

## Once Again 411

### Chapter 411

"You're okay? Then shall we do that again?"

Hearing the producer's words, Maru heavily turned his head around. He was supposed to show that he was okay, but unlike his wish, his face made a stiff smile instead. If he did this one more time, his knees, his head, and his arms wouldn't be as intact anymore.

"I was just joking. You did great. You did great too, Miss Joohyun."

"Then should we move on to the next part?"

"We should move on to the next scene."

The producer told Maru that he did well and patted him on the shoulders. Only after hearing that they were moving on to the next scene could he loosen his body. Two hours of waiting, five minutes of shooting. The only thing left for him now was to go home.

"Hey, wait."

The producer, who was about to turn around, stared at Maru's forehead before brushing away his hair which came down to his eyebrows. Maru cringed for a brief moment there. That was because he could feel a dull pain when the producer's hand touched him.

"This guy's bleeding."

The producer called one of the staff members. Maru was guided by that staff to the waiting room. He said that he was okay and that he would be fine as long as he wiped it off with a tissue, but the producer was quite stubborn. He told Maru to get proper treatment and go to the hospital if anything arose.

"I don't think there's a big problem since it's only a slight cut, but go to the hospital like the director said. We can provide the hospital fee if you give the receipt to us."

The staff left the waiting room while telling Maru to be careful as he went home. Whether it was a rough shoot, a shoot with a good atmosphere, or just a quiet shoot, they were all sensitive to accidents. Since there were more accidents during shooting than people expected, everyone was sensitive to people getting injured. Maru tried touching his forehead. The rough sensation of the gauze could be felt. He tried tapping on it, but the pain wasn't as bad as last time.

'Looks like I don't need to go to the hospital.'

He picked up his bag and left the waiting room. He heard some laughs from the set which was at the end of the corridor. It seemed that an NG had occurred.

He left the studio building as he started eating the chocolate cookies he took from the waiting room. The sun had completely set and it was dark. Thanks to the fact that the heat from the summer hadn't gone away, there were many people in the park in front of the building. He could hear a saxophone sound from afar. It seemed that someone was putting on a performance.

People were gathered around a café in the middle of the park. A cable that protruded out from a black sedan was connected to an amplifier, and next to that amp was a chair with long legs that an old gentleman, who seemed to be over 60 years old, was sitting on. He bowed his head at the people in front of him after turning over the page. The audience quietly applauded.

Maru walked up to the front and sat on the ground. Although the concrete was cold, he did not mind. The people gathered around also started sitting down one by one.

The old gentleman took a deep breath before starting to play the saxophone. The saxophone rode on the low-pitched music box-like sound that came out of the amplifier. The old man closed his eyes and played in a relaxing manner.

Listening to the music that made his heart calm, his emotions, which had ragged edges, started becoming blunt. He didn't know what the music was, but for some reason, he could follow along with a hum. The people around him also hummed as well.

'I need more experience.'

Although his ears were listening to music, his head was in deep thought. Even a little child could one-sidedly pour out emotions. He had to go beyond that stage and be able to communicate with those emotions.

After the performance ended, Maru applauded the old gentleman who bowed again.

"It's pretty hot out here, isn't it?"

The old gentleman spoke after grabbing the microphone on his stand. An amp, a microphone, and even the leisure to emcee. It didn't look like he had little experience doing street performances. Maru stopped thinking about his matters for a while and looked at the old gentleman.

"When I first performed with this saxophone, I was really embarrassed. I mean, even the name of the instrument is 'sax'ophone. Just saying my instrument out loud was embarrassing."

The audience giggled.

"When I first came across this saxophone in the Nakwon mall, the first thing I thought was me playing this instrument in a cool fashion and grandmas looking at me in astonishment. Men want to receive attention from women even at this age, you know? I was completely won over when the employee told me that I'd look really cool since I could play the saxophone at my age, and bought it. Do you know how I felt when I got home and tried blowing in it? I went - Ah! I was completely fooled!"

The old gentleman puffed up his cheeks before blowing the saxophone. It sounded like a children's squishy toy.

"No matter how hard I tried, I couldn't get it to sound cool. It was frustrating. I thought I would be able to make a cool sound if I just blew in it like the recorder my grandson played for me. But it didn't work like that. I bought this saxophone for one-and-a-half million won. Then, it became a one-and-a-half million won paperweight in three days. It hurt my lips to blow in it, and god, how hard the finger techniques were!"

The old gentleman paused with a satisfactory smile before showing off his saxophone a bit.

“But curiously, even though I thought my skills would never improve, they did when I kept trying. When the squeaky sound became more manageable to listen to, I became greedier and kept practicing and practicing. I’ve never been as passionate about anything ever since I retired from the workforce, but ever since I did this, I tried going to local study sessions, and tried studying to look things up on this internet thing.... I lived every day as enjoyable as I did in my youth.”

The old gentleman put down the microphone and spoke. His raw voice and the voice from the amplifier intertwined with each other to create a strange ring.

“It doesn’t matter what the trigger is. It doesn’t matter what you’re doing. If the thing you’re doing makes you move, if the thing you’re doing makes you uncontrollable then that... must be the most meaningful thing to your life. There’s no need to be hasty just because you’re bad at something. If you keep doing it, you’ll do well someday. What is important is to keep holding onto it.”

A low saxophone sound followed up. Maru felt drowsy as though he just woke up from sleep. His brain, which was researching the correlation between expression, emotion, and action had stopped working for a little.

There’s no need to be hasty. What’s important is to keep holding onto it.

If he heard those words in an ordinary situation, he would’ve forgotten about it immediately thinking that those were the words of the irresponsible, but right now, those words resonated with his heart. His lacking acting skills would improve as long as he kept doing it. Perhaps he might hit a wall of talent one day, but until that time, he would be able to progress, even if it was at a slow rate.

Maru checked the time on his phone. It was a little past 8 right now. He stood up from where he was sitting and went into the café. The people inside the café were also watching the elderly man with the saxophone outside. After getting the coffee he ordered, he sat in front of the old man again. He decided to enjoy this time to the end.

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“Play that back again.”

Joohyun looked at the producer who smiled as he snapped his fingers. He played back the footage from the secondary camera several times over while nodding.

“Miss Joohyun, this guy’s expression is really not ordinary.”

On the monitor was Maru, who was growling while baring his teeth. Even though it was a still image, the viciousness could still be felt.

“Thanks to him, I had some fun. I thought it might be a little over the top since it’s an obvious scene, but Maru really brought the life out of that scene.”

“I was only looking at your expression from behind you through the main camera, so I didn’t realize what kind of acting he was doing. Now I can see why you were so excited as you were acting. I mean, just look at his face. His eyes are goddamn scary. I might need to consider cross-editing this.”

“I think you should cut out a bit of my part and insert his. What do you think?”

Joohyun usually did not make such opinions in front of the producer. That was because she thought that the direction of editing was the director's authority alone. It was proper etiquette to not mention anything unless they asked, but she tried inputting her opinion since the picture looked so good.

"If you say that, I'd gladly do so. Your angle is really good, but this fella's expression is just too good to pass by. Uhm, what was his name again?"

"Han Maru. Why don't you commit it to memory now?"

"Sorry. But at least I remembered your name immediately. So that you wouldn't swear at me."

The producer grinned sneakily.

"Man, it's such a pity. Since we used him up like this, we can't use him again either. Miss Joohyun, you should've told me if you knew people like this."

"You should call him for your next work then."

"I won't have any work to do for a while after this series, so how could I? I should keep him in mind and try poking him into some of my junior's works. He doesn't belong to an agency, right?"

"He should be in a contract with JA Production."

"With JA? I heard that they only handle the best of the best. Oho, JA, huh."

"He shouldn't be doing activities under his name yet though."

The producer nodded a couple of times before typing something on his phone.

Joohyun stretched her neck a few times as she returned to the set. She looked at the script while wiping the sweat she got from the strong lights. She was reminded of Maru's eyes. It was quite scary. It wasn't that she wasn't looking forward to it or anything, but she didn't realize that he could do so much. She thought that Maru was really good at putting his emotions into speech during the read-through for Twilight Struggles, but now that she saw his acting in person, his emotional acting was at a considerable level as well. There were parts where he was expressing too much emotion, but it was much better than holding back too much. Thanks to that, she had fun acting. As Maru came at her for real, she could also bring out her abilities without holding back.

Joohyun raised her hands and touched her neck. The part Maru strangled her was still aching a little. That boy really put his mind to it. She didn't say anything at the time since she might make him worry, but in reality, she had a little hard time breathing at the last part. This meant that Maru was just as immersed, and also that he was not fully in control.

"We're starting the next scene."

Joohyun put down her script and checked the parts around her neck in the mirror. Thankfully, there were no visible injuries. Her skin was a little red, but it should calm down soon.

"Miss Ahn Joohyun."

"Yes, I'm coming."

Well then, it was time to finish things off. This was the last scene for the day. Joohyun shook her hands lightly as she walked.

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“Hyung.”

“Yeah?”

“Why don’t we stop for a bit?”

“What? Why? Do you need to go to the bathroom?”

“No.”

“Then why?”

“Just now, you dozed off for around 3 seconds. I am really scared right now, so why don’t you park the car already?”

Byunchan looked at Yoo Sooil, who was smiling at him from the side, before nodding and parking the car on the side of the road.

“You should get some sleep.”

“No, I don’t feel that sleepy.”

“Then why don’t we get that to eat? I’m a bit hungry.”

Sooil pointed at the car in front of them. It was a small truck that sold grain pops and beondegi.

“I’ll buy it for you,” Byungchan spoke.

“Oh no. We should use company money to do this. We’re poor as heck. We’ll get our money back as long as we have the receipt, right?”

“I don’t think vendors like that give you receipts though.”

“That’s why I prepared this.”

Sooil took out blank receipts from his bag. Byungchan burst out laughing.

“Why don’t we get some fresh air?”

Byungchan said yes as he opened the car.

Boiled silkworm pupae. for details.

## **Chapter 412**

“Please write your name right here.”

“Geez, this is the first time someone wanted a receipt for something worth 8 thousand won.”

“Every little bit of savings helps. Oh, write your name here and over here.”

Sooil ended up getting a receipt from him. Byungchan was flabbergasted by his actions. If it was possible to get a receipt from a vending machine after buying coffee, Sooil would probably get a receipt from that as well.

Sooil returned with the beondegi and the grain pops in hand.

“They smell good, don’t they?”

“You really like these things.”

“I love snacks. But where are we right now?”

“We just went past Maesong IC so we should be in Ansan soon.”

Byungchan skewered a pupa with a toothpick before putting it in his mouth. It tasted as great as he had remembered.

“It looks like they’re fishing over there.”

“The Songra fishing zone, huh. You can get a diverse variety of fish there.”

“You’ve been here before?”

“A lot, actually.”

Byungchan came to this place when he failed auditions and was in a bad mood. Talking to new people while fishing made him forget about the sense of loss that pressured his heart. Though, he had never been to this place ever since he started working as a road manager.

“Shall we try going there?”

“Aren’t you tired?”

“I’m fine if you’re fine with it. I’m just sitting still doing nothing so there’s nothing for me to get tired from.”

“Then should we go down there for a sec? It should help with shaking off the drowsiness too.”

“Sounds good to me.”

He emptied the cup of beondegi before crumpling the paper cup and throwing it away. When he did, Sooil picked it back up and put it in a plastic bag. Byungchan had been driving Sooil to his schedule many times, but never had he seen him litter. In fact, he would be the one picking up the trash on the ground.

“It’s just a habit of mine.”

Feeling Byungchan’s gaze, Sooil smiled back and spoke. He had been shooting for half the day, and was being driven for the rest, so he should be tired as well, but he always smiled like that. He was a really good guy.

They drove down to the reservoir. Although there was a parking lot near the fishing area, they did not drive all the way there. That was because they saw some people doing night fishing.

When they got out of the car, the smell of water tickled their nose. Byungchan didn't have any good memories of this place since this was his refuge, but it did feel rather new to have come here after a long time. Although he hadn't become a famous actor yet, he wasn't doing nothing so he considered himself as better than before. Byungchan made a smile mixed with a sigh.

Perhaps due to the warm weather, there were a lot of people enjoying night fishing. His fingers twitched. He had never caught anything big, so he couldn't be considered a veteran, but he could still remember the sensation of some small fish flapping around.

"Do you want one?"

He saw Sooil playing around with some kids with the grain pops. The children's parents were smiling as they watched the kids. Sooil had a kind-looking face, so even people he had never met before weren't wary against him. That was definitely an advantage, whether as an actor, or as just a human.

"Hyung. I got a fishing rod."

Perhaps he got that in exchange for a grain pop? The father of the child gave Sooil his seat. Byungchan approached him and thanked him.

"People come here to talk to new people, right?"

The man spoke as he had his two prankster daughters sit next to him. Byungchan thanked him again before sitting next to him.

The lights on the other side of the fishing area faintly shone down on the reservoir. There was a moon in the sky, and the sunset was reflected on the surface of the water. Just as he was watching the glistening of the water, he saw Sooil raise the fishing rod a little.

"Did it move?"

"No, I was just checking. But there really was no bite."

"You should pull when you feel something. Before that, it doesn't matter how hard you pull."

"Really?"

"You haven't fished before?"

"Never."

"You see that glowing float over there, right? If you see it suddenly get sucked down, then you should pull on it."

"Would I get a fish then?"

"No, if you can catch it just because you see it, everyone in the world would be master fishermen."

Sooil nodded and started staring at the float.

Byungchan breathed slowly as he looked at the sky. His floaty consciousness had returned a little. He felt that he would be fine if he rested just a little more.

“Do you want some ramyun?” The man that lent them the fishing rod asked.

“No, we’re fi...”

“I’ll cook it for you!”

Byungchan was about to refuse, since he felt that they were receiving too much, but Sooil had stood up and set up the portable stove already. The man that was opening the packaging for the ramyun smiled in satisfaction before returning to his seat.

“Your little brother?”

“Well, I guess you can call him that.”

“He has a good big brother, bringing him to a fishing area.”

“We just came here on a coincidence. Oh, have you caught anything?”

“Nope, not even one. I was going to show my kids some fish, but looks like today’s not the day.”

The man turned around and told his daughters not to annoy the oppa too much. The two girls next to Sooil nodded their heads. When the man turned on the radio and started waiting, Sooil brought them the ramyun. The spicy smell of the ramyun was a perfect complement to the quiet fishing area.

Emptying his portion in an instant, Byungchan checked the time. It was 9. They would arrive in Seoul after 10. Although he was still a little tired, he couldn’t delay longer. Sooil had a schedule tomorrow. Unlike himself, who could just sleep the whole day, Sooil had work to do tomorrow. He might ruin his condition if he missed his opportunity to rest, so he had to be careful about that.

“Let’s get going.”

“Let’s go after seeing the float sinking at least once,” Sooil spoke with a pleading expression.

“You have a shoot for an ad tomorrow.”

“I just have to sit down quietly in a classroom. It’s nothing difficult, so let’s stay here a little bit longer.”

Sooil was the type of person who would follow others obediently, but became stubborn once he was obsessed with something. Byungchan had no choice but to sit back down again.

“Thirty minutes. You need to get some rest as well. You know that pros have to be meticulous with self-management, right?”

“I do. You should get some rest too. You must be tired.”

Byungchan crossed his arms and sighed. He leaned back against the plastic chair and stared at the float that was floating around in the water. It seemed that Sooil had taken an interest in fishing as he was holding with the fishing rod without any movement.

‘Should I sleep for around thirty minutes?’

Perhaps thanks to the warm ramyun stock, sleep suddenly overwhelmed him. He felt that he should be fine if he got a short nap. Splash - he heard water noise somewhere as he closed his eyes.



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Byungchan was startled and drowsy as he woke up. He immediately checked the time. The hour hand was moving past the number eleven.

When he turned around, he couldn't see the man or Sooil. Just as he stood up in a rush of panic, he heard some voices.

"Wow, that looks good."

People were grilling meat on a grill on top of a drum barrel. It seemed that all the fishermen from around had gathered. Behind them, he could see a tent. The kids were sleeping inside.

After watching that scenery, that seemed so distant from real life, in a daze, Byungchan sighed and walked up to Sooil.

"Oh, hyung. You're awake."

"Why didn't you wake me up? It's 11 o'clock already."

"Who cares? For now, come here and try this. This ahjussi is treating us all."

A man in his fifties, wearing a hat, waved his hand and smiled at him. On his hat were the words 'Mansunho'.

"You have a shoot tomorrow. If you go home now, it will be past midnight, and you have to get up early tomorrow as well. You'll only get some sleep if you go now."

"Hyung, I have good stamina. Rather than that, say ah."

Sooil gave him a big lettuce ssam. Byungchan momentarily became angry when he saw Sooil being so complacent.

Sooil was an actor who was acknowledged for his talents. He was the only underage actor that was introduced on the JA Production homepage. It meant that he had gained the president's approval. Although Byungchan was managing the child actors, Sooil was always at the top of his priority list. When child actors needed to be driven somewhere, he always prioritized Sooil if his schedule clashed with someone else. He also heard from the president that he should focus on Sooil.

Once Sooil grew up a little more and he could take a role from a more diverse variety, he would become the face of JA that represents them. He had the acting skills, personality, and even the looks that went with it, so he would become successful no matter what.

Yet, why did he not look after himself when he had all those qualities and conditions?

Byungchan had tried to become an actor since young, but he had failed every time. He admired actors on screens, but he had never reached them. Although he was still giving his all right now, he didn't know how long he could keep that up. Actually, he started thinking that it might be better to focus on his job as a manager starting a while ago. He had the thought that it would be wiser for him to tell himself that he had done well and that he should start facing reality.

Since he had such worries, he became angry when he saw Sooil act complacent. In recent days, there were scary new actors rising day after day. Those kids, who had undergone a systemized academy system showed acting skills that even he had to marvel at.

Sooil's competition was those people. He had to get some sleep if he had time to loiter around in this place, and he was at the age where he should focus on researching into his own acting to make it better.

Laughing and talking could be done after achieving success.

Byungchan put the lettuce ssam on the grill. He tensed his eyes and glared at Sooil.

"Let's go. You need to rest."

"...Alright. But you should eat that. You'll get punished if you throw food away."

Sooil smiled until the very end. Byungchan stuffed the lettuce ssam into his mouth. Sooil put down his chopsticks and said goodbye to everyone around.

Seeing Sooil walk towards the car, Byungchan sighed. He wondered when Sooil would become serious about his work. He even wanted to tell him about his own life and how regretting after failing was absolutely worthless.

"Uhm, you shouldn't be so stuck-up."

Just as he was about to follow Sooil, the man that lent them the fishing rod said to him.

"Me?"

"Who else is here? That boy did try to wake you up. But you kept on sleeping without a care in the world. You wouldn't know how much he hesitated as he saw his big brother sleep. I told him that I can wake you up in his stead, but he stopped me, saying that there was nothing urgent and he could afford to take it slow."

Byungchan closed his eyes and lowered his head. At that moment, he saw a piece of paper on the ground. He bent down and picked it up. There was a line from the drama that Sooil was going to shoot on that piece of paper. It was written by hand. There were questions and answers about those lines right next to them as well.

"From what I saw, that boy was mumbling to himself as he stared at that. I don't know what it is, but he seemed very obsessed with it. Isn't it important?"

"Ah, yes. It's very important."

Sooil wasn't playing around. Byungchan felt embarrassed. He was trying to give him a word of advice as a 'senior' in life, when this was what was going on.

Byungchan said goodbye to the people around before walking towards the car. He opened the driver's seat and got in. He looked at Sooil next to him while resolving that he should apologize. Sooil was eating some food out of a plastic bag.

"You need to save up whenever you can. I received them since they told me that they won't be able to finish it. There's quite a lot, isn't there?"

“Uhm, Sooil...”

“Do you want one as well? It’s good.”

Before he could even say sorry, Sooil gave him a chocolate cookie. Byungchan bitterly smiled and accepted the cookie.

“Fishing is fun. We should come here again next time.”

“...Alright. Let’s come here again.”

“I feel sleepy now that I’m full. Hyung, I’m getting some sleep. Wake me up if you feel lonely on the way.”

Then, Sooil soon fell asleep. Byungchan shook his head as he started driving. Just as he entered the highway, he suddenly had a thought: he wanted to become this boy’s manager if he actually decided to continue working as a manager.

Byungchan smiled faintly as he stepped on the gas pedal.

Wrap, usually with vegetables.

### **Chapter 413**

“Club activities start today?”

“Yeah, it’s been a while since school started, so we should slowly start getting things together.”

“Have you decided on a play?”

“Not yet. I’m planning to decide on one once the instructor comes.”

“Sorry I can’t help you out.”

“Once we get the schedule straight and we start practicing, I’m going to call you all the time, so don’t worry about that.”

The acting club started practicing for the winter nationals. During the summer preliminaries, they were defeated by a high school they didn’t even know the name of. Hwasoo High. That was a high school that they didn’t even hear about in last year’s preliminaries. Yet, such a school had gone to the nationals as second place after Myunghwa High. He didn’t have enough time to go watch their play, but he could hear some opinions from her.

-One incredibly good guy is leading the rest.

Although the national competition held in Seoul Arts Hall in August was won by Myunghwa High as he had expected, it was not a complete victory. They had to give up the Best Actor Award to Hwasoo High. The myth of Myunghwa High’s undefeated record of perfect victories had been finally broken.

“Hwasoo High, were they always so good?” Maru asked Daemyung.

“I was also curious about that and asked teacher Taesik. But even he said that it was a school he didn’t know. Apparently, they never participated in the Gyeonggi regionals until now.”

“Are they a new school then?”

“No, it’s not that either. Apparently, it’s a school in Seoul, and it seems quite famous in terms of academic results. It has a high advancement rate into good universities.”

“And they suddenly participated in the regionals this year and got second place?”

“Yeah. He told me that he heard some very skilled first years created the club, but I don’t really know many details. Oh, we have to go now. Good luck with your work.”

Daemyung and Dowook left the classroom together.

“I’m going.”

“Bye.”

Iseul grabbed Dojin and disappeared. Dojin was practically marrying into Iseul’s family, not the other way round. Apparently, it had been more than half a year since he started going to her family’s restaurant and working there. He apparently chopped onions all the way through summer, so Iseul’s parents should have taken a liking to his earnest actions.

“Han Maru, let’s go play basketball.”

“I have work to do.”

“Why do you always have work?”

“I wonder about that too.”

“Can’t you just play a single game? It’s because we’re lacking people. Also, we’re playing with the class next door, so we can’t exactly bring anyone.”

“Which class? Electrical? Mechanical?”

“Mechanical.”

Maru looked at the time. It was 5 p.m. While academic-focused high schools practically forced their students with mandatory after-school self study sessions, this school was taking ‘self’ study sessions a little too broadly in its meaning. This was why practically no one remained after school.

“Aren’t you going to self study sessions?”

“I can do that starting 3rd year. Rather than that, you’re coming, right? If you really can’t do a full match, then just help us out until 40 points. It’s an 80-point bet.”

“80 points in this weather? You guys are amazing.”

Maru pointed at the school field with his chin. The kids holding basketballs were cheering.

“But hey, what are you doing? A drama?”

“No, today, it’s for an ad.”

“You shoot ads too?”

“I’m just an extra. I’m just in the background.”

“Who else is in it?”

His friends listed the actresses in the country with a big grin on their faces.

“How would I know? I’m just going because the company told me I had work.”

“They didn’t tell you anything?”

“They would if I needed to know something. But why would I need to know anything when I’m at the bottom of the rung? I just do whatever they tell me to.”

Maru left the school building with a basketball in hand. He saw the guys from the mechanical engineering class waiting at the court.

“I’m leaving after 40 points.”

“Alright, everyone starts that way. 40 becomes 50, and 50 becomes a full match.”

The boys patted his back as they ran forward. Maru sighed as he followed them. A sports match between classes, whether it was basketball or football, was a match where they put their pride on the line, so it would cause a huge fuss if they lost. This was especially the case with the four people in his class. Those four played basketball whenever they had the time to. If he pulled out mid way without showing them anything, they’d probably text him and call him endlessly. It would be quite annoying.

“It’s hot, so let’s get this over with quickly.”

Maru threw the ball to the court as he spoke. There were three hours until the shoot.

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He wasn’t running - that was the thought he had as he wiped the sweat off his forehead. The heat that he washed away along with his sweat at the washing area had come back to him again.

“Sorry. The air conditioning is broken. Don’t close the windows!”

The wave of heat he felt as he scanned his bus pass was just the preview. It was 6 in the evening, and the bus was full. He could tell what expressions the people on the bus, nay, the portable sauna, were making.

‘Man, I wanna get a car.’

When it came to driving, he had driven more than he ever needed to, but right at this moment, he wanted to grab the wheel. Even a small car was fine, as long as he could go somewhere in comfort.

Despite the silent screams from the bus, the bus driver kept loading more passengers into the bus. Maru, who was pushed to the window side, made an awkward smile to the person sitting and looked outside the window. He would arrive at the train station in just 4 more stops. Air conditioning was coming.

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Murphy's law. He had to read the expressions of the people in the car when the train arrived. The train driver's announcement floated above his head: the air conditioning is currently under maintenance. We apologize for your inconvenience.

The door opened along with the announcement that they arrived at Yeouinaru station. Maru shook his head as he left the train. It was quite a tiresome day. This was definitely not his lucky day today.

After passing the ticket barrier, he immediately entered a convenience store. He was finally greeted with some cool air. He bought a tube popsicle and the chilliest canned drink he could find. He wanted to buy some beer, but he wasn't old enough yet.

He chewed on the tube popsicle as he headed towards the meetup place. His original schedule today was a shoot for the historical drama, but he got a message that it was cancelled the night before. He wasn't notified of the reason though.

He thought that he could get some rest since a schedule was up in the air, but it seemed that his company did not plan on having him rest. He immediately got a call from Byungchan. There was a shoot for an ad, and he was needed to fill the headcount.

He left through the 3rd exit. The Hangang park was filled with people running away from the heat. After throwing away the empty popsicle tube, he looked around. He saw a group of people in a place a bit away from the 3rd exit. They looked completely awkward with each other, so they didn't seem to be companions. That left one possible answer. Maru also walked towards that group. He saw a person checking names.

"Is this the meetup place for the ad shoot?"

"Ah, yes. Where are you from? Taeyang? Daejoon? KA?"

"I just got a call from my company."

"Really? What's your name then?"

"Han Maru."

"Han Maru, Han Maru. Oh, here it is. JA, huh? Do you know how to write the log?"

"Yes."

The man handed him a palm-sized piece of paper.

"Write 'commercial advertisement' on the program, and 'casual' for the clothes. Once you're done give it back to me."

He gave the man the log after writing his name, and some of his personal information. This was usually for companies that managed background actors for their payroll. There was no reason for him to write one since he didn't come here through one of them, but he wrote one anyway since he was told to.

There were around twenty people gathered here. Since it was a shoot for a telecommunication company, there were only young people around.

"We're moving now. Please get in the coach."

They got in a coach and were driven for around 10 minutes. Maru saw a school outside the window. Jangho Highschool. The bus went past the school gates and parked in the middle of the school field.

“We’re getting off.”

There were many cars parked in the school field other than the coach they came in. Students peeked outside the classroom in curiosity since they seemed to be in self-study sessions. It seemed that there weren’t any celebrities here yet. Maru could tell that from the lack of noise.

“Please change into gym uniforms. Oh, and don’t forget to take off any accessories you’re wearing. Over there! The one with strong hair. Please tone it down.”

A man who styled his hair with wax brushed his hair with his hand in dejection. Maru changed into the gym uniform in the bathroom and moved to the right side of the main school building. He saw a few students who escaped the watch of the teachers and came here to watch, but they soon left after finding out that there weren’t any celebrities here.

“Please quiet down. We’re going to the 4th floor.”

The man led the people to an empty classroom on the 4th floor.

‘Balls?’

There were table tennis balls in many colors inside boxes. Just the number of boxes lined up in the corridor numbered a dozen at least. Maru wondered what they were going to do with all those balls.

“Once the shoot begins, you just need to throw the balls around and look like you’re enjoying it as much as possible.”

“You mean those?”

“Yes.”

The uses for them were revealed. He thought that there was going to be a warm couple since he was told that it was an ad for a telecommunication company, but it seemed that he was wrong. He went inside the classroom and waited for the main characters. He wondered which celebrities were coming.

He yawned and had a look at the time. It was past 8 now. The equipment for the shoot seemed to be almost set up as well. There were eight cameras in the corridor shooting the class through the window, and six cameras at the back of the class. He had never seen so many cameras before. He thought that the funds for shooting a 15-second long aesthetics would match the budget of an ordinary drama episode.

“Please get ready. The director is coming.”

It was finally time. Maru stretched his neck out and looked at the back door of the classroom. He saw a woman with dark bags under her eyes. She looked very tired. She was young too, so Maru wondered if she was sick or something.

“I hope we can do this enjoyably, Haha. I am Park Jiseon, and I’ll be working with you today. And yes, I am the director. Though, I don’t think any of you wanted to know that.”

She yawned as she staggered her way across and sat down. Behind her, a good-looking man and a woman pair came in. They were actors he saw on TV. Also, one of them was someone he knew.

“Oh? Han Maru.”

He waved his hand at him. It was the guy who always had a grin on his face, Sooil.

#### **Chapter 414**

“Yes, yes. Over there. Throw it towards the blackboard. As for those of you gathered over there, scatter it towards the ceiling. Like this.”

The director put her hands into the box with the logo of the telecommunication company and scattered the balls into the air. The multi-colored table tennis balls flew into the air before falling back down again. The staff and the background actors picked them back up.

“Make it look like you’re enjoying it as much as possible. You can go a little overboard if you want. We’ll blur your faces, so you don’t need to worry about that. Just exaggerate your actions as much as possible.”

After saying those words, the director took off the baseball cap she was wearing to scratch her head. While the fatigue-struck female director explained to the actors the theme for this ad, Maru put down the box that the staff gave him at his feet. It was full of red table tennis balls. The one sitting next to him had blue, and the one next to that person had green. He still had no idea what the ad was trying to do.

There were some students in school uniform in front of the director who yawned as she explained. They were two girls that he probably saw somewhere before on TV as well as Sooil. The girl that had the mascot doll for the telecommunication company at her waist smiled brightly and nodded.

“We’re starting the shoot. Let’s get this done quickly,” the director spoke again as she pressed down the cap on her head.

\* \* \*

“Let’s do that again.”

The director spoke as she rested her chin on her left hand. Maru poured the balls back into the box. The balls fell from the dustpan into the box. He couldn’t remember how many times he had done this. Maybe eleven?

“This time, make it feel like you’re filling the air in the classroom with balls. You know that air molecules are round, right? Or was it particles? Anyway, it’s there in science books, the round balls scattered in empty space. Make the classroom look like that.”

Her voice was fatigued, her eyes were loose, and she yawned whenever she felt like it. Unlike what she said at the beginning, she kept changing her demands and continued shooting over and over again.

“Yoonji, for you, it’s like you’re not looking at the camera but beyond the camera. Don’t just look at the lens, and make it look like you’re actually talking to the person on the other side. Sooil, you just keep doing that. Haeyeon, you too.”



It wasn't just the background. She kept changing her demands from the actors as well. The girl that had her actions pointed out, replied with vitality, but she clearly wasn't as energetic as she was at the beginning of the shoot.

As soon as Maru sat down after putting all the balls into the box, the director raised her hand. She was eagle-eyed despite being so tired. She signalled the camera director. The actors smiled, and the rest of the people hugged a bunch of table tennis balls.

Along with a cue sign, the actors sitting at the front ran towards the camera. Maru threw the balls in his arms towards the ceiling. Atoms, or particles or whatever, he didn't know and didn't care. He just wished for the director to be satisfied with the picture this time. The people sitting behind the actors scattered the balls just as passionately as the actors.

Maru looked at the director and threw the balls sideways as well. This required more strength in his wrist and shoulders than throwing a basketball. He would probably sweat like he played a full quarter of basketball if he did this a couple more times.

"Let's turn off the air conditioner. I was wondering what it was, and it was that, huh."

Hearing those words, Maru said 'Murphy needs to be killed' in a small voice. He felt as though the heat from the installed lights and humans were being reflected and diffused back into the classroom. This was a splendid oversized microwave.

He wiped away his sweat with some tissue and looked at the director. The director, who was twitching her fingers as she stared at the monitor, clicked her tongue and raised her index finger.

"Let's try that one more time."

\* \* \*

The female director never raised her voice even once. She never glared at someone either. She only changed her demands with a voice that made the listener feel powerless. After looking around the scene with eyes that were devoid of any fighting spirit, the director stretched her arms around and spoke.

"Let's do that again after tilting cameras 3 and 6 a little."

Maru heard a small swear next to him. Maru sighed shortly and straightened his back. He could deeply sympathize with that guy. This was probably the twentieth run. Or was it the twenty-third? He started losing track.

'My luck with work is definitely not good.'

If it was acting, it might have been better. After all, when it came to acting, he could change his expressions, actions, or at least his breathing pattern to change things up. However, this shoot was 100% repetitive labor. Was ad shooting so hard? Or was she a peculiar director? He would've endured if the shoot was boring or exhausting, but this shoot was both boring and exhausting. He was reminded of doing manual labor during his military service.

"The one that swore just now. You'll live a long life."

The director spoke slowly as she leaned against her palm. Even her jokes were devoid of ups or downs. It was as though she was sleep-talking.

“Just twice more. It’ll end after just two more shoots. Please cheer up a little. Why are you so lacking energy? Haam.”

Maru could only laugh in vain when the person with the least energy here said such words.

The director’s yawn infected everyone on the set. Everyone started yawning. People found that funny as some people started chuckling.

“That’s good. It’s just two more runs, so let’s keep this up.”

The director urged everyone with a faint smile. It was the first smile she showed on the set, and it was also the signal that the end was near.

Maru wondered if it was really going to end with just two more shoots, but he decided to trust her for now. The cue sign fell, and he threw the balls into the air once again. The actors ran forward, and the balls were thrown upwards. The balls that were thrown in the air like fireworks made up the background, while the actors said their lines. The director then shouted cut.

“Just one more.”

The director spoke as though she was saying the ending of a finished book. Maru wondered what her confidence was based on. Did it mean that she already took all the pictures she wanted to? Or was she simply running out of time?

‘Or perhaps she might really be predicting that we would produce the perfect picture this time.’

After a final tuning, the director stood up from her seat. She raised her cap a little and crossed her arms. Although her eyes were still filled with fatigue, her pupils were filled with unknown confidence. She pulled her chin inwards.

“Last run. Let’s do this, everyone.”

Maru threw the balls into the air with as much power as possible.

At that moment, the sound of popping popcorn could be heard. The table tennis balls that hit the ceiling all fell down slowly. It looked as though hundreds of baby mobiles were floating in the air, and the feeling of fullness that couldn’t be experienced until now could be felt. It literally looked as if the table tennis balls were air particles.

The others seemed to have gotten similar feelings as they watched the falling table tennis balls in a daze. While the plentiful laughter from the actors filled the class, the director shouted cut.

“Well done everyone. Let’s clean up.”

Even as she put a period at the very end of the sentence, her voice was devoid of any ups or downs. The tone was practically the same as ‘I have a book’. The actors approached the director, who was looking over the footage with the camera director, and the rest were being directed by the staff.

“We’ll pull out after cleaning things up. Thank you for your work everyone. Please return your clothes after this.”

After putting away the balls, Maru went to the bathroom to change his clothes. When he came back, he saw the director talking to a person who seemed to be from the school. He could hear her thanking the man for lending them the classroom.

“It’s over!”

Maru looked at Sooil, who hung his arm around his shoulders and drooped down. Since Maru had no intention of supporting a boy, he quickly shook off that hand. Sooil, who was shaken off, smiled and approached him again.

“You worked hard.”

“It was indeed hard.”

“Hey, you should say the same thing to me. Tell me that I worked hard.”

“You get a lot of money for it though. You are supposed to work hard.”

Maru moved his shoulders a little. He could hear some cracking noises. They were the traces left behind from playing basketballs and throwing the table tennis balls.

“But what’s that?” Maru asked as he looked at the black plastic bag in Sooil’s hands.

“Some bread.”

“Bread?”

“It’s leftovers from the staff, and I asked if I could take it, and they told me yes. It’s free food.”

There was soboro-bread inside. Sooil’s eyes as he talked about ‘free’ stuff were filled with inexplicable satisfaction. He looked like a rich young master from a wealthy family just based on his looks though.

“You shouldn’t like free stuff too much. You’ll go bald.”

Sooil just shrugged.

The staff that led the background actors here told them that it was okay to go home. Everyone left the classroom exhausted regardless of gender. Maru was also in that group as he walked into the corridor. The time was nearing 11 o’clock. There was still time until the last train. He should be able to go home if he took the bus to Yeouinaru station.

“Uhm, can we take a photo with you?”

He subconsciously turned his head around when he heard a girl’s voice. Of course, he knew that the voice wasn’t meant for him. Two ladies, who looked to be in their early twenties and had thrown balls into the air along with Maru were talking to Sooil.

“Of course!”

Sooil walked between them and made a 'v' with his fingers. The girls took a photo with a phone and asked if they could hook arms.

"Sorry, I'm a bit of a shy guy. Instead, I'll take one more photo with you."

Sooil was quite adamant on that even though he looked like he'd gladly accept such a request. He refused them indirectly and politely, but the clear refusal could be felt from his words. The girls also gave up and settled for taking another photo.

After that, many people asked if they could take photos with Sooil as well as the young actresses from before. Maru looked at them for a while before turning around. Although they belonged to the same company and even exchanged greetings, they clearly weren't on the same level.

He didn't know because he didn't have any interest in dramas or movies, but Sooil was actually quite a famous actor. His acting skills were given recognition on the indie movies side, and he had shot several movies along with Geunsoo, whose schedule was full until next year. As for dramas, he showed his face here and there as a set with Suyeon.

Maru only recently found out that Sooil was gaining fame with his kind-looking eyes, neat looks, and friendly speech tone. Looking up his name, he found his name and filmography on the main page, and there was even a fan café dedicated to him. He also tried looking up his own name, but nothing came up.

In other words, he was a star that was given full support by JA Production.

Maru was just stretching his neck out after leaving through the school gates. Just then, a car passed by him and tooted its horn.

"Han Maru?"

Hearing his name, Maru turned his head around. The one he saw was director Park Joongjin, who was peeking outside the car window.

"You're Mr. Han Maru, aren't you?"

"Yes. Hello there, director."

"I was wondering and I was right huh. But what brings you here? Don't you live in Suwon?"

Maru wondered if he told him that he lived in Suwon, but he answered his question for now.

"I had a shoot for an ad. As an extra."

"Is the ad shot by director Park Jiseon?"

He thought about who Park Jiseon was for a while. Soon, he remembered that it was the powerless director that he was working with until just a few minutes ago.

"Yes, that's right."

"I see. Is the shoot finished?"

"It just ended a few minutes ago."

“Hm, alright. You worked hard. Oh, now that I think about it, it’s only a few days huh. See you on set. I’ll be looking forward to seeing you.”

The sedan’s window closed and departed again. Maru looked at the orange sodium lights before looking at the classroom which still had lights on. A strange ad director and an acclaimed genius movie director. They strangely fit each other.

“Not that I have time to think about other people.”

He was currently in a state where he could fall asleep in 10 seconds if there was a bed in front of him. He staggered his way forward. He felt what it was like to be drained of all life today.

‘Let’s remember her name. That way, I can avoid her next time.’

He shook his head in resignation. Just then,

“Maru! Wait for me!”

When he turned around, he saw Sooil, running towards him with a black plastic bag in each hand. Maru smiled and waved back at him before running forward with all of his might. He really wanted to get some rest. He ran for a long time and crossed the road. However, just then, he saw the bus he was supposed to take going right past his eyes. He felt energy being drained from his legs.

“Maru!”

Behind him, there was an overly cheerful guy running towards him.

He was stuck without a place to go.

Maru looked up at the sky. A dogshit afternoon.

That sounded like a splendid movie title for some reason.

A bit like melon bread, but the top is crispy

## **Chapter 415**

“It’s hot. Want one?”

Maru stared at Sooil, who asked as he offered him a soboro bread. It felt like there were a lot of words omitted between ‘it’s hot’ and ‘want one’, but he didn’t have the energy to retort. Since he was hungry, he decided to accept it.

He was just about to eat the bread when Sooil approached him and took off all the sweet crust. He looked at the now-bald bread and Sooil, who was munching on the tasty part of the bread, alternately.

“I don’t like the bread part.”

Oho. Maru put the bread back inside its packaging and took out another one. There was a bit of resistance on Sooil’s side, but he could subdue him with ease.

“You told me you don’t like sweet stuff last time.”

“I don’t hate it either.”

He took a bite and was just about to swallow it when he felt that the bread was beyond dry - it was rough. He could understand why the staff didn't eat them all.

"It's quite suffocating, isn't it?"

A carton of chocolate milk suddenly appeared before his eyes. Maru scanned Sooil from top to bottom. He wondered where he pulled that out from. He looked at Sooil as though he was looking at a portable refrigerator.

"It really is hot. Global warming must be really scary," Sooil said.

The news talked about how it was the hottest in the past 50 years, and the weather really showed that. Even though it was past 11 in the night, the heat did not subside.

When he finished the chocolate milk and looked for a place to throw it away, Sooil told him to give it to him. He then started folding the carton flat and put it in another plastic bag he took out from his pocket. Sooil then twirled around the plastic bag before asking.

"Didn't you just miss the last train?"

"There's one at 11:40. Rather than that, aren't you going home?"

"My house is nearby."

"Where?"

Sooil pointed at an apartment complex near the Han river.

"You live in a good place."

"It's not that good."

"There's the bridge. Aren't you supposed to cross it?"

"Since I started walking, I'll walk with you until the station."

"I don't need you to so go and get some sleep. I heard you were busy."

"I'm not that busy. One of the movies I was shooting fell flat on its face so I have plenty of time."

"You mean the multi-billion won scam movie?"

"Yeah. Thanks to that, Geunsoo-hyung and I daze out a lot together. We had a hard time rolling around everywhere in the mountains since it was a war movie, but it was suddenly cancelled."

Sooil took out another piece of bread and put it in his mouth. It was the bread that only had the bread left without the crust.

"It's a waste to throw it away."

Sooil finished the whole thing.

Maru smiled as he looked at that.

"But are you okay with walking around like this?"

“Why do you ask?”

“Why, you say...”

Maru pointed at the three women heading towards them with his chin. The three were looking their way, no, to be exact, at Sooil. They looked like they recognized him, but they didn't seem so sure.

Sooil laughed like an idiot as he waved the black plastic bag above his head. The women that were giving glances at them tilted their heads before walking past.

“When I do this, most people just walk by.”

Sooil looked at Maru with a proud expression.

“...I'm surprised the president is okay with that. An actor has his image too.”

“Of course, I immediately compose myself if there's a fan who comes at me while shouting my name. It's my work after all. On the other hand, I feign ignorance if they are probing me out. Taking photos together and giving autographs and things like that. Those are actually quite hard. But people see me in a good way. They think I'm interesting.”

“The dilemma of a popular actor, huh.”

“This is nothing compared to Geunsoo-hyung. Ah, Geunsoo-hyung's fan café came to the movie shoot for support last time, and god, that was amazing. That day, we had a full-course meal from breakfast to dinner. I resolved that I will get popular the moment I saw that.”

After that, he followed on to praise the food he ate that day. He took out some bread from the plastic bag and ate them as he spoke, and the amount he ate was more than seven at least. After probing inside the bag for one last time, Sooil made a disappointed expression. It seemed that he had run out.

“You eat more than I expected.”

“I need good stamina if I want to work on many things. Also, I don't gain weight easily.”

“You should manage yourself while you still don't gain weight. Otherwise, you might find yourself in unwanted conditions in a blink of an eye.”

“If I get fat, then I'll just play the old man next door or something.”

Sooil folded the empty plastic bag and put it in his pocket.

“There's a trash can over there.”

“But that's for cigarettes. Also, milk cartons are recyclable.”

“What a good man.”

“I'm used to it since I've been doing it since I was young. Don't litter, if you see any, pick it up. Don't let anyone find fault with you. Well, things like that, I guess?”

Sooil bent down and picked up an empty drink can and put it in his plastic bag.

“I shouldn't let anyone find fault with me.”

The smile he made as he said those words looked a little bitter. Sooil immediately erased that expression and returned to his usual atmosphere.

Maru did not pry any further. Everyone had their own circumstances, and above all, he wasn't close enough to Sooil to hold such conversations. For now, they were just co-workers. Nothing more, nothing less.

"What made you become an actor?" Sooil asked.

"Because I can earn money."

"Ah, money," Sooil uttered in a small voice as though he was talking to himself before looking at Maru.

He clearly wanted Maru to ask him the same question.

Maru lightly ignored his gaze and turned his face forward. He was the type of guy to blab on about it even without Maru telling him to. And just as he had expected, Sooil spoke without being able to wait three seconds.

"I find acting fun."

"Good for you. You get to earn money while doing something fun."

"Good for me, indeed. People give me support from here and there. Being sold as a set with someone famous really is effective. I knew I should've met a good agency."

"You don't like it because you were sold as a set?"

"No, I like it. If I was by myself, I wouldn't have been able to become so popular so quickly. I think I do well in acting. But acting and business are different areas after all. What creates my popularity is not my acting skill, but the power of the agency."

"I thought this was the part where you're supposed to laugh in self-loathing, but I guess you aren't, huh. That's good to see. You should keep that up," Maru said with his honest opinion.

The mindset to win against others using skill alone was definitely worth respect. This was a cruel world, who was supposed to insult a swordsman who lived by his sword alone? It was just that, there were too many swordsmen in this society with broken swords, so it wasn't entirely comfortable to cheer for such people.

Being sold as a set. He was aware that it was a form of business that could raise the value of lesser-known newbies. However, it wasn't always a profitable method. If there was a form of business that always resulted in profit, the world would've been doomed several times already. Being sold as a set was praised for 'excavation of new people' when it worked well, but when the 'plus alpha' was below expectations, then the new person would be exiled from the media while receiving all sorts of insults.

That man, the man named Lee Junmin, was a scary businessman. He wasn't the type of person who would spread his arms to a market where he would take losses in. Sooil was a talent worth his investment in his eyes, and he was sold as a set with someone else accordingly.



Of course, Sooil would probably hear all sorts of bad things from around him. He came here through connections; a nameless guy is acting all cocky; he came here through sheer luck, and things like that. Those words were very cruel and he would probably want to make excuses, but what could he do? It was the truth. It was incredibly difficult to gain both popularity and good evaluations at the same time.

“From what I heard from the president saying last time, he seems to care about you a lot, but he still hasn’t talked to you, huh. I heard you were close to Geunsoo-hyung as well, am I wrong? He could’ve supported you when you got into the drama last time, but he’s strangely quiet.”

“Perhaps he still doesn’t find me worth his investment. Also, I received a lot of money when I first signed the contract.”

“Ah, it was 300 million up front, right? My word, that’s completely absurd. It’s a better benefit than blatantly giving his support.”

“Since I received that much, I should prove myself to be worthy of that. Unless I want to be deprived of all my qualifications.”

“The president is the type of guy to get his investment back before he deprives you of everything though.”

In that, they thought the same. President Lee Junmin was the type of guy who would collect his 300 million won investment regardless of the method.

“Suyeon-noona talked about you from time to time, and now that I got to talk to you, I get why that picky noona talked about you so much.”

“What did that ahjumma say?”

“Ahjumma? Do you say that in front of her too?”

“No, until a while ago, I called her Miss Suyeon. But we’re in the same company now. I call her senior or just noona.”

“Miss Suyeon sounds even worse than ahjumma. Anyway, when that noona talked about you, she used this expression to describe you: you won’t make losses if you have a leg over him.”

“Well, I can’t exactly say anything about that.”

For some reason, Maru was reminded of Suyeon’s sneaky smile. Was she still trying to get Geunsoo to fall head over heels for her these days? Geunsoo definitely wasn’t ordinary either for keeping his balance on the palm of that sneaky fox who probably swallowed hundreds of snakes.

“So I’m putting my leg over you too.”

“Uhm, excuse me, Mr. Yoo Sooil, I don’t accept men.”

“How harsh.”

At that moment, a car that was driving slowly pulled over. Maru looked at the car. The car was moving as slowly as they walked. It was an ivory-colored Nissan Cube. The blocky car slowed down even more before the windows rolled down.

"I was right."

The woman in the driver's seat, Choi Gyunglim, spoke as she took out her earbuds. Just as Maru was about to greet her, he heard a cheerful voice next to him.

"Oh, noona. What a pretty car you have. Did you switch?"

Sooil waved his hand and approached the car.

"Wh-what the? Why are you here?" Gyunglim spoke out in surprise.

"Weren't you saying hello to me? I was really glad too. Wait, if it's not me, then...."

Sooil looked at Maru. Maru nodded his head to greet Gyunglim.

"You two know each other?" Sooil spoke in a high pitch as though he was very surprised.

"Oho. Someone that Gyunglim-noona greets first, huh. Are you two perhaps...."

"N-no, we're not."

"You're not? What a pity."

Maru stared at the two people. Sooil acted like a puppy that hadn't met its owner in a long time as he went right up against the car to talk to her, while Gyunglim looked at Sooil with a very nervous expression. Maru couldn't figure out if they were on good terms or not.

"I'm going then."

Since it was nothing important, he was about to go his way when Sooil blocked his way. Sooil, who had practically teleported, asked in a low voice.

"Do you do stuff like internet cafés and the like? You know, the one she's in. Was it a calligraphy one?"

"No."

"Then how do you know her? That noona... hm, anyway, you shouldn't have any connections to her though."

"We take lessons together. Also, if you want to know, you should ask her. She'd probably answer in kind."

"I can't do that. She finds me difficult."

"Difficult?"

"Something like that. But that's quite interesting. She's incredibly shy so she has almost no friends."

Sooil savagely roasted someone with a completely relaxed expression. If Gyunglim heard his words, she would probably say a string of insults without filtering them through her brain first.

Gyunglim got out of her car and approached them.

"You two k-know each other?"

“Yes. We’re in the same agency. Isn’t that right, Maru?”

Before Sooil hung his arms around Maru’s shoulders, Maru flicked him away.

“Uhm, as much as I want to talk to you, I have a train to catch. I’ll get going first.”

He had zero intention to get stuck in between this rather awkward-looking duo. Gyunglim also didn’t seem to have anything to say either as she said goodbye and quickly returned to her car.

“Noona! Give me a ride!”

Sooil pulled on the handle for the passenger seat, but Gyunglim seemed to have locked it from the inside as the door did not open.

“Noona, we live in the same mansion, do you really have to do this?”

When Sooil did not let go, Gyunglim had to give up. Maru looked at Sooil, who was all smiles, as well as Gyunglim who looked like she stepped on something dirty. They were quite a peculiar duo.

“I’m going! See you later!”

Sooil waved his hand as the car drove past.

Maru shook his head and walked down the stairs to the train station. He went past the ticket barrier and waited for the train when he was reminded of the car that Gyunglim was riding.

‘Looks like she’s well off. Well, she is someone that takes 5 million-won-per-month lessons.’

He had briefly forgotten about it since he was receiving free lessons, but Miso’s lessons were 5 million won per month. Sungjae was understandable since he was one of the top idols in the country, so he wondered where Gwangseok and Gyunglim got all that money from. Were their parents well-off enough to spend 5 million won per month on a single academy?

Also, Sooil mentioned the word ‘mansion’ as well. At that moment, he heard the announcement for the train. Maru stopped thinking about it and looked at the incoming train. He was too tired to think about the world of rich people. He yawned before getting into the train.

## **Chapter 416**

He locked his fingers and stretched his arms downwards to crack his wrists. Minute spasms starting from his wrist went up to his elbow.

“Phew.”

That director, he knew how to make the most out of people. Director Park Joongjin, who was wearing a flowery shirt, stared into the monitor for a long time before raising his head. From his appearance, he looked like a man from the neighborhood who came here to look around, but that man’s requests were truly scary.

“Let’s do one more take on master 8. A long-take this time. Actors, please get into your positions. Background actors, please come over here.”

Groans could be heard. Maru stood up and dusted his knees. Bangjoo, who was lying next to him, also groaned as he stood up.

“You okay?”

“For now. How about you, seonbae-nim?”

“I’m on the verge of collapsing. Please do my worth as well once I actually do.”

“Don’t say such a scary thing. That director looks like he’ll really make me do it.”

The actors who were lying on top of the mattresses started standing up one by one. They were action actors led by the action director Kim Choongho, aka the ‘Kim Choongho brigade’. Maru had lost count of how many times they fell down on the ground today.

Maru extended his hand to Sooyoung and Joon-gi, who were lying down next to Bangjoo. These two had a really hard time today. They did stunts after stunts after stunts. When the director picked these two out for their good stature, the two rejoiced, but their current states spoke for themselves. The two people who were filled with vitality in the morning looked like they were about to give high-fives to the grim reaper.

“Maru.”

“What?”

“I’ll eat my hat if I shoot anything else with that director.”

Those were Joon-gi’s words.

“You’re going to eat your hat? I’m going to quit being an actor.”

And those were from Sooyoung.

The two gnashed their teeth as they stood up. The four of them slowly walked towards Joongjin. The actors gathered with their backs towards the sea. Regardless of whether they were lead, support, or minor actors, they were all sweating like mad. They were unsure whether the salty smell was from the sea or was from their bodies.

“Let’s change the movement lines a little. From here to here, it’s two steps. I saw you running three steps last time, so remember that it’s only two steps. Oh, and Miss Miso. Please teach these two how to look natural when looking at something. As for the two of you over here, fall on your left shoulders. Also, look at the camera. As for the jumping height, I think your chest height should be good. Also....”

Joongjin spoke as he stroked his beard. His detailed requests for their acting started once again. The shoot usually vastly differed according to the director’s style, but Maru didn’t know that it could be like this. Absolute control. A genius’ method of doing things was to control ordinary people with absolute perfection.

‘But I didn’t know it was this bad.’

Seeing Joongjin, who explained things as he pointed at the ground, Maru remembered back to ten hours ago, when he just arrived at Yeouido station.

\* \* \*

“Seonbae-nim!”

Bangjoo greeted energetically in front of the station. The people around were startled since it was early in the morning as they looked at Bangjoo, but he didn't seem to care. Why was Maru in charge of being embarrassed? Maru immediately approached Bangjoo and hooked his arm around his neck.

“Tone it down a little.”

“Y-yes.”

“Have you slept well? You were energetic last time.”

“This is the first time since elementary school that I couldn't get any sleep because of nervousness. It was just like my first ever school picnic. Do you see these under my eyes?”

Bangjoo seemed to have spotted some freckles on his face, but in Maru's eyes, Bangjoo was the epitome of healthiness.

“Have you had breakfast?”

“My sister emptied everything when she came back from work last night. Maybe she got stressed out by something.”

“So you have an empty stomach right now?”

Maru took the smiling Bangjoo to the convenience store and bought a rice ball, some bread, and some milk. Bangjoo ate his light breakfast while they waited for the train.

“You should really eat breakfast. Unless the meetup is early morning, no one will give you breakfast.”

“Yes.”

It was 5:10 a.m. They got on the first train and went to Yeouido station. When they left through the 3rd exit, the coach for the movie was waiting for them. They checked attendance with the staff before getting inside the coach.

“You're here?”

Inside were Kang Sooyoung and Choi Joon-gi, who, like Maru and Bangjoo, played friends of the main protagonist. Childhood friends A through D had all gathered. As the time neared the departure time, more people started getting in the coach. Most of them seemed to be students. Perhaps some of them were older than 20, but they all looked to be high school students.

Maru closed his eyes as soon as he sat by the window. He got a message from the director two days ago. He was notified to get plenty of rest since the shoot was going to be hard. Bangjoo liked that message since he thought that the director was kind, but the first thing Maru did when he saw that message was to sigh. After all, it meant that the shoot was hard enough to the point that they had to notify even the minor actors. He couldn't be entirely sure since he didn't know director Joongjin's progression style, but with precursors like this, he could somewhat imagine what it was going to be like.

“There are a lot of people.”

“Indeed.”

“Do you think they’re all aspiring actors?”

“Most of them are probably here for a part time job, or are considering it as a field trip.”

“Aha, then....”

Maru slightly grabbed Bangjoo’s lips with his right hand.

“Bangjoo. I get that you’re excited, but you should really get some sleep. It’s a tip I’m giving you as someone experienced. Once you get off this coach, you’ll be spending lots and lots of stamina, so you should save up now.”

“Yes!”

“And tone down your voice.”

Maru awkwardly nodded to the students who looked their way and closed his eyes. Bangjoo seemed to be unable to hold back his excitement as he kept moving around even after the coach departed, but he became calm the moment they left the Gyeonggi province. Maru slightly pinched the snoring Bangjoo’s neck before looking outside the window.

‘This is the second time.’

This was his second movie shoot after Twilight Struggles. He wasn’t delinquent 1, who only had a single appearance. He now played a role with a bit of significance. He was ‘Floppy friend B’. Actually, he didn’t have many lines. What was important was the action. The director chose action to express the younger days of the characters that would be played by adult actors. From the synopsis, it sounded like a stereotypical mafia movie, but since the director was dubbed a genius by people, he kind of looked forward to what kind of twists it would have.

The shooting location was Gunsan in North Jeolla province, near Gunsan port. There was no better background environment to show manliness than the saltiness of the sea. Maru pictured all of the action moves he had learned until now in his head.

“Seonbae-nim.”

Hearing Bangjoo’s voice, Maru opened his eyes. The coach was stopping. When he looked outside the window, he saw an old school building. From how there was a signpost that said ‘Dreaming Gallery’, it seemed to be a closed school.

Maru stretched his arms out as he stepped on the ground. His bones were creaking since he had been sitting still from Seoul to Gunsan. And he was young too.

Bangjoo took in a deep breath as though he was a mountain climber that just arrived at the summit. His face was practically shining. Maru was going to calm him down since he looked like he was going to explode with expectation for the shoot, but he decided not to. No amount of talking seemed to suffice.

He just let Bangjoo be. After all, once the shoot started, any excitement was going to end and it would be an endless stream of boringness.

“Seonbae-nim. I’m so excited for it.”

“Don’t be. Shooting a film isn’t such a fun thing.”

“I’m looking forward to the shoot, but more than that...”

Bangjoo, who was short, tip-toed, and looked afar. Maru also looked where he was looking. There was a black van. In front of the van was a girl wearing a deep brown hunting hat, a checkered miniskirt, and ugg boots. Ugg boots? In this weather?

“She’s Kwon Dayoon. I’m a fan of hers even amongst the girls of Blue.”

“Looks like you like her quite a lot.”

“Of course. Dayoon-noona is the dope in my class.”

“Ah, dope.”

He knew what it meant, but he really couldn’t get used to saying it. Was it because he was old? He really had a hard time following young people’s trends.

“I should get an autograph.”

“Hey hey, get yourself together. Why are we here?”

“For the film shoot.”

“Is the film shoot work? Or play?”

“...It’s work.”

“Ask her for one once the shoot ends and everyone starts clapping. No, before that, you should figure out the director’s personality. If you act like that in front of strict directors, they’ll swear at you immediately.”

“Really?”

“If you’re really curious, you can always try it out for yourself.”

“I’ll give up on it then. I’m not here to play around after all.”

“Good.”

He patted Bangjoo’s shoulders.

“But they won’t say anything to me if I just look at her like this, right?”

Bangjoo looked at Dayoon who stood afar in disappointment. Just then, they were told to gather in front of the school entrance. The students that got off the coach walked towards the front door. The word ‘Believe’ was written on top of the yellowed-out white paint. School mottos were always similar wherever it was.

“Get changed into these school uniforms and drill uniforms, and change with the people next to you if it doesn’t fit you. If it’s too baggy, we’ll give you paper clips to size them down.”

The staff didn’t speak to them in polite speech. There was a small commotion among the students, but they soon quietened down.

“Listen and do as I say. Don’t delay the shoot by doing unnecessary things. Understood?”

“Yes.”

The staff scanned the group once before leaving.

“Who the hell is he?”

“I don’t know.”

“Who’s he to order us around?”

The students all started complaining, but when that staff came back, they all shut up.

“Let’s get changed,” Maru said to Bangjoo.

Sooyoung and Joon-gi also got a pair of clothes and stood up. It was much better to get some rest after getting changed rather than complaining. Nothing would change even if they grumbled about it anyway.

“I wonder what the director is like.”

“Me too.”

“Maru, didn’t you get to talk to the director a few times?” Sooyoung asked.

“I did.”

“How is he? Is he strict? I got that he’s a strange guy from when we first met, but I don’t really understand in detail.”

“Well, I don’t know either. He’s a strange fella to describe. You should experience it for yourself.”

The figure of Joongjin he saw in the high-class restaurant last time flashed through his head. Just what could describe his ‘style’ when he pressed down on cooked meat with his fingers? He couldn’t tell at all. It was only possible to find out by experiencing the shoot itself.

They stopped talking and changed their clothes. Changing their clothes in public practically became normal for them now. Although female staff passed by, they didn’t mind each other.

“Should we do move number six as a warm up?”

Sooyoung spoke as he tried clenching both of his fists.

“That sounds okay.”

The three others surrounded Sooyoung. The one that spoke was always the main character. In move number six, the main character would get beaten up. They simply did the actions they repeated



numerous times in the action school. At first, they were shy in their actions in fear of hurting another, but right now, they looked quite good since they were able to 'attack' without restraints.

They could hear other students exclaim as they watched. Sooyoung seemed to be excited as he was exaggerating his actions. After a while, his fist tangled with Bangjoo and they both fell down together.

"Hey! Don't get the clothes dirty!"

Hearing the staff's shout, Sooyoung made an awkward smile.

It seemed that all the equipment entered the building as the props vehicle seemed rather empty. The busily moving staff members couldn't be seen either. It seemed that they were working inside.

Just then, a van entered the school field. The white-colored van stopped before a tall man got out. It was Lee Hyuk, who had cut his hair short and was wearing sunglasses. He was one of the main characters in this movie.

"Wow, he's good-looking."

"It's Lee Hyuk!"

Joon-gi was the one that spoke without any change in his voice, and the one that jumped around was Bangjoo. Bangjoo, this boy, seemed to like all celebrities.

"He's one of my favorite actors. I was really impressed after seeing his action in 'Violent Crimes Third Department'."

"Was he good?"

"Yes. He was really good."

Just as he nodded, other vehicles entered the school field in series.

The main actors were finally here.

## **Chapter 417**

"Their treatment is completely different from ours," Sooyoung spoke as he saw Park Gwangsoo and Cha Taehoon go into the school building.

While the minor actors and the background actors had to find shade to get away from the scorching heat, the main actors waited in a classroom with air conditioning.

"I got a glimpse through the window, and they looked harmonious. Kwon Dayoon is there too," Joon-gi spoke as he did some stretches.

"This is why people need to become successful," Maru said with a smile.

"I think they're all here now."

"Yoo Joongang isn't here yet though."

Lee Hyuk, Yoo Joongang, Kwon Dayoon. These were the three main characters for this movie. Lee Hyuk and Kwon Dayoon had arrived, so the shoot would probably start once Yoo Joongang arrived.

“Man, I’m being roasted.”

The weather was hot even though they were in the shade. Sooyoung tried reaching his hand out of the shade before being startled and pulling it back. Maru shouted towards Bangjoo who was standing under the sun.

“Bangjoo, don’t stand there and come here. You might collapse.”

“I can endure.”

“Right now, you can. Don’t waste any energy and just sit down next to me.”

It seemed that even the heat was unable to melt Bangjoo’s excited heart. Bangjoo hopped towards him before sitting down.

“Don’t you feel hot?”

“I’m not really sure.”

“I’m sure there’s something wrong with you. Calm down already.”

Maru pressed down on Bangjoo’s shoulders since he kept shaking in excitement.

“Who’s car is that?” Joongi asked as he looked somewhere else.

A black sedan could be seen entering the school field. From how there was only one person in the driver’s seat, it didn’t seem to be the director. The door soon opened and a man wearing a flower-patterned shirt got out.

“It’s the director.”

“Whew, what a fashionista.”

Director Park Joongjin waved his hand at the staff who came to greet him. Then he disappeared into the school building as well.

“How many hours have we been here for?”

“An hour and a half.”

“What time is it now?”

“Half past ten.”

“It looks like they might have everyone eat lunch in a while.”

Joon-gi and Sooyoung powerlessly laid on the ground. Maru also brushed aside some pebbles and lied down. No one looked after them in this place. They had to follow silent cues and preserve their stamina as much as possible. Doing their best in a place not being seen by others would give them nothing. They had to show their passion and effort in front of other people, especially the director.

“You should lie down as well.”

“Is it okay to do that?”

“If someone shouts at us, then we can get up at that time. Though, I doubt anyone would do so.”

The staff members had taken refuge inside the building as well. Only the minor actors and background actors were abandoned outside since no one looked after them. If the leader was someone that cared about people, he would probably prepare a place to rest, but the leader this time seemed to be endlessly lacking in mercy. It would be fortunate if he did not swear at them.

As he was looking at the clear sky, a low-pitched exhaust sound could be heard. So the last one was finally here? When he lifted his head a little, he saw a van slowly entering the premises. With that, all the main actors had gathered.

The man who had the proportions of a model, Yoo Joongang, greeted the staff politely as he went inside.

“He looks like a good person,” Bangjoo said.

There was no better self-PR than greeting politely.

“I guess they’ll be starting soon.”

“They should probably call us once their read-through is done.”

They stared at the classroom where the actors would be resting for ten minutes. After that, they were told to gather round. The ordinary students that weren’t used to waiting walked towards the main entrance while squirming like a worm after a day of rain as though they were tired already.

“We’re going to start the shoot soon. Once you go in, follow the director’s words. As long as you do what you were told to do, it will end quickly. After that, you can just sit down and watch actors do their thing, and get your money. You guys are earning money very easily, okay?”

The leader spoke as though he was the one that was paying them. Maru yawned before walking.

They walked up to the 2nd floor and into one of the classrooms where a camera was installed. Like how they were wearing drill uniforms, the classroom seemed to be from the 80s as well. The desks were tattered while the chairs were rusted. The large national flag at the front of the class, the bulging speakers right next to them, the world map, and even a chart stand.

When Maru tried rubbing his rubber indoor shoes against the wooden floor, he heard an unpleasant screeching sound.

“Hey, hey, hey. Don’t look around and sit down. Don’t touch anything and don’t play with your phones. If I hear a phone sound during the shoot, I’m going to sue you for damages, okay?”

The leader went out strong against the students. Then, a woman, who looked to be rather picky, came inside the class and slightly adjusted the placement of the props.

“Hey, lil’ magpie. I’m going to have this placed at the front so get some water in it. Also, dent the sides a little more.”

“Understood.”

It seemed that she was the art director. A youth who was wearing a baseball cap backwards hammered the brass kettle. A loud noise reverberated in the classroom.

“Uh, over there. Stop.”

At that moment, director Joongjin, wearing his flowery shirt, came inside the classroom. He went up to the youth holding the kettle and took it away from him.

“Who told you to do this?”

“Our director told me to....”

The woman, who was outside the classroom for a moment, came back inside and spoke.

“I told him to do it. What about it?”

“Ah, if it’s you, director Choi, I don’t have any complaints.”

“I wonder why I decided to work with you again, director Park. I had my fair share of pain a decade ago.”

“Wasn’t it fun back then too, in its own right?”

“Not at all, really. The props in here are mine, so if you wanna touch them, then get my permission. That’s the way I work. Understood, director Park Joongjin?”

“Of course. I’ll do that. Of course, I will.”

Joongjin put down the kettle with a smile. Director Choi, who untied her hair which was in a knot, started walking around and adjusted things again. Wherever she walked past, the scenery changed slightly.

“I knew it’s fun to work with people you can rely on.”

Maru overheard Joongjin talking to himself and looked at director Choi. Director Choi was moving around busily and shook her hands off once before standing next to Joongjin.

“Where’s the camera director?”

“He’ll be here soon.”

A while later, a man holding coffee in one hand stood in front of the classroom. Maru knew this man. It was camera director Kim Jangsoo, who had a rather crude-looking face with some flicks of white hair.

Maru met eyes with Jangsoo who was looking around the class while drinking coffee. Jangsoo made a surprised expression before approaching him with a smile.

“You were talking to Joongjin in the restaurant back then and I see you here huh. Supporting actor?”

“No, a minor actor doing physical labor.”

“Urgh, looks like you’re going to be in for a world of pain. You don’t know how he works, do you? Just consider yourself dead today.”

Jangsoo patted his shoulders before leaving. At that moment, he felt a prickling gaze on him, and it was from director Choi, who stood next to Joongjin. Director Choi asked some things from Jangsoo before looking at Maru again. Since he met eyes with her so often, Maru smiled back awkwardly and nodded his head.

“What the, who’s he?” Next to him, Sooyoung asked.

“He’s probably the camera director.”

“Really? Then how do you know him?”

“I saw him a couple of times during a drama shoot.”

“Really? Then you should ask him to help us.”

“Help us with what?”

“To get us in a good shot?”

“Don’t talk nonsense.”

Sooyoung just shrugged.

Following that the actors appeared. They were Park Gwangsoo and Cha Taehoon, who had changed into drill uniforms. The adult actors were just watching outside the class.

“Well then, shall we begin?”

Joongjin stood at the front of the class like a teacher and clapped his hand once to gather everyone’s attention.

“Some of you might not have adapted to the environment here since it’s your first time. Also, there might be people who are used to these kinds of environments and must be feeling bored. Before we begin, I’d like to tell you that you must follow my words from now on regardless of the reason. The one sitting at the front. What is your name?”

“I-I’m Kim Jaehoon.”

“Okay, Mr. Jaehoon. Just like that, you should just answer me when I ask you something. Also, Mr. Jaehoon, can you turn your head to the right about 45 degrees?”

The student named Jaehoon turned his head.

“Stop.”

The student’s head stopped.

“Now, turn your head forward slowly. That’s right. Good. How was it? Was it hard?”

“No.”

“From now on, most of the shoot will go like this. I am going to ask you to do things that you can do. Most of them will be simple things, and I will explain them to you in detail so that it’ll be easier for you to understand. If you don’t understand anything, you can always ask a question. Understood?”

“Yes.”

It seemed that his calm voice and polite speech earned the goodwill of the students. Maru could overhear ‘sounds fun’ from the students sitting behind him.

“Then from now on, we’re going to start what is known as a rehearsal. Please listen to me carefully from now. You’ll have to remember and do just as I instructed.”

Joongjin walked to the student on the very left and adjusted the direction of the student’s shoulders, neck, and hands placed on the table. The student, who followed with a smile at first, eventually frowned.

“I should move like this?”

“Yes. Just as I told you.”

Like that, Joongjin went over the simple movements for forty-plus people. Maru’s role was to sleep on the desk.

“Then shall we try it out?” Joongjin said from the front.

Along with his finger snap, the students moved.

And a brief moment later, the students stopped moving. Joongjin, who was watching that from the front of the class, stroked his chin and spoke.

“Mr. Hongsik and Mr. Jaeyoung. Please do as I say.”

It seemed that he had memorized the names of all the students in the class. While Maru exclaimed slightly, the student that Joongjin was looking at, spoke.

“But this way, it looks more natu....”

“Mr. Hongsik.”

“Yes.”

“Can you do as I say?”

“....”

“If you can’t, then stand up. Everyone, you’re here as background actors. Some of you might be aspiring actors as well. Perhaps it’s your first movie shoot, and you want to show your own acting for fun or for your own ambitions.”

Joongjin walked sideways. Then, he grabbed the desk in front of him and leaned forward. Everyone’s gaze was on him.

“I’ll be clear. Don’t act. Don’t even try to act. Just do as I say. If I see someone trying to ruin the picture I’m drawing, I will have that person leave. Don’t worry about the money, I’ll pay you. Understood?”

There was a round of silence.

“Don’t act. Don’t try to move according to your thoughts. You will have to follow my instructions and only my instructions. That is the rule here.”

After saying his words, Joongjin made a warm smile and straightened his back again.

“Then let’s do that rehearsal one more time. After that, we’ll have the actors come in and do the rehearsal again.”

Hearing the clap, the students did the same action over again. Playing with the person next to them, looking at the ceiling in a daze, picking something up from the ground, swinging back and forth on the chair. Maru, who leaned forward on his desk slightly raised his head and looked at them. Each of the actions that Joongjin demanded went hand in hand like gears and created the atmosphere of an ordinary classroom. It was the kind of picture that couldn’t be created if the students were left to their own devices. There was no such thing as awkwardness. It looked smooth enough to be on camera.

A sense of naturalness gained from forced actions. Maru could get a vague grasp on the meaning behind what Jangsoo said.

“Very good,” Joongjin said with a nod.

#### **Chapter 418**

Maru looked at director Joongjin while buttoning up his drill uniform. The atmosphere on the set was mainly decided by the director. Choi Joonggeun, the director of Twilight Struggles, was someone that didn’t talk a lot during shoots. The only words he spoke were: ‘again’ and ‘good’. Whether it was his senior or his junior; a lead actor, or a supporting actor, he did not speak to them in long sentences. He only sat in front of the monitor with an expressionless face and spoke from time to time. Once he got a good cut and the camera stopped, he would become ‘close brothers’ with the rest of the people.

Joonggeun’s method was to let the actors decide for themselves. It was a method that also pressured the actors considerably. There was no feedback during the shoot. He told the things he wrote down and thought of during the shoot to the actors only during break times. Once the camera started rolling again, he would not say anything.

During the shoot for Twilight Struggles, he saw Moonjoong in deep thought. He was probably contemplating how to solve the requests that the director had given him.

Just how many rolls of film had they gone through? Maru was there for only one day, but he was flabbergasted by the director when he took dozens of takes for one scene.

Joonggeun’s method was to help the actors reach an answer themselves. His method was only possible if he had the confidence to give no directions to the actors. However, fundamental trust towards those actors had to lie as the basis. If he was working with veteran actors, he would be able to create high-quality scenes in a short time, but if that wasn’t the case, he would have to throw out a lot of rolls of film. Despite the risks, Joonggeun provided the same opportunities to all the actors during the shoot. He waited and waited again.

“Smack down on the desk when you say ‘be quiet’. Like, in a strong tone. Think of it as though you’re trying to cover up everyone else’s voices on the microphone. Then you turn around, to the left.”

Joongjin limited the range of acting. He controlled every little action the actor had to do with his words and wanted them to act within his control. At first, Maru thought that he was going to give instructions to just the minor actors and the background actors, but he gave detailed instructions to all the actors that came inside the classroom.

“Wouldn’t it be better to turn right?”

Cha Taehoon, the lead actor for a child role, gave his opinion, but Joongjin refused in a soft, yet firm way that didn’t leave room for any negotiation.

No one talked back to him after realizing his intentions of meticulous control behind his soft-spoken words. While the explanations continued, though, another person came into the classroom. It was Miso.

“Then let’s get ready.”

Joongjin positioned each actor. The direction they were looking in, the angle of their arms, the shape of their mouth, etc. He told them every little detail as though he was teaching a child that did not know anything.

Maru saw the expressions of the child actors slowly starting to stiffen.

“We’re going to start the shoot like this. We’ll do a master shot once and then do a coverage of each part. Everyone, do the actions I told you to do. Even if you make a mistake, don’t stop. I’m the one making that decision.”

Joongjin left the class. A camera, which was installed on a dolly, which was then installed on rails, moved around the entrance of the classroom. Maru saw the camera director nodding towards Joongjin.

“Scene three-dash-one-dash-one.”

The staff with a slate clapped it in front of the camera. Following that, the director’s voice could be heard.

“Ready, action.”

The camera slid into the classroom. It seemed to be getting an overall feel of the scene. Maru looked at the situation while in a sleeping position just as Joongjin had instructed him to. Everyone was doing the actions that the director told them to do. The camera on a dolly stopped in front of Park Gwangsoo, who sat in the front row.

Park Gwangsoo said the line he prepared in a strong manner. His character was the first of the class. Everyone in the class suddenly turned quiet. The expressions and actions as they became quiet were also instructed in detail by the director. There was no ‘improvisation’ where the camera was shooting. Everything was a scenery created by Park Joongjin. There was no individuality at all.

Despite that, Maru found this place limitlessly natural.

Directing was something artificial. Since a person was creating an imaginary story and giving directions according to that, it could only be artificial. However, in between two directions, there were the emotions of individuals as well as their acting. It was the mixture of contrivance and individuality that



lessened the artificial nature and increased sympathy. No, Maru believed that to be true until he experienced this moment.

Joongjin's direction of the classroom was fairly artificial. He limited all individual action so that there was nothing in between his directions. He created the space as though he was mass-producing things. Maru thought that the contradiction of this methodology would soon show up once they started shooting. Perfect order could only look mechanical. He predicted that the 'human nature' that people working in the industry looked for, would be absent and would create a stifling picture.

However, what actually happened was a picture of a classroom that had its traits despite being ordinary and above all - had no flaws. What if the kid chatting next to him looked just a little lower, and what if the guy whistling by the window whistled for just a little longer, and what if the drill uniform of the smiling guy sitting at the back was a little neater? Would it feel the same then?

He subconsciously sighed.

Eventually, they continued to the point where Gwangsoo hooked his arm around Bangjoo and laughed together. It was a long take. During this 3-minute shot, there was no NG signal. Taehoon smacked down on the desk. Then, a second round of silence pervaded the area. Everyone looked at Taehoon in the same instant. Every movement, down to their hands, was just as Joongjin had instructed them to do. Once the gaze was gathered on him, Taehoon kicked off his seat and walked towards the camera.

"Cut," Joongjin spoke in a bright voice.

After entering the classroom, Joongjin walked amidst everyone and told every one of them what they did wrong. The ones that were pointed out widened their eyes in surprise. They seemed surprised that Joongjin noticed their minute mistakes at all.

"We're doing that again. You just need to do as I told you to."

While Joongjin took the lead actors and Miso outside the class, Maru straightened his back and sat up.

"Seonbae-nim."

Bangjoo, who sat at the front, walked up to him.

"What is it?"

"Is shooting a movie supposed to be like this?"

"Is anything strange?"

"It is. It's completely different from how I expected it to be."

"What did you expect?"

"Acting out this and that, and then the director would tell people who's wrong, who was good, and what they could do better. When they hit a block, we'd talk with other actors, and... anyway, I was expecting more of a hustle and bustle."

"But it's strange because it's too quiet and calm?"

“Exactly. In Jackie Chan movies, they always show you the bloopers during the ending credits right? The staff and the director laugh together and sometimes they would glare at each other....”

Bangjoo made a complex expression.

“This is not acting, but.....”

Bangjoo frowned with one eye and licked his lips as though he couldn't think of the right word. At that moment, Joongjin, Miso, and the lead actors came back. Bangjoo sighed to himself and went back to his seat.

“You just need to do what you did last time. The camera movement might change, but you don't need to worry about it. Just do what you are supposed to do.”

Maru looked up at Joongjin who walked right next to him. Meeting eyes, Joongjin showed him the smile that he showed back in the restaurant.

Seeing him turning his back, Maru was reminded of a game of chess. That was probably what Bangjoo was looking for. This was a chessboard, the director was the player. Then what did that make the people here?

‘Chess pieces that can't move by themselves.’

Was this a shooting location? Or was this a studio for one individual?

One thing Maru could be sure of was that Joongjin probably had a complete picture of the film in his head. The way of a genius. He now understood why Joongjin cast people based on body figures alone. The very shape of a human - just this couldn't be changed at will, so Joongjin picked the right ones. Instead, he put everything else under his calculations. All the people gathered here became his tools, and tools could not speak. There was no need for tools to express their opinions. They just did whatever they are meant to do.

‘However, there are tools that can speak.’

Maru looked at the back door of the classroom. There was a woman who looked over the class with her sharp eyes while leaning against the door. Director Choi.

-Ah, if it's you, director Choi, I don't have any complaints.

The only person outside Joongjin's frame. Joongjin, who treated everything that stepped into his space as a tool accepted her opinions.

She voiced her opinion as a person.

Maru wanted to be in such a position. Would Joongjin listen to someone if he knew that person for a long time? No. He didn't seem like someone who would do that. In the end, the only method seemed to be getting his approval.

Then how?

“Do just as I tell you. Then, let's begin the shoot.”

Joongjin snapped his fingers as he left.

There was nothing he could do now. He could only fall flat on the desk and just observe everything around him. There was no way to go forward. In order to express himself differently, it required movement, but right now, the only thing he could do was to twitch his fingers, maybe. Perhaps Joongjin might catch even that and warn him: that there's no need for acting.

While they took a coverage shot for each actor, there were no NGs. It was surprising. It had only been an hour since the shoot began, yet the classroom scene ended. What would eventually become a clip that was at least 2 minutes long, finished under an hour.

"Thank you for your work, and let's continue after lunch. We'll mostly be doing action scenes in the afternoon so you should eat a lot and save up some energy. Good luck everyone."

Joongjin tried to cheer everyone up. However, the students inside the classroom had barely any energy. Everyone was aware that they were being treated the same as props.

The background actors were better off. Those people did not have any duty to do acting. They weren't called here to do acting after all. Maru looked at Taehoon who was making a bitter expression as he bit his thumb. The ones that couldn't stand it were the actors. Until now, that kid wasn't able to 'do' anything. On the surface, he did acting, but it couldn't be considered his own. An actor was told not to help other people improve their acting, but to imitate precise movements. It was an embarrassing thing.

Taehoon and Gwangsoo stared at director Joongjin as he left and immediately followed afterwards. Were they going to say something to him? Maru shook his head. This wasn't the time to be worried about others.

"Let's get some food for now."

Maru tapped on Bangjoo's shoulders since he was lying flat on the desk. He now knew his enemy. Know thy enemy and know thyself - now he had to realize what he had to do.

## **Chapter 419**

"It is definitely easy, but..." Joon-gi spoke as he ate a spoonful of rice.

"It leaves a bad aftertaste, right?" Sooyoung added.

They ate an early lunch in front of a rusty bronze statue of King Sejong. They were given some cookies, some fruit salad, and a sandwich packaged nicely with stickers on top of it. Blue-Blue. From what Bangjoo said, it was supposedly the name of Blue's fan café.

"You find it strange too, don't you? Is movie acting supposed to be like this?"

Bangjoo spoke with a bored face. His fantasies towards shoots seemed to have been broken as his excitement and cheerful smile were all but gone.

"I wouldn't know. This is my first time shooting a movie too."

"Same here."

Joon-gi and Sooyoung replied respectively.

Maru, who was just eating a cherry tomato, turned his head around when he felt the hot gaze. The three others were staring holes in him. He munched on the cherry tomato. The tomato, which was practically roasted under the heat, squeezed out some sticky juice.

“Director Park Joongjin’s method couldn’t be considered ordinary. But it’s definitely easy on your mind, so there are no problems, are there?”

The shoot was easy. There was no pressure. They were briefed on everything down to their breathing, so why would they worry about anything? The cramming method of teaching was happening here in a shoot as well. There was no ‘understanding’ or ‘application’ and they just had to interpret the director’s words with their bodies. It was quite an easy shoot.

“Seonbae-nim. Do you really think that?”

Hearing Bangjoo’s question, Maru pointed at the lunchbox.

“Let’s talk after we eat, please? These are practically getting roasted under this weather.”

It was possible to see haze rising from the asphalt on the road. Unless someone liked their fruits roasted, it wasn’t wise to let the lunchboxes be in this weather.

They all ate busily and emptied the lunch boxes. The drinks that were given to them were still cool, so they were quite relaxing to drink.

“For now, follow the director’s words.”

“Keep doing what he says? Like a doll?”

Bangjoo looked at the classroom where the other actors were with eyes filled with complaints.

“We need to match the director’s wishes. After all, he’s the one in charge here.”

“I know that, but it’s too boring. In fact, acting in the acting club seems like it would be more fun. At least we get to exchange opinions and change our acts.”

“Bangjoo.”

“Yes.”

“How would you feel if you cleaned your house and your sister suddenly came in and switched the placement of various things?”

“My sister doesn’t really clean. Also, she’s quite meticulous in nature, so she puts things back where she got them from.”

“I’m just using an example.”

“Well, the first thing I’ll do is sigh. After all, I’ll have to clean up again.”

“Right now, the director probably has a well-organized movie in his head. It’s probably something that’s so incredibly refined and elaborate that we can’t even imagine it. That’s why, if someone comes in and wants to change it, the first thing he’ll feel is a sense of rejection. Right now, the only thing he wants from us is to follow the order of things that he said to us. Just that.”

Joon-gi, who was listening this whole time, spoke.

“Then we have to just obediently follow the director’s words in the future too?”

“For now, yes.”

“I don’t really mind since there’s a lot of action scenes, but it’s still such a pity. It’s my first movie shoot, but the only thing I can do is sing nursery rhymes like a preschooler.”

Sooyoung, who was listening, also spoke as he opened the can.

“At least it doesn’t hurt our pride. The problem is them.”

Sooyoung narrowed his eyes and looked at the west entrance of the school. Maru looked there as well. They saw Gwangsoo and Taehoon who walked out as they held a conversation.

“For us, we have action scenes we practiced for, so the director’s method isn’t that bad, but they should have prepared their own acts as well, no? They can’t display any of that and have to listen to the director’s words alone, so how annoyed would they be?”

“Exactly. If it was me, I would’ve jumped in frustration.”

Bangjoo agreed.

“Would he do the same thing to Lee Hyuk as well?”

“No way. Lee Hyuk isn’t like a pebble on the roadside. He’s known as an actor that’s quite skillful in the drama industry, so that can’t be, right?”

“You can’t be sure. Didn’t you see the director’s eyes? He was smiling, but his eyes were hella scary. He really looked like he’d exile someone from the shoot if that person didn’t follow his instructions. If what Maru says is true, he’ll probably tell literally everyone what to do. Don’t you think so?”

“But it’s Lee Hyuk, though. That can’t be right. If it’s like that, why would he need such an expensive actor?”

“I’m probably right, you know? You see how he cast Yoo Joongang and Kwon Dayoon, right? Lee Hyuk may have proved his acting skills through dramas, but what about the other two? From what I know, Yoo Joongang used to be a model, and Kwon Dayoon is an idol. Also, don’t you know that Kwon Dayoon left a drama for her horrible acting skills around a year ago?”

“Ah, I remember that as well. But I heard that it wasn’t because of her acting skills, but because of her busy schedule. Also, she did quite decently back then.”

When Bangjoo stood up for Dayoon, Sooyoung snorted.

“Hey, Bangjoo. Put your hand on your heart and say that again. You might have seen her in a good way since you’re her fan. I saw that drama several times, and I always switched the channel whenever Kwon Dayoon appeared. Kwon Dayoon, she’s pretty alright. But acting? I don’t think so. I felt embarrassed just looking at her.”

Bangjoo opened his mouth as though to say something to retort, but he couldn't say anything. In the end, he sighed and admitted that her acting was not good.

"Here, listen," Sooyoung said as he raised his nose a little.

"You remember how the director picked us based on body figure alone and didn't see things like acting skills?"

"I do. That was a weird audition after all."

"I remember that as well."

Maru just nodded.

"Then are we the only ones picked that way?"

Hearing those words filled with suspicion, Joon-gi waved his hand.

"Hey! He might have done that with us, but do you think he did that with the main actors as well? Do you think he wants to ruin the entire movie? Be sensible."

"You can't be sure."

Just then, director Joongjin walked out of the school building. Sooyoung pointed at the director with his fingers.

"That director, I looked him up on the internet, and do you guys know what his nickname is?"

"Genius," Maru said in a small voice.

Sooyoung said 'right' before snapping his fingers.

"A genius director, they said. If he's really a genius, if he really does know everything about acting from A to Z and can teach them everything, don't you think it's plausible that he can pick people based on looks alone? After all, he'll be able to cover everything else with his own skills."

"Does that even work?"

Bangjoo spoke with suspicion.

"I wouldn't know. But from what we saw, it was like that."

"But if I was Lee Hyuk, I don't think I would accept such a condition. An actor has their pride too, don't they? Would they want to shoot a movie where they can't show off their own acting at all?"

"And I know something about that as well. This is also from the internet."

Maru rested his chin on his palms and looked at Sooyoung. The self-proclaimed internet detective was speaking.

"Do you know that Lee Hyuk switched agencies?"

"How would I know that?"

"I'm not interested in men."

While Bangjoo and Joon-gi shook their heads, Maru said 'Soul' in a small voice. He found out about this while watching the news about the unfair contract terms with 'The Five'.

"Maru, you're quite knowledgeable. Yes. Lee Hyuk's new agency is Soul. Apparently, he approached JA Production first, but he was rejected and Soul became his next choice."

Maru did see him back then. Maru thought about Lee Hyuk who he saw in the lobby of the JA Building when he first went there.

"There's a portion of the idol group named 'The Five' in Soul as well, right? The other celebrities that belong to them are mostly people that were involved with not-so-good incidents. That's why we call Soul a charity among ourselves and...."

"Wait, who's we?" Bangjoo asked.

"Nothing important. It's just a calligraphy café where we talk about various things."

"Why do you talk about celebrities when it's about calligraphy?"

"Is studying all you do in school? You play ball sports there too, don't you? Anyway, there's someone in our ranks that possesses some very credible information sources, and apparently, Lee Hyuk has a lot of debt."

"What? Isn't he a popular actor?"

"Who here has seen him on a TV commercial?"

Sooyoung spoke as though to do some fact-checking. Maru shook his head. He didn't watch TV that much, so he didn't know.

"Huh? Now that you mention it, I don't remember one."

"Who here has seen him in a drama or a movie?"

"I don't think I saw any since three years ago. Wait, now that you say it, he's had quite a long rest period."

"Precisely. Also, he apparently screwed up while trying to open a restaurant, so his bank account is currently negative."

"Why would he do that instead of doing activities?" Joon-gi asked while crossing his arms.

"This is not verified info, but apparently, his personality is shit so the directors and fellow actors don't really like him. If he's godly at acting then there might be directors who might be willing to take the risk, but Lee Hyuk isn't on that level, right?"

"Rather than his acting, he's more well-known for his looks."

"I do remember that he placed first in the 'men who women want to date the most' ranking."

Hearing the two people's words, Sooyoung clapped his hands.

"There you have it."

“So he’s shooting whatever comes his way because of his debt?”

“Correct.”

“That does sound plausible.”

It wasn’t entirely believable since it was a combination of rumors gathered on the internet, but there were no contradictions in his words. At that moment, they saw Lee Hyuk walk out the west entrance and kick a trash bucket. When people looked there after hearing the sound of the plastic bucket falling, Lee Hyuk’s manager quickly ran over and started cleaning up. Meanwhile, Lee Hyuk just left.

“See? I told you his personality wasn’t good.”

Sooyoung clicked his tongue.

“If what you’re saying is true, then this is huge news. It means that the director will do everything by himself, right?”

“Right.”

“That’s crazy. Wouldn’t his head explode? I mean, if it was me, my head would have exploded already.”

Joon-gi shook his head in resignation.

“Geniuses aren’t called geniuses for nothing.”

Sooyoung ended the conversation while putting the empty lunchbox in a trash bag. Bangjoo stared at Joongjin, who stood afar before sighing.

“Looks like I have no choice but to be obedient for this movie.”

Maru took out his phone after finishing his drink. Then, he sent a text.

“What are you doing?”

Bangjoo poked his head in and asked.

“Sending a text to your sister.”

“Eh? To my sister?”

A moment later, he got a call. He texted her if it was okay to call her right now, and from how she called back immediately, it seemed that she wasn’t busy.

-This is weird. You sending me a text.

“Is it okay for you to be on the phone right now?”

-Yeah. I’m resting right now.

Joohyun urged him to speak while yawning. Maru looked at Joongjin, who was talking to the actors and spoke.

“Senior, you became famous through Spring Calendar, right?”



-Right. Ah, that's ten years ago, huh.

"I want to ask you just one thing. How was the atmosphere during the shoot back then?"

Joohyun had experience shooting with Joongjin ten years ago. Was there an actor that knew Joongjin better than her? When he first met director Park Joongjin, he called Geunsoo and Geunsoo replied thus: Joohyun-noona became a star through that work. As a minor actor that gobbled up a lead actor.

If Joongjin's style was to put everything under his control, then it meant that Joongjin intended for Joohyun, a new actress, to overtake a lead actor from back then.

After he waited for a little, Joohyun laughed in a small voice as she spoke.

-I get it. It's about director Joongjin, isn't it?

"Yes. I didn't know he would direct our every action."

-That's how he works after all. At first, I was very confused as well. I was told not to act. The only person that did not hear that must be that unni. Anyway, since the director told us to do it, we had to do it.

"Then did you follow the director's word as well?"

-At first, yes.

"At first?"

-For now, listen to the director's words. It might make you feel angry. Why? Because doing things the way he tells you does make a good picture. It also makes you feel frustrated since you don't think you'll get a better picture than that no matter what you do.

"What about after that?"

-Naturally, you need to find a better picture than what the director has in mind and offer it to him. If you do that, the director will fall for you.

"How do I do that?"

-How? Well, you'll have to see for yourself.

"What?"

-I'm hanging up now, okay? I'm still tired since I just woke up.

Joohyun hung up without giving Maru any time to talk back. Maru stared at his phone. He was suddenly reminded of this woman's career. She debuted in a one-act play, and immediately joined the ranks of stars through Spring Calendar. She spent many years shooting commercials due to an unfortunate event, but she returned and continued participating in works with over 30% viewing rates.

"So she's the genius type as well...?"

He had no intentions of looking down on her efforts, but he could understand the situation. A good player doesn't necessarily have to be a good coach.

"We're moving now."

The staff shouted from afar. Maru put his phone back in his pocket.

“What did she say?”

“She told me to make the director fall for you.”

“How?”

“That’s up to us.”

“Eh?”

Maru grinned as he stood up.

### **Chapter 420**

He had to put a dot on what was already a complete picture. Where did he have to put the dot? In a corner where there was blank space? Or on top of another colored spot?

The bus stopped at an opening in front of a mountain. When Maru got off the bus, he could see the sea. This place was near Gunsan port.

“I wonder if we’ll shoot near the port as well.”

“Since we’re here, I wish we could go in the sea as well. Summer equals sea and sea equals summer, no?”

“But this is supposed to be a port. Doesn’t that mean we can’t go into the sea?”

The kids that got off the bus all sighed as they spoke.

Maru saw the staff, who were holding shovels, gathered in front of the car holding the props. Joongjin and director Choi were explaining things to them. Seeing how the background was the mountains, the fight scene was probably going to occur here. It was a fist fight between some cocky kids, and one of the students would die here.

“Die realistically okay? Realistically.”

“If it’s too hard for you, I’ll help you.”

Joon-gi and Sooyoung spoke while giggling. Maru pictured how his death scene would look in his head and contemplated what he had to do from here on. His part for the movie would be done if he shot today and tomorrow. The three others were the same. Two fight scenes and a funeral scene. The remainder of the shoot would probably occur under Joongjin’s immaculate instructions.

“What are you thinking about?”

“I’m thinking about whether I should stand out or just blend in with the rest.”

Hearing his words, Joon-gi and Sooyoung, not to mention Bangjoo, all closed in on him.

“Hey, it’s hot.”

“Is being hot the problem here? You’re talking about the shoot, aren’t you?”

Hearing Sooyoung's question, Maru nodded his head.

"Do you have a way? Didn't the director say that he'll chase us out if we don't do as he instructed?"

Joon-gi turned his head around to look at director Joongjin who was walking towards the mountain. The staff members that followed him held a shovel in their hands.

"That's why I'm thinking about it. Today's our last shoot."

"It is also our first," Sooyoung interrupted.

"There won't be any problems even if we just do what we did in the morning and follow his instructions to the tee. The other actors are doing the same after all. However, it would be such a pity if we wasted this opportunity like that."

How many movies would a nameless minor actor participate in over the span of one year? Moreover, this movie was making the news amongst movie critics as the 'return of the genius director'. If what they said floated around the internet, the public's interest would rise accordingly.

Since Joongjin was given acknowledgment for commercial movies after Spring Calendar, he should probably be able to achieve decent results with this one as well. Perhaps it might become a movie that millions of people would end up watching. Of course, there was also the possibility that Spring Calendar was just a one-hit wonder, but from looking at Joongjin, Maru didn't feel like this movie would have bad results.

The fact that he cast Lee Hyuk, who hadn't appeared on the screen for quite a while, shouldn't entirely be because of his looks. As Sooyoung said, he might also have been in need of an obedient actor, but he might have needed the title of the 'comeback work' of a 'pretty decent male actor'. From the beginning of the shoot to now, Joongjin proceeded as though he had already broken down a complete puzzle and was just reconstructing it from scratch. Perhaps his ears might be numb already due to the applause of the audience.

"So, what are you going to do?" Bangjoo asked.

What, huh. If he was asked about the method, then he had no answer for that. If he knew such a thing, he wouldn't be thinking about it in the first place.

"It's not like I'm completely out of cards, but before that, there's something I want to ask you guys."

"What is it?"

Maru looked at Sooyoung who asked back.

"The four of us are a set, right?"

"I don't really like that word, but for now, yes, we're a set. You and I, Bangjoo and Joon-gi are the main character's 'friends' after all."

Maru raised his hand and put Sooyoung's hand, which was covering his nose, down.

"I'm asking just in case since the four of us will have to be together for today's shoot, but are you going to follow the director? Or are you going to try various things?"

Friends A through D. They had practiced a lot for today's fight scene. If any one of them was missing from the picture, the whole thing would look awkward. The reason Maru asked this question before talking about how to act against the director's methods was because of that. This movie was entirely teamwork-based. If any of the three told him that they should just do as the director says, then there was no need to worry about any of this at all.

"I'm going to go with what you're going to do, seonbae-nim," Bangjoo replied without hesitation.

Maru shook his head at him.

"Think about it before answering me. You saw the director for yourselves. He's the type of guy who would ask a person to leave the moment they do something that he didn't ask for."

"I'm fine with that. I'm here to do action acting, not move as I was instructed to. Also, you made a confident expression after calling my sister a while ago. I got the feeling that I can expect good things from you."

He looked as though there was no need for second thoughts. Maru looked at Joon-gi and Sooyoung.

"We're just minor actors, so we should try regardless. Also, would he really throw us out? He would have to throw out the entire action scene if he does that. Well, if he does tell us to leave, I guess we can only beg him to let us stay," Sooyoung spoke with a laugh.

"I'm fine with all that, but what is this about Bangjoo's sister?"

Joon-gi narrowed his eyes. Maru looked at Bangjoo and quietly asked if it was okay to tell them who his sister was.

"I don't mind."

Since he got permission, there was no need to hide it anymore. Maru told the others the conversation he had with Joohyun just now.

"Wait, this guy's sister is Ahn Joohyun?"

"You mean that Ahn Joohyun?"

The two of them grabbed Bangjoo by the collars asking why they weren't aware of this until now but soon treated him in a nice way while calling him 'brother-in-law'.

"I did find it strange that Joohyun-noonim was walking right behind you when she came to the action school last time, but I never realized that you were her brother."

"To think that you kept such an important thing a secret until now. What a disappointment."

The two people kept poking Bangjoo by the waist.

"There's nothing good if it gets known. Both for me and for my sister. Also, my sister said she has no intentions of getting married."

"What? Really?"

"Yes."

“Why? She’s so pretty. There must be a truckload of men wanting to marry her.”

Hearing that question, Bangjoo’s expression darkened. Maru slapped Joon-gi and Sooyoung’s mouths with the back of his hand. When the two people glared back at him, Maru told them to stop here.

“Are you here to do an interrogation? Stop falling into your delusions and finish what we started.”

“Alright, alright. Damn, kid. Your hand is spicy.”

Sooyoung wiped his mouth with his palm as he continued speaking,

“Anyway, you’re saying that the director isn’t 100% stubborn in his ways?”

According to director Joongjin’s style, there was no way a minor actor could shine more than a lead actor. After all, in the world inside his mind, everyone should have their respective roles.

However, Joohyun achieved that. She made the director fall for her and managed to do her own act instead of the one suggested by the director. As a result of that, she became a star.

“If you get acknowledged, who knows? He might give you his full support.”

“We’re just minor actors, would he really do that?”

“It would probably be impossible to rise to the ranks of main characters since the story is already set, but it should be possible for him to allocate more screen time for us during the beginning parts.”

“It would be great if that happened. I would die satisfied if my face appeared on screen for just 30 seconds.”

“1 minute for me.”

“15 seconds for me!”

The three of them grinned in satisfaction.

“So all three of you agree?”

The three of them slowly nodded.

“But we can’t just outright go against his words, can we? I think it’ll be reckless to just tell him that we are going to do our own acts.”

“Of course, we’ll have to plan things out.”

“Plan things out?”

Maru crossed his arms. Joongjin didn’t look like someone who would talk nonsense. If they told him that they wanted him to look at their acts without any preparation, they might actually be thrown out of the set. However, was that the only way?

“For now, we’ll follow the director’s words. Honestly speaking, I couldn’t think of a better picture than what the director suggested during that classroom scene. What about you guys? Do you think you can direct people better or make it look better than that?”

The three of them thought about it for a while before shaking their heads. Joongjin's skills were definitely exceptional. The owner of those exceptional skills was putting his heart and mind into creating a movie. If they were to have Joongjin paint a completely different color on top of what is a 'completed movie' in his mind, no small feat was going to do it.

"Since we're here in the mountains, I'm probably going to die here. This is the scene where we have the most lines."

"That's true. Once we go to the port, the only thing we can do is to jump around cheerfully."

"For now, do as the director says once the shoot begins. Once you think of a better act than the one that the director is telling you to do, you can bring it up then. Of course, only after discussing it between ourselves."

"But what if he says no? The guy that tried to change the direction of turning got rejected on the spot. Wouldn't he tell us to fuck off if we tell him that we want to change the acting when we're just minor actors?"

"Once we four judge that it's better than what the director is telling us to do, I'm going to push on with it."

"Push on with it?"

"Yeah."

"Isn't it too dangerous? I don't want to be thrown out of the movie altogether while trying to do something different," Joon-gi spoke in a careful manner.

"That probably won't happen."

"How do you know that? It seems too much like a gamble to me."

"I don't like gambling. Challenging something is too dangerous after all."

"I think what we're trying to do is plenty dangerous though."

"No. If the director is someone that can take responsibility for his words, then it's not that much of a gamble."

He didn't say words like 'he had a good feeling about this'. Maru talked to the others about this because he saw definite potential in this.

- Just following what other people have already done is, yes, it is very easy. There's no risk in that. That is because numerous pioneers have experienced all the existing dangers and told their followers. Look, this is no longer dangerous - one would have said.

Joongjin said those words himself. He also said this - the ones that have faith in conventions start condemning people that try to escape such conventions.

Joongjin was a meticulous perfectionist. Precisely because of that, he wouldn't want to contradict himself. He talked as though he was bored when they talked in the restaurant. He always looked for new, exciting, and fun things.

His declaration when he said that he would throw people out if they went against his frame, was perhaps, not such a strict declaration.