was repeated several times, but this mistake was a first. Maru thought that the producer would be okay with it. Since he was a child actor, there was a need to be considerate of him after all.

However.

“Hochul.”

“Yes.”

“We don’t have time to fool around. You know that there are seniors waiting for you, right?”

“Yes.”

“Then do it properly, and I mean properly.”

He sounded calm, but the tone of his voice was very harsh. It looked as though he would swear if this Hochul made any more mistakes. Maru looked at Hochul in front of him. He was biting his lower lip. He was clearly uneasy. Just what made him so uneasy?

“Well then, get into positions. Ready, cue!”

Along with the director’s cue sign, the shoot resumed. Maru decided to match Hochul’s every move so that he could focus more. He would accept the emotions that the other party gave him and he would return it with his emotions on top of it.

Maru saw Hochul’s neck muscles tense up. He was too tense. The character Hochul was acting was an antagonist full of confidence. That was why he was giving such dangerous instructions to the team member of his opponent. Such a character lost his composure and looks like he’s being chased by something? That was nonsense.

He got the premonition that the director would shout cut. If he was going to use it, then he might just look over it, but there was no way the director would miss that when he caught it several times before. Moreover, behind the producers were Miyoon and the lead actors.

The storage vault scene was supposed to be a short one so they must have come here because it was being dragged out for too long.

“Hey!”

There was no ‘cut’ sign this time. Maru saw the camera director, Jangsoo, turn off the camera in a hurry. Hochul, who was in front of him, flinched and took a step back.

Maru sighed and took a step back. He might be sworn at together with him if he stayed next to this guy.

“Aren’t you going to do this properly? This is the fourth time already!”

“I’m sorry.”

“You goddamn....”

“I’ll do it again.”

Maru looked at Hochul who was bowing in apology and turned his head around when he felt a gaze land on him. The producer was staring holes in him.

“Hey, you.”

“Yes?”

“You... nothing. Just do that once again. Okay?”

“Ah, yes.”

“Hochul, didn’t I keep telling you that you shouldn’t lose out to a minor actor? Do it properly, okay?”

Maru blinked once. So it was because of himself? He met eyes with Hochul. He could see Hochul’s lips move.

‘Know your place?’

If he didn’t see wrong, then it was something like that. Before the shoot resumed, Maru approached Hochul. He might say something if he went up close.

“Hey, don’t show me such a cheap act. You’re getting me involved,” Hochul said.

Cheap act, huh. Maru smiled and nodded. If it was the producer that said this to him, then he would lower himself and follow instructions even if he didn’t accept that. Why? Because the producer had the authority to fire a minor actor on the spot.

Then what about this kid in front of him?

Did this kid have a way to bring him harm?

Maru soon came to a conclusion.

“Just don’t be caught up with me.”

Maru calmly told him. Hochul widened his eyes and looked back at him. He was about to say something, but Maru quickly moved back.

He did not plan to become a hero that was weak against the weak and strong against the strong. If someone with power looked down on him, he would yield and wait for the right opportunity. But what if someone without power bared their fangs at him without knowing their place?

“Let’s do this together.”

Maru grinned back at him.

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Maru returned to his place and calmed his breathing. Although Hochul was glaring at him, glaring didn’t do damage.

“Don’t make a mistake. We’re going to start the shoot now, so get yourself together. Get your breathing together and... cue.”

Hochul softened his lips and got his emotions together before coming over to him and grabbing his shoulder. His fingers were tense. He even pinched slightly as though to ‘put Maru in his place’. There was a slight pain from Maru’s shoulder.

“You heard what I said, right?”

“Uh, yeah.”

“Just do as I say. If you do this well, I’ll pull you up in the next round. Trust me.”

That was a mistake on Hochul’s part. There was no such line as ‘just do as I say’. However, since the director didn’t cut them off, there was no need for Maru to mind about that. The judgement was the director’s worth. As long as he wasn’t given the signal to stop, he would continue acting.

He pulled his chin inwards and looked at Hochul. At this very moment, Hochul was a ray of light to him. It might be false hope, but he couldn’t help but be charmed by it. He was the one that might be able to turn team member 1’s desires into reality.

Actions required motivation, and motivation required emotion. It was important to pick out the emotion that was precisely between the boiling emotions and the uneasiness stemming from the fear that everything would fall apart if he was found out.

If it was any other time, he would volunteer to be expendable. He would not dig deep into the emotions of the character and would avoid the emotions of the other party as well. After all, this was something trivial. It was not important.

However, it was different now. It was an opportunity.

Opportunities were like invisible arrows. They just shot past even if one stood still. Those that create the arrows of opportunity by themselves were the so-called ‘prodigies’, and those that grabbed the arrows out of luck would be called ‘talented’. Normally, people would miss all of them. Despite so many opportunities whizzing past, most people don’t even realize that they did. That was normal. However, there were rare occasions where people discovered an opportunity that was coming straight at their faces. A razor-sharp opportunity would rage towards them. Most of the time, opportunities were scary. They did not occur in everyday life. They started from change, and change was something new, and new was something to be afraid of because it was the unknown. This was why people ignored those opportunities or consoled themselves by saying that the opportunity wasn’t for them and just let it go.

Maru was neither a genius nor a talented person. However, he had one weapon that no others of his age could have. It was experience. He had learned to adapt to change and developed his eyes to spot opportunities. This wasn’t given to him for nothing. It was compensation for the experience piled up from the long time he had lived.

At this moment, Maru’s vision widened. He saw the actors lined up behind the producer who was looking at him with an angry face. A small commotion brought them here and attracted their attention. The staff was paying attention to them as well. They were desperately hoping that he and Hochul would calm down the burning personality of the producer.

All of their attention was on the two. Maru barely held himself back from grinning.

A stage was set. A stage that would engrave his image into everyone's minds.

He followed Hochul's gaze. He saw the salt. Now, he had to grab it with all of his wishes. However, he couldn't look excited as he did so. This was an extremely dangerous task, a crime. There was no way a criminal would only be excited thinking about the good results. He had to do it carefully, and with a bit of hesitation as well.

"Sorry, I made a mistake in my line."

Maru stopped his hand in midair. He slowly turned around to look at Hochul. He had a very ugly expression on. Was his choice really right?

Maru looked at the producer. He wasn't saying anything. He only raised his hand to stop the camera. Hochul bowed his head and apologized to everyone.

Usually, everyone would just laugh if an NG scene occurred. It was something that humans did. Everyone knew that it would be strange instead if there were no mistakes at all. The producers all knew that the shoot would drag out if they shouted at the actors and the actors became intimidated.

However, there were times where they couldn't accept NG scenes. Maru noticed. The air was expanding. The situation was about to become really ugly here. Living a corporate life would make a person learn to read the mood. The mood of the office, that is.

Also, the mood of any workplace was decided by the most superior person there. In this place, it was the producer and Lee Miyoon.

There was only one reason that the producer stayed still. That was because there was someone who he couldn't act as he wished to in front of. Of course, the producer would win if they went to the bitter end with the power struggle. After all, he held the authority to change actors. However, holding power struggles with actors all the time would not allow him to keep shooting. So, he would let go most of the time unless the situation was serious.

"Hey."

Miyoon pointed at Hochul. Hochul froze up.

"Aren't you coming?"

"Ah, yes. I'm sorry."

Hochul immediately stood in front of Miyoon.

"Sorry producer Kim. I couldn't stay still. That's why I decided to interfere. Is that alright with you?"

"Yes, okay. Please explain it to him so that he can understand."

"Alright. Why don't we take a little break?" Miyoon spoke with a smile.

The producer declared a 10 minute break time. The staff members all walked away as though they were waiting for that moment. Only a minimum number of people remained behind to look after the

equipment. The actors walked away as well. Maru was about to join them and leave this place, but a voice stopped him from doing so.

“Hey, you. Come here.”

Maru sighed slightly and stood next to Hochul. Miyoon told the staff that was looking after the equipment to leave the place for a while. The staff members went away. There was no human presence around the storage vault.

“Hochul, was it?”

“Ye-Yes!”

“My dear, an actor must be bold once they start acting. You can’t cower in front of others. It doesn’t matter how old you are. Even if you treat an elderly in the 80s politely most of the time, you must act with the mindset to win against him once you start acting. That is what being an actor is.”

“Understood.”

“You understood? And yet you acted like that? Are you an extra? Or a staff member that’s just filling in because of an accident? If you’re a support actor that came here through the audition, you should overpower any minor actor with ease!”

Miyoon suddenly raised her voice. Her voice was loud enough to ring throughout the entire 2nd floor. Hochul flinched and shrunk his head.

“And who told you that you can stop? Hey, are you that confident in your acting skills? Do you have the confidence to do it flawlessly if you do it again?”

“N-no.”

“Then who the hell are you to stop midway when the director hasn’t said anything? If you aren’t good at acting, at least learn to read the mood. I’ve never seen anyone as stupid as you.”

Miyoon poked Hochul’s shoulder.

“You know? I am flabbergasted when I see idiots like you. People like you, who think anyone can be actors and show up on TV make me wake up at night. Are you one of those idols or something?”

“No.”

“Have you learned acting formally?”

“Yes.”

“Then what is wrong? How old are you?”

“E-eighteen.”

“And you’re old enough too. When I was your age, everyone treated me like an adult. But kids these days are kids even at that age. You still reek of milk. You learned acting? And you can still yap on with that mouth of yours? If it was me, I wouldn’t be able to speak because of embarrassment.”

"I'm sorry."

Hearing those words, Miyoon stiffened up and clicked her tongue.

"Do you know what I hate the most? It's people like you who are quick to apologize and want to escape the moment. It's horrific. Very horrific. Incompetent fools who only know how to apologize. Hey, whose family are you?"

"F-family?"

"I mean your company!"

"G-good People."

"Good People? I thought of them as a decent agency, but it looks like they made the wrong choice about you."

Miyoon slapped Hochul's cheeks with the back of her hand. Hochul swayed.

"Hah, you don't even have any strength in the legs and waist. Are you still a man?"

Miyoon walked in front of Hochul and tightly grabbed his thighs. Hochul closed his eyes shut and flinched back. Miyoon observed his expression for a while before letting go.

Maru clicked his tongue. This woman was something. Leaving aside good or bad, the pressure she gave off was incredible. She wasn't called the godmother in the drama industry for nothing.

She turned around from Hochul and faced Maru this time.

"I saw you last time."

"Yes. We met in Namyangju last time."

"Yes, I remember you. You're that smart kid. Now that I look at you today, you have the basics down. Whose family are you?"

"I'm currently in JA."

"JA, you say... Oh, it's Junmin's huh. No wonder your eyes are filled with vitality unlike the other kids these days. So you're in the same family as Suyeon?"

"Yes."

"Hm, Junmin does have a good eye for people."

Miyoon nodded with a satisfied smile.

"How old are you?"

"I'm also eighteen."

"Really? There's so much difference between you two even though you are the same age. It's because people like him are taking the good roles that people like you can't climb up."

A wrinkly hand stroked his chin. Maru smiled faintly and stood still. After observing his face for a while, Miyoon stepped back.

“I hope I see you more frequently.”

“Yes.”

Miyoon told Hochul to get himself together before leaving the storage vault. Hochul, who barely breathed, waited for Miyoon to leave. After that, he turned around.

“You damned bastard!”

Maru just watched Hochul come up to him and shout at him. He was someone true to his emotions. He must have grown up in an environment where he didn't have to read the mood around him. He was a little arrogant, but he had a bit of skill to back it up. He probably never got ignored by others of his age.

Maru understood how he felt. He probably felt wronged. He was probably thinking that it wasn't his fault.

“Because of you, I....”

“Stop nagging.”

Maru grabbed Hochul's shoulder. Then he clenched it. Hochul writhed in pain and tried to pull away, but he did not let go. Maru would probably have to see this guy again in the future, perhaps in the shoot of another drama. That was why he needed to set things straight here. If he couldn't be close to him, then he had to go higher than him. That would make things much easier for him.

“Just do your bit. I will do my bit. It's that simple. Understand?”

He looked straight into Hochul's eyes and spoke. This kind of guy only knew how to pretend to be angry, not actually get angry. In some sense, he was a kind and soft guy. Hochul looked away and shut his mouth. Perhaps his last line of pride was that he didn't nod.

Maru loosened his hand and let go. Hochul left as he looked down at the floor.

‘Phew, this is hard.’

He leaned against the wall and stretched his arms out. He had to make the most of what little break time he had left.

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“I'm sorry, please forgive me.”

“Those who play around with food for the customers don't have the right to cook. Get out of here this instant!”

Maru slowly kneeled as he was scolded by Miyoon. Then, he shouted at her to give him another chance. The camera followed Miyoon. Now, he wouldn't be on the camera anymore. However, his voice would. He smashed his head against the ground and kept shouting. Just like the script said.

“Okay!”

The producer's voice could be heard. Maru breathed out one last time at the floor in front of him before raising his head. His throat was getting sore after all that shouting.

"Nice acting."

The producer smiled and tapped his head with the script. It seemed that he had scored some points with him. Although Hochoul was glaring at him from the corner, Maru didn't even mind.

"Wow, you're quite good."

Gwangseok approached him and spoke. Gyunglim was behind him as well. Maru took off the toque and the cooking uniform and returned them. That was it for minor actors today. Only scenes for the lead and support actors were left. Maru said goodbye to the other actors and the staff before leaving the restaurant.

"I heard some loud scolding back there. What was it about?"

Gwangseok asked what happened in the storage vault. Maru said that it was nothing much.

"Really? Well, that woman did shout at every mistake she saw during the last shoot. No, I guess she's not a woman but a hag?"

Gwangseok shook his head as though he was fed up with her.

"Hey, it looks like we need to delay our appointment for later. Something came up suddenly."

"Alright."

That was good. Maru had something to do at home. It was to watch historical dramas on RBS. Although the elder told him not to worry about the audition, he didn't know what was coming for him. Just as he turned around after sending Gwangseok off, though,

"Hey."

Gyunglim approached him.

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"Let's grab something to eat," Gyunglim spoke as she hooked her arm around Maru's.

Maru looked at her face before pulling out his arm.

"I'm planning to eat at home."

"I'm not going to tell you to treat me, so let's go."

Maru stared at Gyunglim who pulled on his arm.

"I like to make things clear. Especially when it comes to relationships."

Gyunglim let go of his arm and tilted her head.

"So?"

"We can eat together, that's fine. After all, in a broader sense, we are colleagues that are working together. But after hearing what you said to me before, I think your intention is clearly not the 'colleague' sense of eating together. Am I wrong?"

Gyunglim brushed side hair behind her ears and smiled.

"So, you're really not interested in me?"

"Yes. Really."

"Then why did you act like that to me before? Why were you kind to me?"

"Anyone can act like that out of kindness. Isn't it courtesy to worry about someone even in words if they look uneasy next to you?"

"So it was an act out of kindness?"

Maru nodded. What was this called again, princess syndrome? It was good that she was confident about herself, but the way she conveyed that to the others around her was a big problem.

"R-really?"

Gyunglim's expression became uneasy as she bit her lips slightly. She was really easy to read. She was like this during the last shoot as well. She was the type to blurt out what was on her mind and instantly regret it. Put in a good way, she was brave and put in a bad way, she didn't think much. It seemed that her ego was big enough to think that everyone around her liked her, but Maru didn't know how to put it in order to make her understand.

"You should fix that habit of yours to blurt out what's in your head. If you don't, you'll be misunderstood by a lot of people. Also, stop fantasizing after you shut up because you look like you're in a bad position. Likewise, the misunderstanding becomes bigger as well. Lastly, I'm a married man."

"M-m-married man?"

Gyunglim scanned him before slowly taking steps backwards.

Maru shrugged. A moment later, Gyunglim made an angry expression after realizing that it was a joke, but she immediately loosened it.

"...Then let's just eat together. I don't want to eat by myself."

"Don't you have any friends?"

"I don't. I, I mean, it's not that I don't but..."

Gyunglim started biting her lips after blurting that out. Looking at her now, it was quite interesting to watch her. She wasn't a bad girl at heart. She was just awkward at expressing herself and fantasized a lot, which made her unlikable.

"Are you treating me?"

"Me?"

"I lent you an ear and even gave you a diagnosis, I think that's worth a meal."

"...Yeah, it's a waste, but okay."

"There you go again."

"What?"

"You didn't have to say the latter part."

"It's not good to deceive people, right? It's better to be honest."

Maru smiled when he heard the textbook answer. Well, she was right, in a sense. The plant known as the art of living did not exactly sprout from the soil known as ethics.

"You're going to eat something cheap, right?"

"I'm not that shameless."

Maru pointed at the kimbap restaurant right in front.

* * *

"It's not."

"It is."

"I'm serious. This is real."

"Put your hand on your heart and say that again. Really?"

"Uhm, yeah!"

"Think about what your hesitation means."

"You damned...."

"Don't swear at me."

"I'm not doing this!"

Gyunglim snorted and started eating the ramen. Maru thought that she'd order a roll of vegetable kimbap due to considerations of her weight, but she ordered pork cutlets, a roll of cheese kimbap, a bowl of ramyun with cheese, and even a bowl of jeyuk-bokkeum to go with it, all for herself.

"Noona. I'm not joking around. Did Ahn Sungjae's eyes really look serious when he looked at you?"

"I told you so. We take the same class, and we met eyes several times!"

Bits and pieces of ramyun spewed out from her mouth. Maru quickly avoided them. Gyunglim looked at the food fragments on the table before quickly wiping them away with some tissue. Then, she wiped her mouth with the same tissue as though nothing had happened.

"Ahn Sungjae from TTO fancies you?"

“How many times do I have to tell you?”

Gyunglim stuffed more kimbap in her mouth out of frustration.

The start of the story was like this: Right after they ordered some food, Gyunglim started talking about Sungjae. They were taking classes together, and it seemed that he took fancy in her.

Hearing those words, Maru burst out laughing, and things led to one another up to this point.

“They say multiple coincidences is fate.”

“Yes, I heard that before. And it’s also been discovered that it’s completely useless.”

“Would we have met eyes if he didn’t look at me?”

“I thought there were only three in the class. Gwangseok-hyung, Ahn Sungjae, and you, noona. You don’t like Gwangseok-hyung, right?”

“Yeah. I totally hate that guy.”

She didn’t hesitate at all. Maru nodded and asked again.

“And you said that the instructor is quite scary, right?”

“Yeah! When she stays still, she looks very lofty and looks like she won’t talk at all, but once she does open her mouth, it’s an endless wave of storms. Moreover, you don’t know how harsh her training sessions are. I’m not sure if I’m going to learn acting or gymnastics.”

“Meeting eyes with someone like that makes you feel unpleasant, right?”

“Of course.”

“There, we have a conclusion. Where else can you look? The only one left is Ahn Sungjae. In the end, the only reason you met eyes with him is not because Ahn Sungjae is looking at you, noona, but because you are ogling Ahn Sungjae all the time. Okay?”

“...”

“Looks like you think what I’m saying is true since you’re staying quiet.”

Maru looked into Gyunglim’s eyes as he ate some pickled radish. When he looked into her eyes, a speech bubble popped up above her head.

-Fine, you’re smart. You’re right. Yeah, that’s right! Let’s say you’re right!

“Fine, you’re smart. You’re right. Yeah, that’s right! Let’s say you’re right!”

She blurted out what was exactly on her mind. Maru started laughing again. At this point, she was a human treasure; one that did not know how to hold back.

“You can say all that, so why did you stay still back then? People dislike you because you stay silent for everything else but blurt out things that poke their conscience.”

“...That’s because I’m not used to speaking in front of others. No, I hate doing so.”

“And yet you’re trying to be an actor?”

“Acting is different. It’s work. But talking to a crowd of people is too hard.”

“I get it. You actually ran into a lot of trouble because you talked too much, right? And that’s why you stay silent.”

“You know well.”

Gyunglim put the spoon inside her mouth and just moved it up and down.

“You should really learn to tell lies and suck up to people. You’re an adult, you should be able to do that. I think twenty-one is plenty old enough.”

“Hey, I know that too, you know?”

“If you know, then you should put it into practice. Also, don’t think that all men like you. When I look at you, I feel like you’d get your entire life’s savings scammed by someone.”

“Me?”

“Yes. Tell me honestly. Have you ever dated someone?”

“N-no. How did you know that?”

“It’s obvious from looking at you. Who would like a girl who acts proud because she thinks everyone likes her? Even if they did like you, they’d probably feel horrible from seeing how you act and walk away.”

“Why?”

“Why? Unless it’s unconditional love, love goes both ways. You should look for one-sided devotion in fiction. Think about it. There’s a man who has an interest in you. He approached you in hopes of developing his feelings into love, but you suddenly say ‘I know everything already. You like me, don’t you?’ to him. How would he feel then?”

“...Good, probably?”

“Oh my word....”

“Th-that’s not it? Why? Whether he likes me or hates me, he should just say it. He has an interest in me because he likes me, right?”

“There are things called stages. Also, being honest isn’t always the answer. Especially when it comes to relationships.”

“I don’t understand.”

“It’s me who doesn’t understand. Are you even Korean?”

“I am.”

Gyunglim fiddled with her smartphone as she pouted.

“What are you doing?”

“Talking to my friends.”

“I thought you didn’t have any.”

“I do.”

Now that he thought about it, Gyunglim stared at her phone a lot during the last shoot as well. She was also on her phone the entire time throughout dinner at the BBQ restaurant last time.

“Should I show you my friends?”

She looked like someone who liked to boast about her friends. Maru nodded. He did wonder what kind of people they were. Gyunglim proudly showed him her phone screen. There were several messages. However, the names of the senders were quite strange.

“Are they foreigners?”

“No, they’re Korean.”

“Then why are their names in English?”

“Oh, that? It’s their IDs.”

“IDs?”

“Yeah.”

“What IDs?”

“Blog IDs.”

“...Oh.”

“What?”

“Have you ever met the people you’re texting in person?”

“N-no.”

“...I guess internet friends do count as friends.”

Gyunglim connected to the internet on her phone. She showed him the blog she was using on her tiny phone screen. Curiously, it was a blog related to calligraphy. Maru was worried about her phone bill. It would probably cost a lot to keep scrolling through the page like that.

“Your phone bill will go up if you use it that much.”

“It’s fine.”

She didn’t seem to worry about it that much. After showing him around the blog for a while, Gyunglim continued speaking.

“Look, they’re all good people. They never get angry. Everyone’s honest.”

“Sure.”

“Why are you looking at me like that?”

Maru smiled and looked away. He didn't know whether she was a good girl or not, but she was definitely a kind person. People like her were extremely rare in the current era. She maintained her honesty in an era where teachers taught the kids to be honest but being honest never had its good sides.

“Uhm, hey.”

“Yes?”

“Actually, there's one more reason I asked you to eat with me.”

Gyunglim hesitated for the first time since coming to the restaurant. Maru ate the last piece of pork cutlet and spoke.

“What is it?”

“Can you teach me acting?”

“Eh? Me?”

“Yes. I saw it. How should I put it... Yes, it gave me the chills. I also want to act like that.”

“I thought you were already learning from an instructor.”

“I am, but I want to learn it in an easier way. You're good at talking, aren't you? Teach me, okay?”

“Forget it. I have my hands full as it is. I'm not teaching anyone.”

“If it's money, I'll pay. How much do you need?”

“Fine. It's 5 million won. Not anything less than that.”

“Alright. That sounds fine.”

“Eh?”

Maru stared at Gyunglim for a while before chuckling. So she knew how to joke around after all.

“Forget it. Go learn from that instructor. Rather than that, let's get going since we finished.”

“Hey!”

Maru picked up a toothpick before quickly leaving. Gyunglim quickly followed him and panted.

“Thanks for the meal.”

“Why did you run away?”

“I thought you were the one buying.”

“Yeah, but still.”

"Then I don't see a problem."

"Dammit. Leaving that aside, say yes. Say you'll teach me."

"I told you to learn from that instructor."

"I hate that instructor. She's scary. You just don't know what she's like. I made one mistake and she gave me an earful. Do you have experience running to death in this weather? Well, I do. That instructor, I mean, that woman stops at nothing."

"Wow, she must be good."

"I get that she's skilled. Yes, that woman's good. But she doesn't suit me."

"Then quit."

"No, I can't do that. Since I started it, I must do it until the end."

"Then I guess your only choice is to endure."

Maru felt a little tired since he just ate. He yawned as he walked towards the bus stop. Gyunglim snorted and followed him.

"Aren't you going your way?"

"I'm also going this way! I have a lesson in an hour."

"With that scary instructor?"

"Yeah."

"Good for you."

Just as he said that, his phone rang.

"Hello?"

-Han Maru. It's me.

"Senior Miso. What's up?"

-You heard from senior Junmin, right? That you need to attend lessons.

"Yes. Oh, are you the one teaching me?"

-Correct.

"Phew, is there physical training this time as well?"

-Acting requires stamina as well. Rather than that, what are you doing now? If you don't have anything, come on over.

"To where?"

-Film, the academy in Gangnam.

“Oh? I’m in Yeoksam-dong right now. I’m nearby, so I should be able to go soon.”

-Really? That’s good. This place is near Gangnam station.

“I’ll give you a call once I arrive at the station then.”

He hung up before looking behind him.

“I got an appointment, so I need to get going.”

“Fine, go. You damn prick.”

“See you next time.”

He waved at her before walking towards Gangnam station. He walked for quite a while before turning around, and he saw that Gyunglim was still following him.

“Are you still following me?”

“I said I’m going this way as well.”

Gyunglim angrily walked ahead of him. Maru shrugged as he walked.

Chapter 374

Maru thought that something was strange when he crossed the pedestrian overpass with her.

“Is the place you’re going to Film?”

“Yes, and?”

Maru laughed in vain as he walked into the building’s elevator and saw it close. Soon, they were on the 5th floor.

“Wait, you too?”

“Yes.”

“Do you commute here as well?”

Gyunglim asked in the corridor of the 5th floor.

“No, I came here to visit because someone I know is here.”

“Someone you know?”

“Yes. She works as an instructor.”

“That’s a strange coincidence. Hey, I told you that I wasn’t following you, okay?”

Gyunglim snorted before opening the door to the academy.

“Then Ahn Sungjae must be here as well?”

“It’s not just him. There are tons of famous people here. Just the actors that are here as instructors are super popular people.”

Gyunglim went to the 3rd lecture room. Maru stood in the corridor and called Miso.

"I've arrived at Film. I'm at the entrance right now."

-Then wait there a minute. I'm going in right now as well.

It seemed that she went outside for lunch. He sat down on a seat in front of the information desk. The floor and ceilings were tiled in red. Next to the entrance which gave a strong impression were the signs and photos of various stars. It didn't look like the academy was trying to boast, but rather was just calmly telling the visitors that they had such people.

"Are you here to consult about taking lessons?"

A lady holding a cup of coffee approached him and asked.

"No, I have an appointment with one of the instructors here so I'm waiting a little."

"An instructor? Who?"

"Instructor Yang Miso."

"Instructor Yang Miso?"

The lady seemed a little surprised. Just then, the door opened and Miso entered. She was holding a paper bag with a sandwich franchise logo in both of her hands.

"You're here."

"Yes, I'm here."

"Then take this for a sec. It's rather heavy."

"I know you're strong."

He received the paper bag that Miso gave him. In one bag were six cups of coffee, and in the other were various sandwiches.

Miso looked at the coffee in the staff's hands and spoke,

"Oh, you had lunch already?"

"Yes. We had a light meal."

"What a pity, I should've been quicker. Then take this as dessert. You can take the coffee as well."

Miso handed her a coffee and a sandwich despite the lady refusing.

"Thank you."

They switched places after the lady thanked Miso. The place Miso headed towards was the 3rd lecture room.

"This is the place?"

"Yeah."

Miso opened the door. Maru saw Gyunglim abruptly stand up from her seat. So the scary instructor was Miso? Maru barely held himself back from laughing and followed her in.

Gyunglim greeted Miso and discovered Maru, which made her confused.

"I'll be in the faculty office for a bit. You two should get to know each other. You're going to receive lessons together from tomorrow onwards. Oh, you can eat those as well."

Miso took some coffees and sandwiches before leaving the lecture room.

"So the instructor you knew was instructor Miso?"

"Yes. What a coincidence."

"Urgh, really?"

"Why are you so scared? Are you afraid that I'll tell senior Miso what you said about her? That she's scary, easily pissed, evil, and is total human trash?"

"I never said she was human trash!"

"Really? Then let me leave that out."

Maru placed the two coffee cups in front of him and spoke.

"It looks like one's black coffee and one's a latte. Which one do you want?"

"I want the latte."

He handed her the latte and sipped on the black coffee. When he was young, he wondered why people bothered drinking this bitter stuff. The coffee-lovers apparently looked for the hidden acidic and sweet taste, but Maru drank it for the bitter and 'cheap' taste. Oh, and for health reasons. After hearing that sugar was the source of all diseases, he always drank black. Though, he wouldn't do that now.

"But why do you call the instructor senior?"

"Because she's a graduate of my school."

"No way."

"This is why people call our country small."

Gyunglim pouted as she drank the coffee.

"It's really hot today, isn't it?"

The door abruptly opened and Miso entered. In her hand was a fan. From how there was a photo of an apartment complex on it, it seemed that she received it from a nearby estate agent.

"Have you introduced yourselves?"

"We know each other, so we skipped that part."

"Really? Miss Gyunglim, you know this guy?"

Gyunglim nodded shyly. She said she was scared of her, and it seemed like she didn't know what to do.

"That's good. You are going to take the same lessons in the future. Maru, how's your time? I thought you were going to practice because you're preparing for a movie."

"I'm going there twice a week. On Thursdays and Fridays."

"That's good. Lessons are on Mondays, Tuesdays, and Wednesdays."

"It's held three times a week?"

"Well, yeah. They're paying expensive fees for it after all."

"Expensive fees?"

Maru subconsciously looked at Gyunglim. Gyunglim, who was biting a sandwich, looked at him with a questioning expression.

Maru looked at Miso and asked in a small voice.

"How much is it?"

"Three times a week, two hours per session. How much do you think it is per month, then?"

"Hm, if it's that much... 300 thousand? No. It's Gangnam here, so 500 thousand maybe?"

"Wow, 500 thousand?"

"It's not?"

"It's five million."

After hearing that, Maru almost dropped his coffee.

"You're kidding."

"Kidding? No, it's my class, so I should get that much at least."

"How many are there in the class?"

"Four including you."

"...That's not a lot."

"I'm teaching only so many members in Film, so there's no way a couple hundred thousand is enough."

"Gangnam sure is scary."

"This isn't that much. My lessons are cheap. The children of the so-called 'prestigious' families don't come to acting schools like this. The super rich people are all at the college entrance preparation academies. I got to know a maths teacher through work, and apparently, that person received a watch after CSAT last year. One that cost 15 million won. Compared to that, this place is chump change."

"Should I quit being an actor and start digging into maths?"

"I thought your grades weren't good."

"I'm solidly in the middle. Looks like I should focus on acting."

"You really know your stuff, concerned about money at your age. But you're good at acting as well. Man, the world is so unfair."

Miso smacked Maru's forehead. At that moment, a coughing sound could be heard. Gyunglim had a very surprised expression on her face.

"Anyway, you should come here by 10 in the future. As for what you need to bring, it's a healthy body, undying mentality, as well as...."

"Willpower and tenacity, probably."

"There you go. You've been keeping in shape, right?"

"Unintentionally, yes. Action acting was harder than I expected."

"What's not hard these days? If it's an action school in Seoul, then it must be director Kim Choongho, huh. You should learn a lot from him. There's no one better than him in our country."

"Well, I'm trying my best to do exactly that."

Miso grinned.

"Oh yeah. The movie. It's the one by director Park Joongjin, isn't it?"

"Yes."

"Then I guess I'll see you there too."

"There too?"

"At the set."

"Wait, you were cast as well?"

"No, he asked me to advise on acting on the set."

"Acting advice? On the set? I thought that's what directors did."

"Right? I was going to refuse because it was so sudden, but it's director Park Joongjin, isn't it? The legendary Park Joongjin of 'Spring Calendar'. That's why I gave it a shot. Perhaps I'll get to learn something from him. Even that picky senior Junmin gave me permission as well."

"So you're doing it?"

"As experience, yes."

"He's not your everyday eccentric... I think putting the two of you together might cause problems."

"I'm a calm and obedient person, so it's fine."

"Haha, that's the funniest joke I've heard this year."

Maru quickly continued when he saw Miso's hand up in the air.

"So, when do I get to eat the celebratory noodles?"

"...W-wait a little more."

"So that means there was some progress?"

"I did greet his parents."

Miso raised her thumb and spoke.

"But why do I need to report to you about it?"

"Because I was the wingman. Am I wrong?"

"I guess you're right."

"They say owing someone will make you regret it."

"Can't you just come and eat food without paying congratulatory gift money?"

Miso stood up after messing up Maru's hair.

"Miss Gyunglim."

"Yes!"

"Do you have any message from Mr. Sungjae?"

"No."

"He's usually here 10 minutes before class..."

As soon as Miso said that, the door to the lecture room opened. Sungjae appeared wearing a trench coat. A trench coat in the summer, huh. He even had makeup on.

"Sorry for being late."

"Not at all. We haven't started yet. Rather than that, were you at a photoshoot or something?"

"Yes."

"Really?"

"Yes."

Sungjae came in with an awkward smile and discovered Maru.

"Oh, it's you."

"We've met before, haven't we? Hello."

"You're the one I saw when I was going to the set, right?"

"Yes, that's me."

“Nice to meet you. I’ve always wanted to meet you.”

“Me?”

“I’ve heard some stories about you from sir Moonjoong.”

Sungjae reached out and offered a handshake. Maru wiped his hand on his pants and grabbed Sungjae’s hand.

“What’s your name?”

“I’m Han Maru. Oh, my sister is a huge fan of yours. I gave her your autograph back then.”

“Really? That’s good.”

Sungjae smiled as he let go. Maru exclaimed slightly. He looked very handsome and did not lose out to any actors. It seemed that not anyone could become the best in the country.

“Ah.”

Maru grinned and looked at Gyunglim. Gyunglim shook her head vigorously.

“What is it?”

“Nothing. Rather than that, please take care of me in the future. I’m going to receive lessons here as well.”

“Really? That’s good for me.”

He was even cooler when he smiled. Maru felt that he might become a fan at this rate. It shouldn’t be bad to go to his concert one time.

“Well then. If you finished introducing yourselves, let’s begin, shall we?”

Miso clapped to gather attention.

“Maru, you should just watch for today. Also, once you officially join, I’m going to call you Mr. Maru, so bear that in mind.”

“Really? That gives me the chills for some reason.”

“Shut up and listen.”

“Okay. Oh, what about the lesson fees?”

“Senior Junmin already paid for it.”

“My backer is quite reassuring.”

“Stop grinning and go sit over there. Well then, let’s begin.”

Maru nodded and sat down on the chair.

* * *

“Even characters without much weight have their own backstory. However, the script will not mention what that character did until now, what kinds of problems he or she has, or what kinds of desires he or she has. That’s because they’re just characters that just flash by. But there are people that grab onto those characters, dig into them, and try to make the character their own. Those are the actors that you need to learn from.”

Sungjae nodded his head. What Miso said was entirely correct.

“Among the top actors and actresses today, there is no one that was suddenly cast as a lead role. Everyone started from nameless minor roles. We get surprised when seeing such actors. How can they act like that? The answer lies in the characters they created. They have one body, but they have several souls. They really become a beggar if they play a beggar role, and when they play a rich role, then they become rich to their bones. They do not stop at imitating that role, but they continue on to understand and dig deeper into the mindset of such people and become the character itself. The thing we call method acting is actually the acting skill that’s focused on the foundation.”

“Is it enough to just get immersed into the role?” Sungjae asked a question.

“No. Oh, bear in mind, what I’m saying might not be the truth. What I’m about to say is just one methodology. You asked a very nice question. Becoming immersed, that’s not easy either. However, if you can do that, no one will tell you that you’re bad at acting. However, the actors that play around with the audience on their palms do not stop there. They add character to that. Let’s take an example. Everyone here knows Park Taeho, right?”

“Of course. Who doesn’t?”

Gyunglim spoke.

“Actor Park Taeho, winner of the Daejong Awards. In the movie ‘The Road Home’ he shot two years ago, he played a man in his 40s who was forced to voluntarily resign from his company. In order to understand such people, he approached actual people who were forced to resign from their company and talked with them. Some actors have people under them to gather materials and do interviews for them, but like that, they’ll never be fully fledged. First-hand interviews and seeing it on paper are worlds different after all. Like that, he understood their problems, experienced their pains, and perhaps even received insults from such people for doing such a thing. That’s how the main character of that movie came about.”

Sungjae imagined himself going to various people and asking questions. It wasn’t anything good either. Asking people who were forced to resign from their companies about their resignation? He’d probably have to be prepared to get slapped at least.

“Also, Park Taeho donated his guarantee from that movie to a foundation that works for the re-employment of middle-aged people. He also did a campaign with the people that helped him out on the interview. Of course, I’m not telling you all to do this. That’s something that happened because the man named Park Taeho is too great. Normal people can’t do that, whether it’s due to emotional limitations or due to physical limitations.”

Miso looked at the clock before breathing out.

“Let’s stop there for today. I talked too much.”

Chapter 375

The method was very different from how she taught at school. At school, Miso just gave instructions. The only thing that awaited those that were not able to follow instructions was cruel leg stretching. She put importance on unified acting rather than independent thought and tried to put all the students into a standardized mold like the military. It was Miso’s way of building the foundation.

However, the people gathered here were either pros or aspiring pros. There was no reason to follow a forced and unified education style. Miso’s way of doing lessons was to first talk about the theoretical stuff, and then bring up examples to explain. After building the founding knowledge, she immediately had her students practice.

Most of the acting was free acting. There were times where she would give context, but most of the time, she induced the actors to create a situation for themselves. After the act, the actor would then explain the theoretical stuff themselves: what the surface and inner emotions were; whether they matched or not and if they matched, why they matched or if they did not, why they did not.

Miso asked questions until the answerer couldn’t say anything anymore. Although Maru was just watching, he felt his strength draining. When Gyunglim said that she was scary, he thought of an instructor that shouted at the students, but this was on a completely different level. Shouting, they could just ignore. They might feel bad while they were being scolded, but they would be able to forget about it after some time. Moreover, it was easier on the mind as well since it didn’t require any action on the student’s part.

However, these kinds of lessons where they had to devise their own acts required the students to think about their actions endlessly. Miso did not scold people, but she persistently asked questions about their acting until they could not answer anymore. It would end only when they were at a loss for words.

“Haa, it’s so hard.”

Gyunglim became utterly exhausted as she collapsed on the ground. She looked like she didn’t have the strength to sit on her seat. She fell sideways and started sighing. Sungjae approached Maru.

“What do you think?”

“It’s terrible. Shouldn’t you report her to the police for human rights violation?”

When he said that, Miso, who was drinking water in front of the beam projector screen said that she could hear everything.

“It’s hard, but it’s worth it. I feel like I’ve returned to my younger days.”

“Your younger days?”

Sungjae nodded.

“Before I entered TTO, I was going to an acting school. That was during high school so whew, that’s nearly 10 years ago.”

“Your dream was to become an actor when you were young, huh.”

“It still is. Becoming an idol is well, a strategy of sorts. When I think about it now, I must have not been confident in myself. That’s why I followed the president’s words. If I really had the confidence that I would do well, I would have probably stuck with that path and not become an idol.”

“Do you regret it?”

Hearing that question, Sungjae smiled and didn’t say anything. Maru sipped some water before speaking.

“I think it was a splendid decision.”

“What, mine?”

“Yes. If you become successful after walking down a path filled with hardships, you might look cool, but there is no difference in success, is there? As long as you’re doing good, then that’s good enough. If someone gave me the same offer, I would take it without hesitation. No, wait. Being an idol isn’t easy, right? If you think about it, those that will become successful will become successful no matter what. They just take detours.”

Did Sungjae win the title of the ‘best idol in Korea’ through gambling? Did he pick it up from the side of the road? With the rise in popularity of idols, there was a rise in the number of idol-related TV programs as well, and Maru got to watch a documentary of trainees that wished to become idols. They staked everything into their agencies in order to become idols. Junmin once said that the actor market was a red ocean. In Maru’s opinion, the idol market was a blood ocean. Sungjae said that he was not confident, but with that tenacity and passion of his that put him in his spot right now, he would probably have done well no matter what it was.

“If you put it like that, I feel thankful and a little embarrassed.”

“If you appreciate it, then give me another autograph. My sister is starting to become defiant so I need a carrot for her.”

“Haha, sure. But looks like you’re on good terms with your sister, huh? One of our members would just shudder at the mention of his little sister.”

“Well, she’s a piece of luggage. I heard that Gwangseok-hyung was in this class as well.”

“He says he’s taking the day off because he has an appointment today. You know him as well?”

“The three of us, including Gyunglim-noona, met during a shoot before. All three of us as minor actors.”

“I see. A movie shoot?”

“No, it was for a drama.”

“You haven’t shot a movie since Twilight Struggles?”

“I haven’t shot one yet, but I am training in order to shoot one.”

“That’s good. Sir Moonjoong told me that it would be bad to have a long rest period. Looks like you don’t need to worry about that.”

“I have it rather lucky.”

Practice was important, but not losing a sense of the real deal was just as important. It was a very good fortune that Maru was able to keep acting without a long break.

“Looks like the elder has told you a lot of good things.”

“The elder? Oh, sir Moonjoong, huh. Hm, actually, I was scolded a lot instead. The day I met you was my first day on the set, and I was scolded big time from the get go.”

“By the elder?”

“Yes. Looks like I had something like an inferiority complex. That’s why I became nervous by myself when I first arrived at the set. I believed that the actors would not see me in a good light. After all, I hear quite frequently that idols are trying to steal the places of actors.”

Sungjae smiled in embarrassment.

“But I realized the next day that I was horribly misunderstanding. Stealing their places? That was just a delusion. I could never win against them through acting.”

“However, when it comes to popularity, you won’t know what would happen.”

Maru provoked him slightly. How would he try to avoid sensitive topics? There was a need to see what his personality was since they would be taking lessons together in the future. He looked likeable on the surface, but he needed to talk to him in depth to find out for sure.

“You’re right. That’s right as well. In entertainment programs, that works. The same goes for dramas. After all, it’s easy to access. You can see idols as long as you have electrical power and a TV, so in the perspective of TV stations, featuring idols to raise viewing rates must be a convenient method for them. I admit that going on TV programs using popularity is easy. Also, I thought that the same formula would work on movies as well. Until just a while ago, that is.”

Sungjae took out a movie poster that was folded in half from the sports bag that his manager brought him. It was a thriller that was released during the summer holidays. Two men were glaring at each other, and one of them looked to be in the forties, while the other looked to be in the early 20s.

“You know who this is, right?”

Sungjae pointed at the younger guy. Maru shook his head.

“I don’t know idols that well.”

“Really? Well, I guess you wouldn’t be that knowledgeable if it’s not girl idols.”

In truth, Maru didn’t know a lot about girl idols either. Maru smiled awkwardly and waited for him to continue.

“He belongs to a group called Change, and he’s a rather popular guy. They placed 1st in the rankings not too long ago as well. There was a bit of acting skill controversy when he appeared as a minor character in a drama, but it soon disappeared. In my eyes too, he wasn’t that awkward at acting. Like that, this movie was released. I heard that the agency stretched its investment in this. It was all the rage on the internet prior to its release. There were many fans that said that they were going to watch it five times.”

“Didn’t this disappear after around a week or so? I heard that the acting was shit.”

Gyunglim, who had been watching from the side, suddenly spoke. She immediately became startled and looked at Sungjae’s face. It seemed that she was never going to get rid of her habit for a lifetime.

“I-I didn’t mean that, but.”

“You’re right. It did horribly. I went to watch it last week. I mean, it’s a movie with an idol as the main character. I wanted to see how it was as well as the atmosphere at the cinema. Also, on how well it would do. The movie itself was not that bad. The story was interesting, and the acting skills of the prosecutor character, actor Choi Jaechul, were good as well. But this guy, this guy made it look bad.”

Sungjae folded the poster again. He had a relaxing smile on, but it looked like he was seeing far into the future.

“There were definitely many girls. The internet was still hot about it as well. But that was it. There was nothing other than that. At the start of the year, the movie Silmido was released, right? And it received over 10 million views. In that movie, there were no actors that had lacking acting skills. Even the actors that I don’t know the name of, contributed to the movie with heavy acting skills. Back then, I thought that it would be fine to replace one of them with an idol. I believed that even if one of the minor actors was lacking, the power of popularity would make up for it. But I found out that I was too narrow-sighted through the movie shoot this time. On TV, popularity does work. But it doesn’t work for movies. I forgot about the obvious fact that you need to go and pay for tickets to watch a movie. I was mistaken just because I was a little drunk on momentary popularity. I forgot that the public was frighteningly sensitive to ‘fun’. The ‘fun’ that can be satisfied by idols and the ‘fun’ that can be satisfied by movies is different.”

He nodded his head before putting the poster back in his bag.

“Sorry for stepping over the line.”

Maru apologized to Sungjae. He felt sorry that he tried to probe him out. What he found out through this conversation was that the person named Ahn Sungjae was not light at all. Only those that think deeply can introspect themselves. Sungjae was a person that had already finished looking back on himself and was making progress. Meeting people like him as a junior at a company would make the senior both happy and afraid. That was because they knew that that junior would soon rise in ranks.

“No, I feel good since you were just as I expected.”

“Just as you expected?”

“When I shot Twilight Struggles, I kinda became insistent on staying there. I delayed my entire schedule and begged the president so I could stay there. My part of the movie was finished already, so in order to find an excuse to stay there, I did some menial work for the staff and drank together with them at night. The fact that I can drink a lot helped quite a lot back then.”

“Drinking? Did you perhaps drink with the elder as well?”

“Yeah, as well as the other actors. Back then, sir Moonjoong talked about you a lot. He said that you’re quite bold and unexpected and that I will never be bored when I’m with you. Now that I met you in person, I think I know what he was trying to say.”

“I’m not that bold. I’m a quiet guy.”

“This guy says whatever he wants and is so cocky.”

Gyunglim suddenly interfered and said a line.

Sungjae laughed. Maru just watched as Sungjae laughed heartily.

‘He’s a decent guy.’

He might really be a good guy. Maru always had a bad image of idols, he thought that Sungjae might change his mindset.

“Looks like the lesson was too easy for you from how you’re laughing and chatting. Well, then. Let’s resume, shall we? Let’s start with light acrobatics to remove those smiles on your faces.”

Miso clapped as she walked forward. Maru wished them luck before walking backwards. Today, he was just watching after all.

“Mr. Han Maru.”

“Yes?”

“Where are you going?”

“Going back to my seat and watching?”

“You don’t need to. Come here and stand against the wall. If you’ve been keeping in shape, you should be able to stretch your legs out like last year.”

“I thought I was just watching for today...”

“Do you want to do it moderately today? Or do you want to do twice as much, tomorrow?”

Maru walked to the wall as he watched Miso’s twitching smile, thinking that there were enemies he could not win against in this world.

* * *

“Then see you tomorrow, everyone.”

Miso left the lecture room with a refreshed expression. Maru clenched his teeth as he fell to the floor. This class was even harder than his action classes.

“You still alive?”

Sungjae spoke from the side. Maru replied yes in a small voice.

“Looks like Gyunglim-noona died.”

"It seems so."

"Should we hold a funeral for her?"

"I'm too exhausted to do that."

"I guess we can't help it then. Let's just go by ourselves."

"Alright. Oh, Maru. Do you want to eat together? There's a good bossam restaurant nearby."

"Are you buying?"

"I wouldn't have someone younger than me buy."

"I'll treat you like a big brother for a lifetime. Are you going too, Gyunglim-noona?"

Gyunglim stood up like a zombie and slowly nodded.

"Ah, right. Sungjae-hyung."

"What is it?"

"You know what?"

"What?"

"Apparently, you like someone."

"What the heck does that mean?"

Sungjae tilted his head, and Gyunglim screamed as she stood up.

Seeing her, Maru giggled for a while. He really liked this class.

An actual movie released in 2003. for more details

Chapter 376

"I come here quite frequently, and the food is really good."

The place he followed Sungjae to was a Japanese-style restaurant. He pushed aside the blue noren and walked inside. Next to the entrance, which was decorated with black pebbles and gravel, was a desk that checked for reservation. When Sungjae approached that desk, the employee smiled back at him. It seemed that Sungjae was really a regular here from how he greeted back without being flustered.

'I'm eating a lot of good food these days.'

He was eating a lot of good food these days unintentionally. It was good to have acquaintances that were successful. Normally, he'd avoid such food due to the price.

"This place, huh. It's quite good."

Gyunglim spoke from the side.

"You've been here before?"

“Here? Yeah.”

Gyunglim nodded as though it was natural.

“Let’s go in.”

They followed Sungjae to the 2nd floor. An employee opened the door for them.

“Please wait a moment.”

The employee smiled and closed the door.

“I’m worried these days because I regained my appetite thanks to the instructor,” Sungjae sat down as he spoke.

“But you’re in good shape though.”

“I gain weight really easily and... I don’t really like exercise. I’m used to it, but just because I’m used to it doesn’t change the fact that I don’t like it.”

Maru nodded as he poured some water for everyone. The cup was a ceramic cup with a *koi* fish on it. There were some seaweed-like things drawn on the inside. He put a cup in front of Sungjae and Gyunglim and looked around for the container for the spoons and chopsticks, but he couldn’t see one.

“They give you one when they serve you. You didn’t even know that?”

Gyunglim remarked in a spicy manner.

“That’s because I’m ordinary.”

“What ordinary.”

Gyunglim took out her phone and started typing. She was probably chatting with the people from the blog that she showed him during the day.

“If phones get better in the future, we’ll talk less and less with other people, right?” Sungjae spoke as he drank some water. Gyunglim raised her head.

“Am I strange?”

“No, it’s not like that. It’s just a thought I have recently. Texting is definitely more comfortable than speaking, isn’t it?”

“You’re right. Texting is much more comfortable. If I try to talk in front of other people, especially if there’s a lot, it feels somewhat...”

Gyunglim turned her head away before saying ‘uncomfortable’ in a small voice.

“I was like that too.”

Sungjae smiled as he spoke. Gyunglim put her phone beneath the table and looked at Sungjae.

“Right now, I’m used to talking in front of many people, but when I just had my debut, that was the hardest thing for me. Practicing dancing and singing was hard, yes, but talking in front of other people

without preparing was the hardest for me. I still remember my first fan meeting. I was in front of my fans, and the host suddenly asked me a question. What type of girls do you like? That was the question, and that turned my head blank and I didn't know what I had to say."

"So? What did you do?" Maru asked.

"I cried."

"What?"

"Even I don't know why I did that. Thankfully, it was nearly at the beginning of my career, and there weren't any cameras around, so it ended without a hitch, but it definitely became a huge issue back then. The host quickly tried to switch the topic, but I foolishly said that I'd reply, making things even more awkward. The other members panicked as well and only after a long time did they start laughing. Now that I think about it, I had an even harder time back then than when I made a mistake on a live show."

Sungjae shook his head in resignation as though it still made him feel embarrassed. Maru smiled and grabbed his cup. Cried, huh. He could imagine what kind of emotions Sungjae had back then. Anyone would start sweating cold sweat if they suddenly receive an unexpected question while they were at the center of attention.

"I was like that too."

Gyunglim, who blurted that out with a dazed expression, quickly became startled and shut her mouth. However, it was too late. Everyone had heard her already.

"Since it's like this, why don't we all say something? I'm the only one embarrassed here."

Sungjae quickly followed up. It seemed that he was being considerate for Gyunglim. What a good youth he was. Gyunglim had much to learn from him.

"Maru, you don't have anything like that?"

"Me?"

Sungjae gave Gyunglim a glance before speaking. Maru felt that the mood would turn awkward if he said that he didn't have any.

"Of course I have one. Though, I didn't cry. It was during a presentation I did. The teacher kept asking me weird questions. Questions that weren't related to the topic. Actually, I had a slight conflict with that teacher before the presentation. He must have been annoyed by that and kept asking such questions. When I think about what happened back then, it makes my head churn. Others that are competing with me for grades are all staring at me, but I can't say anything. It was frustrating and made me angry."

"That teacher is totally trash," Gyunglim spoke.

Of course, he had just adapted an event he experienced in the company into his school. The memory of his presentation, where he had to bow down to the general manager who had indisputable authority over the approval of his project, was still clear in his mind even now when most of his memories had faded away. A colleague he was close to looked at him with pity and the colleague that had a competing

item looked at him with glee, while the deputy general manager quickly gestured for him to sit down. If he lost his rationale just a little, he might have cried without being able to endure his frustration.

“Well, we finished things up by promising to apologize next time, but I still don’t want to remember that moment.”

“Why would you apologize when the teacher was in the wrong?”

“Well, reasons.”

“You don’t have any guts.”

Gyunglim shook her head.

Maru barely held himself back from twitching his lips. Whose fault was it that made him talk about all this?

“You don’t have an experience like this, Gyunglim?”

Sungjae asked lightly. If you don’t, then forget it - he seemed to be implying. Gyunglim looked around before speaking in a small voice.

“I was teased in front of my friends for not speaking properly. I was just stuttering because I was a little nervous, too. Ever since that, I don’t like speaking in front of others. I’m fine when there are only a few people, but it does feel a little awkward if there are more than four or five. Of course, it’s fine once I get close to those people. So don’t look at me in a strange way. I just....”

“Then the fact that you acted cold to me even when I talked to you after class was not because you disliked me?” Sungjae asked with a smile.

Gyunglim slowly nodded.

“That’s good then. You can’t be the same as everyone else. Sorry for talking to you all the time without knowing how you felt. It was my way of trying to resolve the issue, but it must have pressured you instead.”

“That’s true.”

Gyunglim clenched her eyes shut after saying those words. She quickly followed up saying ‘no, that’s not what I meant’, but she was clearly a little too late.

“No wonder you misunderstood,” Maru said as he stared at Gyunglim.

Gyunglim abruptly raised her head and shook it.

“What did she misunderstand?” Sungjae asked.

Maru looked at Gyunglim, who was shaking her head vigorously, and Sungjae who was looking at him in a questioning light before grinning.

“I’ll tell you once I have the opportunity.”

He shrugged to Gyunglim who said ‘don’t’ without producing a sound.

* * *

“That family is strange.”

She read the title of the sitcom script several times over in a loud voice. It was the script *she* received from the TV station. Unlike when *she* went to have the audition, she was able to enter the building without feeling nervous. When *she* received the script sealed inside a paper envelope from the information desk, she ended up hopping on the spot without thinking about it. *She* still felt embarrassed when she thought about how people who were going in and out of the building were smiling while looking at her.

Just as *she* was looking at the script with satisfaction, her phone rang.

-Hey! Did you get your script?

The owner of the excited voice was Yoojin.

“Yeah, I got it.”

-Wow, so our Bunbun is finally going to appear on public TV now? How is it, have you looked at the script?

“I was just about to. I didn’t feel this when I received it since I was too happy, but it makes me nervous now that I’m actually going to open it. It feels like receiving my grade card.”

-I know that feeling. Open it now. See how many lines you have.

“I’m the neighbor that lives next door to the main characters’ house, so there probably aren’t that many lines.”

Now that *she* said those words, she felt once again that her role was rather vague. The next door neighbor of the main characters. It would be great if *she* appeared at least once per day.

-Do you have any appointments today?

“No.”

-Then let’s hang out. Bring the script as well. I’ll practice with you.

“Really?”

-How is it? Aren’t I the only one that thinks about you?

She lied down on her bed and chuckled in a small voice.

“Yeah, you’re my only friend.”

-What the? You’re giving me goosebumps. What about Maru? Did he not call you?

“Well, we do call each other a lot.”

-But?

“...It’s been a while since we saw each other.”

-What? When was the last time you saw each other?

"I think it's been more than a week at least. Maybe two weeks?"

-Oh my word.

"It looks like he's busy. Not long before, I had to hang up first because he said he was just about to start a shoot."

-Hey.

"Yeah?"

-I don't think this is the right time for you to see me. Call Maru and have him come to you this instant.

"Should I?"

-It's not 'should I?' Just do it now.

She smiled and touched her hair before slowly speaking.

"Nah, it's fine."

-What's fine?

"It's late, and he should have his rest as well."

-Hey, it's only 5 right now. It's not late at all. You were about to come out to meet me, weren't you?

"Yeah, but still."

She did want to see Maru. Although some of her friends told *her* that it would scratch her pride as a girl to ask the boy out first, she didn't think so. They were dating because they liked each other, no? *She* didn't understand how pride had anything to do with liking. It wasn't like women were animals that were made to wait.

"I want to allow him to rest as much as possible. He sounded tired the last time I called him. It looks like action acting is quite hard. Also, he's going around a lot taking minor actor roles. In fact, I feel like it's rather fortunate that he didn't pass the regional finals for the acting competition."

-Are you Maru's manager or something?

Hearing those words, *she* chuckled. It did feel like that a little.

"If I tell him I want to meet him right now, he'll come straight to my house. Even in Suwon, we live on opposite ends. Also, he might be working in Seoul right now. I don't want to tire him out even further."

-What a faithful girl. What era do you think you're in? You're so considerate towards your husband.

"What's up with you today?"

-I'm like this because it's frustrating. At our age, we aren't supposed to care about things like that and just meet whenever we want to. You can leave those miserable thoughts for when you're a granny. Hey, come outside for now. I can't take this. You need to get an earful from me.

“Fine, I’ll listen to you. Where shall we go?”

-I’m going to Suwon station right now, so meet me there.

“Suwon station? What brings you all the way here from Seoul?”

-It’s to meet you!

“Really?”

-I was just about to hold a congratulatory party for you, but I can’t take it anymore because it annoys me. Come out for now. Be prepared to receive my frustration, okay?

“Alright. Then see you in a bit.”

She smiled and hung up.

* * *

Maru stared at the whole course for a while. Grilled scallops, pickled seaweed, as well as sweetfish. It was served in some sort of wooden tray, and the decoration made him flabbergasted.

“The tuna tataki here is really good.”

“I think this also looks plenty good though.”

Maru picked up his chopsticks. This was his first time eating formal Japanese food in this life. Moreover, it was free. There would be no other blissful dinner than this. Just as he was about to poke into the pickled seaweed, he got a call. The screen had the caller’s name: Yoojin.

“Yeah, what is it?”

-Hey.

“I’m listening.”

-Come to Suwon station this instant.

“I’m sorry, but I have a very important appointment right now.”

-What is it?

“I need to eat this beautiful piece of sweetfish.”

-So you’re eating dinner, huh?

“That’s right.”

-Since you sound leisurely, it doesn’t sound like you’re eating with people that you’re awkward with. Then come to Suwon station right now, Mr. Han Maru.

“I apologize, but I have to refuse.”

-Oh really, now? You’d better come though. I heard that you haven’t met her in two weeks, right? I called *her* just now, and while she said she’s okay, she sounded hella depressed.

“...Really?”

-It pricks you, doesn't it? It must. So come here right now. Do you know that *she* received her first sitcom script?

“That was today?”

-I knew this would happen. Geez, this is why men are.... They don't have the slightest bit of delicacy. I'm hanging up, okay? Come here quickly.

Maru looked in front of him and put down his chopsticks, then, he grabbed the sweetfish in the middle of the vegetable flower with his fingers and put it in his mouth.

“Uhm, sorry everyone. Something important came up, so I think I'll need to leave,” He abruptly stood up as he spoke.

Sungjae and Gyunglim were looking at him dumbfoundedly. Maru apologized to the two again before leaving the restaurant while munching on the sweetfish.

Chapter 377

She put on a mint-colored roundneck t-shirt and an ivory-colored skirt before standing in front of the mirror. *She* left her room after checking if there were any creases on her clothes.

“You're still at it?”

“Yeah, I'm still at it.”

There were bottles of coffee and vitamins on the table. She sighed before standing next to her mother.

“You should really stop drinking.”

“Why don't you tell me to stop breathing instead?”

“If you can't quit, why not just drink black coffee? I heard that it's healthier for the body.”

“Coffee without milk and sugar is not coffee, girl. But are you going out?”

“Yeah. I'm going to hang out with Yoojin.”

“Do you need any money?”

“No, I still have money left over from last time.”

She peeked at the laptop screen. There were two different texts on the divided screen. One was an essay for a magazine, and the other was a novel.

“Don't you get confused when writing two at once?”

She found it curious whenever *she* looked at it. Her mother always worked on multiple things at once. She switched between texts and wrote two different types of writing. She would switch to the other once she was stuck on one, and switch back if she was stuck on that. When she was young, *she* always watched her mother do so while dazing out. Her mother used to say that *she* was so adorable when *she* just dazed out like that as *she* sucked on *her* thumb.

“What kind of writing is it?”

“The sadness of doing groceries.”

“What about the novel? The same one you were doing last time?”

“No, it’s a different one.”

“What about the last one?”

“I saved it. I’m planning to read it later.”

“You might end up deleting it again if you do that. You should just send it to the publisher.”

“Your mom’s pride won’t allow it. Can you show your acting to others when it’s not perfected yet?”

“No, I can’t do that.”

“It’s the same for me.”

Her mother alternated between stretching her fingers out and clenching. *She* did the same thing. Her mother always did that exercise since she spent most of the time sitting.

Just as she was fiddling with her fingers, a messenger program popped up on the screen. On the left, there was the name ‘Ahn Pilhyun’. That person was asking if things were going well.

Her mom replied ‘somewhat’.

“A friend of yours?”

“A comrade of mine I got to know through work.”

“Comrade?”

“A comrade that fought with me against the evil that is the publisher.”

“You call the source of your money evil, huh...”

“Why don’t you reach my age? You’ll realize that the person that pays you is the enemy of your life. Rather than that, is it okay for you to still be here?”

“I can stay for around 10 minutes. She’s coming right now.”

“Don’t be late and be there early. It’s not polite to make your friend wait. Also, come back home early. You watched the news, right?”

“Your daughter is strong, you know? I’ll probably win against a man in a fight.”

“Girlie.”

Her mother stood up and walked to the kitchen.

“Dinner?”

“Since my daughter seems like she’s going to eat out, your mom will have to eat by herself. This is why people say raising kids is useless.”

“Should I just watch from the side?”

“Forget it. You should get going. I’m going to order something good while you’re out.”

“Sure, sure. Eat a lot of delicious things then, okay?”

She went to the door and put on her shoes. *She* picked up the bag with the script in it and opened the door.

“I’m off.”

She took the elevator as she heard her mother tell her to come home early. *She* received a call when she got on the bus to Suwon station.

-Where are you? I’m three stations away.

“I’m almost there.”

-Then wait for me in front of the kimbap restaurant in front of the station.

“Okay.”

She got off the bus and stood in front of the kimbap restaurant. *She* saw a lot of people eating through the glass window. Most of them were eating by themselves.

“Hey.”

Hearing a familiar voice, she turned her head around to see Yoojin. Yoojin was wearing a black leather jacket, a white blouse, and a pair of high heels as well. She didn’t look like a high school student.

Yoojin stood next to *her* before hooking her arms.

“You haven’t had dinner yet, right?”

“I haven’t.”

“Me either.”

“Then shall we eat dinner first?”

“Hm, why don’t we get some appetizers instead?”

When *she* tilted her head, Yoojin pulled her arm. The place they were heading to was inside Suwon station. Yoojin turned right and led *her* to the department store connected to the station.

“I saw a macaron store when I was coming out. I think they just opened. There’s an event as well.”

“Really?”

“Let’s talk while we get something to eat there.”

The station was filled with vitality from the people going home from work. Looking at them, *she* felt filled with energy for some reason. As *she* followed Yoojin, she browsed the cosmetics and clothes that were put on display. *She* ended up buying two bracelets because she liked them. Yoojin put on one of the bracelets before giggling.

“It’s over there.”

There was a macaron store with a sign that said that there was an event going on. Inside, there was a place for people to enjoy food and drink. They walked past the people that lined up to buy some for takeaway and ordered some from the counter. Vanilla, chocolate, and strawberry. They decided to share the vanilla. As for drinks, they ordered green tea lattes. They went with that since Yoojin said that sweetness had to be complemented with bitterness.

“It’s not as good as I expected.”

Yoojin looked rather disappointed.

“It’s delicious though.”

“That’s good then. Oh, have you seen the other actors?”

“No, not yet.”

“There should be an occasion to get together and eat dinner or something before the first shoot.”

“Ah, I heard that the day after tomorrow is the first read-through session. I think that’s what you’re talking about. I heard there will be cameras too.”

“It’s probably to shoot some videos for a making film. You have it good. There are a lot of actors I like in that piece. Sir Choi Taeyeol, Mrs. Kang Miae, sir Han Woojin, and senior Joo Inha. They’re people you can only see in traditional dramas, and this is their first sitcom, you know? Thanks to that, everyone’s talking about it.”

“Really?”

She spat out a deep breath. There were many actors that could be considered ‘great seniors’ in the lineup. *She* felt nervous when she thought about how she would get to act together with actors that were popular before she was even born. Moreover, one of the main character’s family members was played by a member of ‘Change’, a popular boy idol band. When *she* said that she was going to shoot this sitcom, many of her friends asked for autographs from him.

“Why do you look depressed?”

“I’m just a little nervous.”

“Phew. I know how you feel, but you can’t do anything about it. That kind of nervousness won’t go away unless you confront the situation.”

“Really? Oh, right. Is the read-through just like one for a play?”

“Without any special instructions, yeah. Are you appearing on the 1st episode?”

“Yeah.”

“Then you just need to sit there obediently in one corner of the set and say your line when it’s your turn. The lead and supporting characters will probably sit at the center table and the minor actors will probably sit in the chairs that are against the walls.”

“It’ll be strange to make a mistake during the read-through, right?”

“It’s fine. Everyone will just laugh it over.”

“Yoojin. Have you made mistakes during a drama shoot?”

“I have.”

Yoojin rested her chin against her hand and spoke.

“It was during my 1st year of high school. It was a really minor line. But I kept messing up and had to redo it four times. I really wanted to run away back then.”

“What did you do then?”

“What could I do? I just did it. Thankfully, the actors that I shot with back then all consoled me by saying that I will do better next time. It’s mostly a case-by-case scenario, but as far as I know, there aren’t any actors that scold other actors that are at their first shoot.”

Just as Yoojin was telling *her* not to worry, she stopped and made an expression as though she made a mistake. She worriedly asked.

“What is it?”

“Miss Lee Miyoon is on that sitcom, right?”

“Yeah.”

“Then you should be careful. She’s infamous for being vicious. She’s known for scolding supporting actors and minor actors alike if they’re bad at acting. I heard that she sucks the soul out of them and some of them end up running away halfway through.”

“R-really?”

“Yeah. So don’t make a mistake in front of her.”

She looked at the cover of the script. The names of the main actors were right next to the names of the producer and the writers, and the second line had the name ‘Lee Miyoon’. How strict of a person was she?

“Give me the script. Rather than worrying about it, it’s better to just try. Let’s try practicing. Where’s your line?”

“On page 15.”

“Is your character Lee Danjoo?”

“Yeah.”

“Your line’s quite long.”

Yoojin started reading the script until she suddenly took out her phone. She stood up and left the store as though the call required some quiet.

She looked at her script and sighed slightly. *She* was worried enough as it was already, and she felt gloomy after hearing that there was a strict senior. This was not a play *she* was doing with people around her age, but a shoot for a TV program with seniors. *She* was worried about whether she could adapt properly since it was a completely different environment. If it was anything like a play, *she* had the confidence to do well.

After finishing her call, Yoojin returned to the store.

“He’s here.”

“Who’s here?”

She wondered who Yoojin was talking about. *She* asked Yoojin about it, but she didn’t reply and only made a strange smile. At that moment, *she* saw a boy who was looking around outside the store. Was he looking for someone?

“Wait.”

She spoke out in surprise. The boy approached them. He opened the door to the store and sat down next to them.

“How did you come here?”

“How? I took the train. Am I late?”

Yoojin said ‘no’. *She* looked at Yoojin. *She* finally understood the meaning behind her smile.

“Well then. I should get going, then, huh.”

Yoojin took her bag and stood up. *She* immediately grabbed Yoojin’s hand and spoke.

“Where are you going?”

“Where? To my next appointment, of course.”

“You had an appointment?”

“I’m a busy person, you know?”

Yoojin shook *her* hand off and whispered into *her* ears.

“Both you and he are busy, so you might not actually get the chance to meet frequently in the future. You should have a blast today. You should get him to dote on you.”

“Yoojin.”

“I’m leaving then. But next time, be sure to hang out with me a lot.”

After smacking Maru's forehead, Yoojin turned around and waved her hand. The amber bracelet they bought together sparkled.

"You're going?" Maru said to Yoojin.

"Yeah, I am. Have fun, the two of you. I'm expecting lovey-dovey."

"I'll ask you to stay out of courtesy."

"Forget it. Both of you owe me this time, okay?"

"Yeah, we owe you."

Before she left, Yoojin bought a box of macarons for takeaway. She waved *her* hand to Yoojin who waved back through the window. It should've taken more than an hour to reach here from Seoul, so *she* felt both thankful and sorry.

"If we have some time, let's go to Seoul together," Maru said.

"Yeah, we should."

Yoojin once again waved towards them.

* * *

"What are you going to do about this? I just got the uniform yesterday! Here, do you see the ketchup? It's not going to come off."

"I'll wash it for you and give it back to you."

"What? Wash? Do you think washing it will do anything? Looks like you really don't know anything, huh? Even if you have a professional launderer wash it, it will leave behind a stain. Look at this red thing on the white shirt. What do I tell my mom?"

"Th-then what do I have to do?"

"Well, it's not like there's no method at all."

"What is it?"

"Money."

After saying that, *she* tilted her head. Maru, who was playing along, also breathed out.

"Why don't you rest a beat before you say the word 'money'? I think it's better to exaggerate it a little since sitcoms are about character building,"

"Really? I think it will be a bit bland if I just follow the script."

"Think about it for now. Look at how things go during the shoot and try it out if you can."

"Ah, I wonder if I can do it."

She sat on the swing as she spoke. Maru sat on the swing next to *her*.

“Are you worried?”

“Of course. This is my first time on a TV show. Honestly, I was prepared to fail when the senior of mine offered me the audition and just tried it out as an experience. Now that I actually passed, it feels unreal and somewhat worrying as well.”

She started swinging on the swing. Maru stood up and walked behind *her* to push her. *She* embraced the wind that hit her face and took a deep breath. It felt like the nervousness spread around in *her* body was easing a little.

She waited for the creaking swing to completely stop. It had been a long time since she rode the swing. *She* didn't have any experience of sitting down on a swing like this after she graduated elementary school.

“Maru.”

“Yeah?”

“Can I do this?”

“Do you want to do well?”

“Of course.”

“Then don't be so tied up over it. It'll be strange for someone to do well the first time. It's actually easier if you prepare yourself to get scolded big time at least three times.”

“Three times?”

“Yes, three times. After that, you'll be able to do well.”

“It'll be rather fortunate if three times was the end.”

She jumped off the swing.

“Can you practice with me one more time?”

“Sure.”

She smiled and opened the script. *She* felt comfortable just because someone she was at ease with was listening to her like this. If *she* was able to save up this energy inside her body, she felt like she wouldn't be nervous on the day of the shoot as well.

“Then I'll give you the sign.”

“Yes, director Han.”

She smiled.

Chapter 378

“His Majesty has once said that men have their duties. However, I am no man. I am but a beast. You may discuss the duties of men in front of me, but I will not understand a thing. As such, do not try to shake

me with words stained with ink. I have more faith in the barks of the dog over there than your three-inch tongue.”

The character inside the screen laughed heartily in his tattered rags. The low tone and speech of the character were low and echo-y which was unique to historical dramas.

“His Majesty has once said.”

He lowered his voice and tried imitating the voice, but it didn’t sound cool at all. There was a gap between him and the man in the story, who had transcended mortal desires after residing from power. It wasn’t simply a difference in speech. It was the difference in harboring emotions, the difference in technique, and the difference in the sheer level of acting.

Maru resumed the drama and continued watching. The reason crow-tits try to chase the stork despite knowing that its legs would break is because that is its path and an objective it has to challenge at least once. If they were afraid of breaking their legs, they would never be more than a crow-tit.

He rested his chin against his hand and focused on the character on the screen. This was the Wednesday-Thursday drama made by RBS. It was a historical drama with hints of fantasy elements such as sorcery. Unlike the long-running historical dramas on YBS, many young actors appeared in it and it was targeted towards the younger generation. The opinion on the internet was rather decent, and the viewing rates were also decent with around 20% viewership. RBS had been imitating YBS by airing historical dramas until a few years ago when they changed lanes to target the younger generation, and now, they were on completely different tracks.

After watching an RBS historical drama series that aired 2 years ago from beginning to end, Maru sighed slightly and turned off his monitor.

“Tomorrow, huh.”

He got a call from Moonjoong yesterday and found out that there will be an audition in RBS. Although his role was nothing major, due to the characteristics of historical dramas in general, if an actor is out of place, the entire scene would look awkward, so he was told that the producers and writers of the drama were quite thorough with all the actors that had any lines. Meaning, that it was likely that the writer or the producer would probably be present at the audition.

“Aah, aah.”

Since his role was that of a beggar, he didn’t need such a cool tone of speech, but a tone of speech that fitted the era which was probably a requirement. Maru recorded his voice at higher and lower pitches than his usual voice. Listening to his own voice directly echoing inside his head and a machine-recorded voice would sound completely different. Even people that had pride in their voices would feel rather perplexed when they heard a recording of their own voice. This was why he had to listen to recordings of his own voice until he was perfectly able to understand his voice from the perspective of others. After repeating that process, he would reach a point where he would no longer feel unfamiliar with listening to his recorded voice. Only then could he say that he had ‘found’ his voice.

Even Maru, who had repeated this training for a long time, felt rather perplexed and awkward when he heard his recorded voice with emotions in it. He was definitely better than when he first started off, but

there was a unique crack in his voice whenever his voice got agitated, so he was thinking about how to rein in such an effect.

'I guess I'm rather fortunate that my voice has changed already.'

Maru touched his neck and put down the recorder. After stretching his neck out a little, he went to the kitchen and turned on the kettle. He poured the boiling hot water into a cup about halfway and mixed it with cold water to make it warm. He drank that water to loosen the tension in his throat a little. Ever since he heard that it was just as important for actors to manage their throats as singers, he started drinking warm water instead of cold water.

When warmth spread around his body, his muscles relaxed subconsciously. Thinking that he was in the perfect condition to practice vocally, he slowly started voicing out. He had the urge to shout out in one go, but he couldn't do so since he was in an apartment. The heat he brought up from his stomach mixed with his breath and exited his mouth. The point was to prolong the sound as much as possible without making it sound too light. A voice that played above his head was not good, and it would be better if the voice moved around his knee-level. These were Miso's words.

He walked after producing a 'hur' sound. He walked around the house while imagining himself pushing down the minute vibrations in his mouth into his stomach. Before his voice became like a mosquito's due to lack of breath, he inhaled again and continued voicing out. Narrowing the vocal cords to create sound would damage his throat. An actor did not need frequent uses of vocal techniques but only a stable voice. They had to remember the state when their throat was the most relaxed, and voice out in a way that didn't ruin that form.

He heard the door lock opening. Bada had returned from going shopping. Bada looked at Maru and frowned.

"What are you doing, oppa?"

"Practicing."

Ignoring Bada's gaze, he continued his practice in pursuit of an even voice. He heard Bada say 'oh my god, crazy' in her room, but he tried to be understanding. If she barked at him again, he could just use his ace, which was none other than the photo he took with Sungjae. If he showed her that, she would probably come up to him and say 'brother~' in a cute voice.

He felt a little dizzy. He stopped voicing out and evened his breathing. The basics were always boring and looked meaningless. However, Maru was aware of the power of basics that had piled up over a long time.

"Han Bada. Let's eat," he spoke as he turned on the stove.

* * *

Producer Han Changsung stared at the cups piled up on the side. He couldn't remember how many cups of coffee he had today. He felt as though coffee and sugar flowed inside his body rather than blood.

"Get me some coffee."

Changsung asked for one more cup from the newest producer. Although he thought all those things, he couldn't work without coffee.

"Producer, you're drinking coffee again?"

"What? Can I not drink?"

"Just look at the cups by your side, and try telling me that again."

"Just get me one if I ask for it. Why are you so picky? Are you my wife?"

"What kind of horrible delusions are you having?"

The newest producer, Kim Jinhyuk, still brought him coffee anyway.

"Thank you~."

He tried to be as posh as possible when he thanked him for the coffee. He couldn't imagine a life without it. He felt a little better after drinking a bit of the sweet instant coffee.

"Oh yeah, have you heard?"

"What?"

"I heard that producer Yoon Mijeong of the 3rd drama team resigned."

"That's not surprising. She was doing really well, wasn't she?"

"She's probably going to an outsourcing company, right?"

"She's probably bold enough to do that because she was given an offer."

He tilted the coffee cup into his mouth but he couldn't taste any coffee. When he wondered what happened and flipped the coffee cup upside down, the last drop that hung there pitifully fell down. Changsung quickly reached out with his tongue and caught that droplet. It was even sweeter than usual.

"Outsourcing huh. I heard that the treatment is good there."

"Why? You wanna go there too?"

"I haven't even had my debut piece, where would I go? I might be a producer outside, but I'm merely an assistant director here. I'll first have my debut piece and then shoot a bigshot drama that hits 40% viewership and leave the company in a grand fashion. I'll throw my letter of resignation at the president's face."

Jinhyuk giggled for a while before sighing.

"Aren't you too quick to return to reality from dreams? Why don't you try fantasizing a little more?"

"Because of the reality that came to me when I saw myself wrestling with receipts. Geez, it's hurting my eyes."

"You're in your first year, and you already feel that way. Why don't you think about how I feel?"

Changsung put the paper cup he just drank from on the tower of other paper cups. Perhaps it would be as high as the 63 building one day.

“Don’t you want to go to one as well, senior?”

“To an outsourcing company? Hm, not really.”

“Why? I heard that it’s really good. You get a lot of free time and the pay is good.”

“If you have the skill, you’ll get a lot of free time and pay no matter where you go.”

“You’re at that level, aren’t you? You made the historical drama 2 years ago a huge hit.”

“Is 20% a huge hit? It must be at least 40% to be called a huge hit. Also, I was lucky back then. All the other dramas that aired at the same time were shit. It was instead strange to not go over 20% back then.”

“Why do you sound so humble today?”

“Why don’t you find out for yourself when you reach my age? The only thing that increases is your humility. Also, not all outsourcing companies are good. The producer that’s right above us, he left the company and created his own outsourcing company and ended up being in a lot of debt.”

“That’s why you need to join someone else’s. Creating your own is just risky.”

“Wow, what a splendid laborer you are.”

“I do a fair share of labor, huh.”

He stretched his arms out and sat up straight. Tomorrow was the day of the audition for the minor roles. He felt a headache coming just thinking about how he would have to watch little kids acting for the entire day.

“Rather than that, a self-produced drama, huh. I wonder what happened.”

Jinhyuk offered him a piece of melon bread and spoke. Changsung stuffed his mouth with the bread and spoke.

“How would I know? Either they have the desire to make a proper one, or they have money left over.”

“Isn’t it good anyway? Since we’re outsourcing everything these days, there’s a lot of talk about us not getting any work.”

“It’s bound to be outsourced anyway, except for KBS, which is operated by the country itself. They don’t need to care about the viewership. Also, they should have a lot higher budget than us.”

“If we outsource everything, what becomes of us?”

“You’re worried about your job?”

“I am. If we give everything away to outsourcing companies, I’ll no longer have any work to do.”

“Why would you no longer have any work to do? You will probably work with an outsourcing company for your debut piece. Although the production is done by the outsourced company, we’ll have to send a member of our own to act as the control tower.”

“I don’t want there to be two producers though. That’s just not cool.”

“Why would there be two? The production company will literally just provide the production environment, and your name will be on the producer line.”

“Oh, really?”

Changsung sighed and stood up. Jinhyuk followed him. They left the first meeting room and walked around the office. Although it was past 8 in the evening, the drama department was still as busy as though it was 10 in the morning. As the results of the Wednesday-Thursday drama weren’t that good, the producer and the chief producer of team 1 were wrestling with work at their desks.

“Watch them closely. We’ll be exactly like that once they leave and we go in.”

It was one year. For the past year, he made plans, went to the president with it only to get kicked, persuaded one of the chief producers, and talked to the president once again only to get kicked again. Like that, they barely made a plan that received a pass and created a team. They then got together and had a drink to resolve themselves to create a good drama, but the script that came out after that wasn’t to their liking and they had to wait for a long time once again. As they were employed, they would receive their salaries even if they spent time doing nothing at their desk, but since this industry was one where they would get thrown out if they didn’t gain career experience, they would sometimes help other teams. Sometimes, he would get called to the editing room of a cultural education department which drove him crazy.

After a long time of waiting, the beginning part of a script was barely created. In terms of episodes, it was only around 5 episodes worth. They finally had the foundation to shoot a seasonal historical drama of 20 episodes.

They then spent several weeks with the completed script and the polished plans and wrestled with the president. Finally, they received the okay to start. Moreover, it was a self-produced one. The prefix was ‘special content’. On top of that, it was a 50-episode one and not a 20-episode one. They had to fix most of the plans and script that they planned at the beginning. Thankfully, it wasn’t that difficult. It was hard to remove content, but adding it was easy. The writer also became enthusiastic as well.

This was why there were now more portions for child actors. Since they now wanted to spotlight the main character’s younger days, the weight of the story that featured his childhood to his youth became heavier. They would first show the grown-up versions of the characters in the first episode and do a flashback to the past. He already had a picture in mind to have the audience fix their channels since there was a great lineup of actors that were coming in the later episodes.

“The children will have to do well for that.”

“What? What’s that all of a sudden?”

“I mean tomorrow. We’re picking the child actors that will be leading the beginning parts, right? I hope we get some decent kids.”

“When I think about it, I think it’s better to skip it as much as possible. I’ve never seen the views rise with the addition of kids.”

Changsung smacked the complaining Jinyuk on the forehead.

“You’re the assistant producer and you’re praying that it will fail?”

“That’s not what I mean.”

“Shut up. If the kids here tomorrow are awkward, I’ll blame it all on you.”

“You know what I mean, senior~.”

Changsung ignored Jinhyuk who tried to suck up to him and walked towards the bathroom.

Chapter 379

“This is RBS’s Seoul HQ.”

“It’s rather big.”

“It is. The office building in the center is 12 stories tall, and the broadcasting station next to it is 7 stories tall, so just going by area, it’s probably 1.5 times bigger than that of YBS, you know?”

Byungchan parked the car in RBS’s parking lot. It was prohibited to park in front of the front door.

“I have to get going.”

“Okay, be careful.”

“Call me once you’re done. I’ll give you a ride.”

“It’s fine. I can just take the bus and train when I go back. It’ll be fine just to get a ride if you’re going the same way.”

After sending Byungchan away, who told him to give him a call no matter what, Maru turned his head to look at the RBS building. The blue-tinted glass was reflecting the sunlight. Thinking about how numerous TV programs including dramas, entertainment programs, and news programs were being created inside, he felt rather curious.

He went around the parking lot and walked to the front door of the building. There were young children lined up outside. They seemed to have come to tour around since they just started their holidays. Next to the automatic door which was fixed in an open state, there was a rotary door which had the sign ‘no entry’ on it. It seemed that they blocked off that entrance for the safety of the children.

When he passed the air curtain, he was greeted by the lobby. The ceiling wasn’t there until the third floor, and the glass walls installed on both sides made the lobby look even bigger. On the right were numerous round sofas and people were drinking coffee. There were also quite a lot of people who were reading books they took out from the five-level shelves lined up outside the coffee shop.

Above the information desk, the corridors on the 2nd and 3rd floors could be seen, and people wearing jumpers were carrying around a lot of things. Some of them were even on their phones as they did so.

'So this is a workplace as well.'

Maru smiled faintly and walked towards the information desk.

"I'm here for the audition."

"Which audition is it?"

"It's for a drama, a historical drama. But I heard that the title wasn't decided yet."

"What 's your name?"

"Han Maru."

The lady typed on her keyboard for a while before giving him a pen and paper.

"Please write this down, and write down the purpose of your visit at the bottom. Also your phone number. You'll have to return the temporary entrance card when you leave, and please be aware that you may receive restrictions if you do not return it. Please wear the card on you at all times, so that you don't lose it."

The lady gave him a card with a blue cord on it.

"You can enter through the entrance on the left of the lobby, and you'll be able to enter if you put the card against the sensor. Think of it as the metro."

"Oh, okay. Thank you."

Leaving behind the lady who smiled at him, he walked towards the left of the lobby. The electric card readers were lined up, and next to it was a man that looked like a security guard holding a walkie-talkie. He put his card against the card reader. A blue LED flashed before the waist-height barrier opened up.

Maru hung the card around his neck and walked inside. In front of him were life-size cutouts of the two announcers of RBS. Above their heads was a sign that read 'Honest South Korea'. Next to them was a noticeboard, and there was a big notice saying 'RBS Special Historical Drama Audition'. The location was studio A on the 2nd floor. Maru turned left and tried to walk to the 2nd floor through the stairs, but the door to the staircase was locked. Did he have to go to the other side?

Just then, a girl and presumably her mother walked into the lobby.

"I heard it was studio A."

"Then it's this way."

He followed the mother and daughter who walked boldly as though they were used to it. When they turned right, facing the corridor, there were elevators. Quite a lot of people were waiting for an elevator. Maru also joined the group and got on an elevator.

After getting off on the 2nd floor, Maru followed the mother and daughter duo again. It was always best to follow someone else who knew the way when not knowing the path. They crossed the corridor from which they could see the lobby from above. On the beige-colored walls were many education-related programs created by RBS.

Arriving at the end of the corridor, the mother and daughter walked through an open door. Maru raised his head a little. Studio A. It seemed that he had arrived at the right place. He slowly walked through the door that was soundproofed. He could see light fixtures on a dark ceiling. On one side were studio-grade cameras.

"If you're here for the audition, please come this way," a man wearing a baseball cap backwards said as he waved around a rolled up paper. Maru watched out for the cables running across the ground as he walked.

"What's your name?"

"Han Maru."

"Han Maru, Han Maru. Ah, there it is. The waiting room is to the left. You need to wait there."

After nodding towards the man, Maru walked to the back of the studio. There was an entrance hidden behind some fiberboard and when he walked through that, he saw a room with a paper saying 'audition waiting room' plastered on the door. He could hear some voices inside.

"Didn't know I'd see you here, Yejin's mom."

"Me neither, Sorae's mom. How have you been?"

"I've been doing fine. How about you?"

"I've been doing well too. Other than that I gained a little weight."

"You still look skinny though."

There were four moms and their children. Some of the children talked to each other while some looked very awkward.

When Maru went in, their gazes were gathered on him for a moment, but they soon returned to their conversations. There were quite a lot of young kids here. Though, the production team were looking for child actors.

From elementary to high school - there were people of various ages. While some of them were shaking their legs in nervousness, there were some who were leaning against the wall yawning despite being so young.

"We're going to start, so please be ready."

"Yes."

The moms all cheerfully replied.

'Would it be free acting? No, I guess it will be script acting.'

The elder gave him a hint along with the opportunity for the audition. It was the fact that Maru was going to be a beggar. Although the lead and supporting actors were notified of the roles beforehand so that they could prepare, minor actors were mostly decided on the spot according to the act they did

during the audition. The casting director, the producer, or the writer would quickly pick out people suitable for various roles.

Of course, the minor actors that were picked this way were those that didn't have a lot of significance. The difference between minor actors and background actors was that minor actors appeared a lot more than background actors since there were certain scenes that required them. If the main character was a lead role, the main character's friend would be a supporting role, the 'talkative kid in the group' would be a minor actor with significance, and the rest of that group would be minor actors with less significance. After that came the background actors who didn't belong to any group, like 'passerby A'.

"We'll begin with the child actresses. Han Solmi, Lee Jin-ah, Kang Soojin, An Seol, Cho Yoogyung, Kim Haejin, Kim Bitna. The seven of you please come to the studio. Also, take off any accessories you are wearing, like hairpins for example."

When the production team called out, the moms all stood up. They grabbed the hands of their children and left the waiting room. The waiting room had become a bit quieter. Maru found an empty chair to sit on and closed his eyes after leaning his head against the wall.

* * *

"Me too?"

"Yes, you too."

"Senior. Do you see these bags under my eyes? I'm about to be exhausted to death."

"Junior. Staying one night in the editing room is compulsory, and two nights is basic. Do you know what three nights is? I'll give it to you if I feel pissed. Follow me obediently before I drag your ass."

"I was just joking, senior."

"Hey, do you think you're qualified to joke with me? Was I too soft on you?"

When Changsung rolled his eyes, Jinhyuk flinched and looked down on the floor with his hands clasped. Changsung watched him for a while before chuckling and tapped on his shoulder.

"Hey, you scared of me?"

When he said that, Jinhyuk raised his head with a grin.

"There's no way I'd be scared with just that, right?"

"I knew it."

"But would I be any useful over there? I honestly can't differentiate between those who are good and bad at acting."

Jinhyuk locked his hands and put them behind his head. Changsung agreed with him.

"Me too. But what can we do about it? We need to pick the useful ones we find among them."

"Then what should we focus on?"

“First, those that don’t cry.”

“Those that don’t cry?”

“Yes. These days, the kids’ moms are with them at the set, and they’re a pain to deal with. Aren’t elementary school kids all grown up? But they’re all so adamant on coming. Two years ago, when I was shooting a historical drama, one of the kids fell over on a haystack, and the kid’s mom created a huge ruckus.”

“Because she wasn’t happy with the way her kid was treated?”

“No, she beat up the crying kid, telling the kid not to cry. ‘Isn’t your dream to become an actor? Your mom’s doing her best to help you out and you can’t even do that?’ The mom said such a thing and started beating up her kid, and man, I had to step in to stop her, because the kid was too pitiful.”

“Moms are scary.”

“I get that they’re having a hard time taking care of their kids, but if they are going to do that they might as well not have their kids do acting. It felt like they were venting their stress on their kids. Anyway, I get that a parent might accompany a young child, but they should do it moderately. Anyway, if the kid is stiff or if the parent is interrupting too much, they’ll fail that instant. Also, it’s no good if the kid looks like they’ll cry during the shoot. As for acting skills, we can make that up by shooting five or six fucking times.”

“Senior, don’t swear.”

“Oh, fuck it. Fuck, fuck, FUCK!”

“There you go again. Please calm down, you’ll just stress yourself out even more.”

Changsung sighed. The schedule for the first shoot was already set in stone. His second historical drama had started. When he thought about what happened two years ago, he had a headache. He couldn’t go home, he shot outside as often as he ate a meal, and for some reason, he had shots scheduled away from the city. This damned Seoul leveled all the mountains and forests, so they had to go to the countryside unless they wanted to rent a studio to do it. If a problem occurred while they were renting a historical site, all of their schedules would be delayed, causing an endless streak of headaches. If there was an accident during crowd scenes, especially with horses he would get an earful from the president. The moment those ‘honorable lord horses’ sprain their ankle or something, he would get scolded more than when a person was hurt since horses cost more than his yearly salary. The rental fee for horses was 10 times more than the cost to hire people after all.

“Damn, I wonder why I didn’t go to the culture department. Morning programs, how good does that sound? They laugh all the time, make some food, and get to shoot kind neighborhood elders.”

“Don’t escape from reality and just get going. The schedule is already set. Hell is upon us.”

“Jinhyuk. Don’t start a drama and go to the entertainment section. The future is entertainment. Go there and raise your worth.”

“Senior, let’s do this!”

Jinhyuk pushed his back. Changsung sighed as he watched studio A closing in on him.

“It looks like they’re waiting already.”

When he went into the studio, the child actresses were lined up already. When he left the drama department office, he had told the staff here to get things ready in five minutes, but it seemed that five minutes had passed already. Looking at the moms standing on one side, he walked to the center of the studio.

“Hello!”

The children greeted him as though they were waiting for him. It was quite fascinating. He hadn’t told anyone that he was the producer, yet they recognized him anyway. Of course, their moms were the ones that gave them signals. This was why housewives were scary.

“Yes, hello. I am producer Han Changsung who will be going over your acting today, little friends. Next to me is producer Kim Jinhyuk. What we’re going to do today is simple. You just need to show me an act that I’m asking for. It’s easy, isn’t it?”

“Yes!”

The children replied vigorously. This was looking good. There wasn’t anyone that was crying right off the bat. He sighed in relief before sitting down. The screen in front of him showed the footage from the camera that was set up beforehand. Since he was looking for minor actors without much significance, he just needed to pick those that had patience and didn’t stand out too much.

“Okay, let’s begin right away. Han Solmi.”

“Yes!”

A girl wearing a t-shirt with a character on it raised her hand above her head and stepped out.

“You aren’t crossing the road, so you don’t need to raise your hand.”

“Yes!”

“And please lower your voice a little.”

“Yes.”

“You aren’t here to play around, right?”

“Yes. I am here to do acting.”

“Good. Then try doing what I say, okay? Okay, smile.”

He rested his chin on his hand as he spoke. The child panicked and looked around before looking at her mother. The mother quickly urged her to start acting, and the child just looked ahead of her and hesitated. Changsung smiled and inwardly sighed. The boring audition had just begun.

Chapter 380

“Well done.”

The child took a bow before going back. Her name was Kim Bitna. She was the best among the girls he saw today. First, she didn't cry and smiled a lot. Above all, her mom just watched her from beginning to end without doing anything. Whether it was trust or giving her free rein, he wanted to give her the pass just for the fact that she just watched obediently.

"I think the girl named Bitna is the most decent."

"Me too."

"Really? Looks like I have an eye for discerning acting."

Jinhyuk smiled in satisfaction as he drank coffee.

"You're just picking the child actors and outsource everything else right?"

"Yeah. They'll use their connections, whether it's blood relations, school relations, or whatever relations they have and bring people, so there's no need for me to interfere, right? I have enough headaches as it is creating non-existent roles since people come in sets."

"Sets? Oh, that set. Which one? Yellow? NL? Or Jewel?"

"All three of them."

"I had a hunch something like this would happen when you went around scouting various people, and it did happen, huh. Are you sure the writer didn't receive anything behind the back?"

"So what if he did? Would you refuse free money?"

"I'll refuse at least once."

"What if they come to you again?"

"Of course I'll receive it. We don't call ourselves courteous people for nothing. Refusing twice is just rude. So who are the ones that latched onto the superstars and managed to step into our drama?"

"Choi Jaehoon, Kim Jinsook, and Go Youngji, I think. I've placed them in the corners so I don't see them."

"I haven't heard of any of them."

"They're probably receiving full support from their agencies. The popular actors have their pains as well. Even if they don't want to be lumped with someone, everyone else is doing it so it's not like they could just refuse."

"They're probably continuing that tradition because it works. Well, isn't it good for us anyway? If the agencies are supporting them, then they should have decent manners at least, and they should have received some sort of training as well. They should know a lot of things as well, so they should be able to read the mood."

"That's true."

Changsung put down the list of names he was holding on the floor. Now that he had some rest, he had to start working. He signalled the new member of the production team.

“By the way, have you heard any news from the writer? I heard that he rejoiced for a bit after this became a 50-episode one and was having a bad time recently.”

“The important outline is finished, so we have some leeway, but it’d be better if he could hurry. Receiving the script at the last minute when we’re shooting a historical drama is just crazy.”

“Have you visited him?”

“I was planning to even if you didn’t tell me. Since we’re at it, you can drive for me.”

“If I can leave the editing room, I’ll be a driver for you any time.”

“But Jinhyuk, you need to know this, okay? Just because you leave the editing room doesn’t mean that the piles of work in the editing room will decrease. All of it is assigned so you have to read them all. Oh, have you read the preview?”

“What do you think this is in my left hand?”

Changsung peeked and looked at the lump of papers that Jinhyuk was holding. He thought it was a list of names at first, but it wasn’t. They were the previews of the items that came up during the meeting. It was the culture department’s.

“Read it over and over until you reach a level where you can think of a scene when you read the texts.”

“You can imagine a scene when you read this, senior?”

“No.”

“Eh? Then why....”

“They say the student will surpass the master. You should be able to do better than me at least.”

Just as he was about to smack the dumbfounded Jinhyuk on the forehead, the child actors that he called for had come into the studio. They were boys in middle school and high school. It felt much better now that the glares of moms weren’t present.

Changsung crossed his legs and leaned back against his chair.

“You’re all good-looking. I like it. Well then, neither you nor I want to drag things out so let’s get going. Those of you that want to stand next to the main character, raise your hands.”

The nine people that entered the studio all raised their hands.

“Good. Then put some distance between you. Around a meter.”

The boys looked at each other and spread out.

“I’m going to be looking at you all at once. Anyone that tries to pop out from the rest will not be picked. If you stand there awkwardly, you won’t get picked. If you can’t hear me, you won’t get picked. Understood?”

“Yes.”

“Good. You are aware that the audition you applied for is one for a historical drama, right? I believe that you should’ve done some studying at least. Well, I won’t ask you to act like a lofty official or use difficult speech, so don’t worry about that. You just need to start acting when I give you some instructions.”

Changsung looked at the faces of all the kids through the camera before continuing.

“Okay, you are the children of wealthy families. The current situation is that you’re in the bustling streets with a servant. Try walking.”

After saying that, Changsung looked at the boy standing on the far left. When the two met eyes, the boy coughed awkwardly before starting to walk. The eight others also started walking. One of the boys locked his hands behind his back and raised his chin. At that moment the others all followed suit. Changsung checked the first boy that did that in detail before looking at the others. Since they were all about the same level, he gave the highest points to the one that did it first.

Just as he was about to stop them since he didn’t have any expectations, he saw a boy that was walking very calmly on the right. The boy walked slowly but suddenly stepped sideways. It felt as though something invisible passed by in front of him. After that, the boy looked back with just his head and said something before starting to walk again.

“Senior.”

“Yeah, I’m looking at him right now.”

Jinhyuk seemed to have found him as well. The quick-witted ones followed the producer’s eyes and looked at the boy, and started context-acting just like him. However, they were lacking in detail. It was natural. The one that did it first, did it after thinking about the situation, and the ones that followed up shouldn’t have anything in mind.

This was his eighth year in the drama department. Originally, he wanted to apply for the broadcasting department. It wasn’t that he had a big dream to bring evil to justice or to pursue a fair society, but because he felt that creating news was the easiest. However, he became attached to the drama department after spending his time here as an assistant director, and he ended up applying for the drama department.

Although he always said that he ‘couldn’t deal with this anymore’, he worked on dramas for 8 years. If he spent another two, it would be a whole decade. Since he didn’t spend all this time loitering around, he had developed a good eye for people. He was past the stage where he had to try something out to discern whether it was useful or not.

Changsung gave the boy on the right a check in his mind. He didn’t know the boy’s name. He just looked at his looks: the clothes he was wearing. Since he was wearing a brown shirt, he just decided to call him ‘Brownie’ in his mind.

“Good, you can stop. Everyone, well done. You’re so good that I don’t have anything to find. If you can continue that, you’ll be able to become good actors.”

It was the same regardless of occupation, but flattery didn’t cost money. Flattery could be overused without preparing for the consequences. Scolding the kids would have a negative effect on their acting. Changsung always said compliments to the ones that were trash at acting. If they actually believed his

words and continued acting like that, they would become real trash, and if they were smart enough to think that something was up, they would eventually fix their mistakes.

The kids smiled after listening to his compliments. They were happy. The acting just now had no points to compliment on, nor any points to point out. Well, they would only be able to judge themselves if they knew something. He just said those words out of lip service so that they wouldn't stay nervous.

'Oh, look at that kid.'

The boy on the right, 'Brownie', caught his eyes. He was just looking ahead of him without any emotions on his face in this good atmosphere. It didn't look like he was stiff from nervousness. Was he one of the arrogant ones that thought himself to be above others? Or was he someone that was unshakable with just this?

"Let's continue on then. Since you tried playing a wealthy kid, let's go with a beggar this time. Let's say I'm the Minister of War for the country."

Changsung stood up and reached out with his hands.

"I'm going to give you dumplings. Try acting like beggars who received dumplings after a long time."

He pretended to throw the dumplings. When he did, the boys all reached out into the air in an attempt to receive the dumplings. One kid prostrated on the ground as though a dumpling fell. Like that, the boys started eating the dumplings in a hurry. Their expressions were all different as well. Some had smiles and some were crying. Some acted like they were moved to tears while eating non-existent dumplings.

'They're exaggerating too much.'

If they appeared like that on screen, they would get cut immediately. It was bad for minor actors to receive too much attention on the screen. If they caught the eye of the audience purely through their acting skills, that was something that the producer would welcome, but such exaggerated acting would make the producer go 'what the heck is that' instead.

The scary acting skills of the actors that have decades of experience came from their 'everyday' movement. Their acting was natural, yet on point. If the audience could feel various emotions from an actor just by looking from afar while sitting on a bench, that actor could be considered to have entered the ranks of experts.

The kid that first put his hands behind his back and raised his chin was eating obediently. That was much better than the rest. He wouldn't stand out even if he was put in a crowd. He was someone who knew what broadcasting media was. Check. He passed.

Changsung looked for the other kid that he checked before.

'Where's he now?'

The boy in the brown shirt that stood on the right couldn't be seen anywhere. When he looked away from the rest, he saw the kid curled up behind the rest of the kids. He was sitting down, putting his face against his hands and was eating very cautiously. He sometimes raised his head and looked around him

before quickly munching away. He didn't exaggerate that it was tasty, but it looked like he was swallowing everything in a hurry as though he was chased by something.

Changsung groaned. It seemed that a really smart kid just entered the audition.

"Okay. Looks like everyone's eating as though you've been starving. Good, very good. If we had enough spots, I'd be picking all of you," he said as he sat down.

"Thanks for participating, and before we finish things off, can you sum up what kind of acting you were doing and tell me? I'll give you thirty seconds. We're going to start from the left."

The kid standing on the left fidgeted and started mumbling. It seemed that he was summarizing what was on his mind.

"3, 2, 1. Don't think too hard about it and just say what you were trying to express. Starting from the left."

"Uhm, I thought about a beggar that had starved for a long time. That's why I started eating it deliciously as soon as I received it. I hit my chest several times in the middle because some pieces got into my throat."

"Good. Nice analysis. That's what I wanted. You did well even though you were the first one."

The first kid smiled brightly. Changsung then looked at the next kid. Everyone gave similar answers. It was smooth up to the third kid, but the fourth one started stuttering. He had nothing to say since his acting was the same as the three before him. That continued until the eighth one. Changsung wasn't even surprised since he was expecting this kind of result. If they were lead or supporting roles, he would've reconsidered casting them, but he didn't want to think that deeply about picking out minor actors that didn't have much weight in the story.

Finally, the ninth one, 'Brownie', opened his mouth.

"If a high official gave out dumplings, then the scene would attract attention, so I was afraid that other beggars would come and steal mine. That's why I hid and ate by myself."

He blurted that out in an instant and took a bow as well in that short moment.

Changsung subconsciously clicked his fingers.

This guy was good.