

Once Again 451

Chapter 451

"Now, the crudeness is what makes it look good."

Hanna cut the A4 paper with scissors. Little pieces of paper with the line that Daemyung texted as well as the location and starting time of the performance started piling up.

"I brought back the canned coffee. They're quite hot."

Sooil came back from the convenience store.

The first thing they did after eating lunch was to go to a nearby convenience store and buy the coffee in the drink warmers. They stored sixty cans of coffee for later across a total of four convenience stores, each with 15.

"Bring them here. We have to stick these on."

Sooil took out the cans of coffee from the plastic basket.

Maru covered the pieces of paper that Hanna had cut with tape and plastered them on the cans. He firmly pressed the cans with both of his hands so that the tape didn't look out of place. He stuck them well enough that it wouldn't come off in the rain.

"Sixty is quite a lot," Sooil said from the side.

Since this was a trial run, they originally thought about doing twenty, but Ganghwan said that they should do a hundred since they were doing it anyway. However, Hanna said that that was absolutely nonsensical and said that they should go with fifty, but in the end, it became sixty. Right now, Ganghwan had left to get a heater after negotiating for ten more cans.

"Once you're done, you just need to lock the door and leave. I'll appreciate it if you do some cleaning as well," a rather elderly man opened the door and spoke.

That man had lent them this practice space. Hanna told him not to worry and the man nodded before closing the door.

"It looks like there are a lot of practice sessions going on in *Daehak-ro*, huh?" Sooil asked.

"There are places run by companies, and there are places like this which are lent to small-scale teams and theater troupes," Hanna replied.

After they stuck the small pieces of promotion paper on the sixty cans, they started preparing the gifts for the members of the audience that participated in the play. They put some discount tickets for plays in envelopes.

"Now that I look at it, senior Ganghwan must have used quite a lot of money for all this."

Blankets, coffee, discount tickets, and even food expenses. Everything was paid by Ganghwan. At the restaurant counter, he said that it was fine since it was on company expenses, but there was no way that was true.

"It's your company's money though."

"Eh?"

"He said company expenses, didn't he?"

"He meant that company?"

"That oppa uses that card literally everywhere. While the acting association doesn't give us a lot of expenses, the money given to him by your president should be quite a lot, you know? Though, he'll have to pay for them through work later. I heard that president Lee Junmin is a scary man, isn't he?"

"Yes, he is scary. He's not someone who would make losses on anything he does, so he might be writing down what senior Ganghwan spent the money on even now."

"Well, that's up to him to deal with. Maru, do you have good handwriting? I want to write a word of appreciation on the envelopes."

"I have horrible handwriting," Maru said.

He then looked at Sooil but Sooil also shook his head.

"Senior Ganghwan has neat handwriting from what I saw at the restaurant. We should let him do it."

"Alright then. Blankets, check; coffee, check; gifts, check. I guess we're done for now."

"We just need the heater."

Just then, Hanna's phone started ringing. Hanna, who received the call, gestured at the other two to stand up. When they left the practice room, they saw Ganghwan in a truck parked by the roadside, waving his hand. Apparently, he managed to get a truck from god knows where.

"That should suffice, right?"

On the truck were eight oil heaters and a large barrel.

"Let's hand out the coffee for now. The play begins at 8 anyway."

Maru looked at his watch as he spoke. It was just past six. After returning to the practice room, the four of them split up jobs between them. Hanna and Sooil were going to be handing out the cans of coffee, while Ganghwan and Maru were going to carry the heaters.

"Hyung-nim, we have to do this first."

Maru handed Ganghwan the envelopes. Ganghwan started writing 'thank you' on the envelopes on the spot.

"Done?"

"Yeah."

"Anything else?"

"Nothing. We just need to carry the heaters and then the blankets."

Maru returned to the truck with Ganghwan. Ganghwan passed down the heaters from the truck while Maru received them from the bottom. He carried the rather heavy heaters and went to the public performing grounds. Due to the cold weather though, there were significantly fewer people in the park.

“There aren’t any people since it’s Sunday night,” Ganghwan put down the heater as he spoke.

The photo exhibit had been put away as well. Maru turned around while looking at the rather empty pathways. There were still six heaters to move.

After putting down the last heater, Maru rotated his wrists round and round. His fingers were aching quite considerably. He definitely had to have some work gloves.

“What time is it?”

“Almost seven.”

Sooil and Hanna returned. They had finished handing out the cans of coffee.

“Looks like our advertisement was quite effective.”

Maru saw a couple holding cans of coffee looking their way.

“Let’s get prepared as well. Hanna put this on, and you two put this around your neck.”

Maru put the name tag that Ganghwan gave him around his neck. On it was written ‘Serious Sighing Patient’. For reference, the one around Sooil’s neck said ‘Terminal Stage Narcissism’.

When Ganghwan and Hanna put their doctor gowns on, people started gathering. Some of them had cans of coffee in their hands.

“It’s cold, isn’t it, everyone?” Hanna spoke to everyone here.

The audience replied ‘yes’. As they were here to enjoy the play, their reactions were quite good.

“Please wait a moment. You see these heaters right? We’ll turn them on at full power so that you won’t feel cold while watching. Also, tell us if any one of you feels cold. We have some blankets.”

As soon as she said those words, some women wearing skirts raised their hands and asked for blankets. The people that received blankets found some seats nearby to sit and waited for the play to start.

“Looking at the number of people here, I think we should prepare at least two of those twenty-liter hot water dispensers. I don’t think we’ll have enough tea to go around with just one.”

“You’re right.”

The reaction was much better than they expected. There weren’t any empty seats around, and the number of standing people quickly started increasing. It was definitely different from how they started off with just five people during the day.

Maybe it was because of all the advertising they did, but the heaters definitely had some effect. Many people came to get some warmth and ended up staying.

“I think we should start now.”

It was 7:52. Ganghwan nodded once before walking in front of the audience.

“Hello everyone.”

“Hello.”

The audience reacted to his greeting. Ganghwan shortly explained what the play they were going to do now was about. Unlike usual, where the audience came to the play while knowing what it was about, street performances like this required some explanation as the audience didn't have any prior information. Moreover, since this play required participation from the audience, they had to be briefed on how the play was going to unfold.

“Yes.”

Ganghwan induced the audience to reply using some humor. Meanwhile, Maru went around carrying blankets and handing them out to people who came with children.

“Well, then. Since I explained to you that your participation is very important, I think I should start the play now. Those of you that participate will be given a small gift as well, so if you have anything to talk about, you should come up and speak your heart out. We are just here to play along with you.”

After seeing Hanna's gesture, Maru patted the head of the child that thanked him for the blanket before walking to the stage. The audience members, who were either sitting or standing in a semicircle, seemed to number around 90 people. Since the passersby were also giving them a glance because of all the people that were watching, they should probably reach 100 quite soon.

He heard a guitar sound from afar. The street of youth, the land of artists. The night that descended upon such a place contained a mood that couldn't be found anywhere else.

Maru took a deep breath in before breathing out slowly. This was a very liberal stage. There was no distinction of acts nor lines that he had to say. What was important was to listen to the member of the audience that came up and to react.

“Next.”

Ganghwan started acting and sat down on the chair as he spoke. Maru sighed in front of the little child in the front row and sighed once again as he walked in front of the lady that sat next to the child before sitting in front of Ganghwan.

“I wonder what worries our patient has this time to be sighing again.”

“The thing is, doctor. I'm so lonely that I keep sighing.”

“Lonely?”

“Yes. I feel like I'm all alone in this world. *sighs*.”

“Mr. Patient. It's not like that at all. There are so many of us here in front of you.”

Ganghwan stood up and opened his arms wide in glee. In that state, he spun around elegantly like he was doing ballet as he walked amidst the audience.

“Doctor.”

“Yes?”

“Are you crazy?” Maru said with a sour expression.

The people in the audience giggled. Ganghwan confusedly walked back to the stage.

“Don’t you see all these people in front of you?”

Maru stood up and walked to a man in the front row. He stopped around 30cm away and spoke.

“Is anyone here?”

“Yes. There’s a person right in front of you.”

“It’s a wall though.”

Maru reached out and felt around the man’s shoulders. The man moved around to dodge his hand.

“Why is the wall moving?”

Maru moved a little sideways this time and slowly touched the cheek of a girl that seemed to be around his age. The girl screeched in a small voice before pulling back.

“Tsk! Walls aren’t supposed to move,” Maru said to the girl.

“Mr. Patient. I thought you didn’t see any people?”

“Ah, right. It was like that, wasn’t it?”

“Then what was that just now?”

“What do you mean?”

“I think you reached out to the lady in front of you with indecent eyes.”

“Me? I don’t see anyone here though.”

Maru feigned ignorance.

“Over there, lady. Did you hear what this guy just said?”

Ganghwan approached the girl and asked. The girl replied ‘yes’ with a smile. She seemed to be here with some of her friends as three girls around her started laughing at the same time.

“Who are you calling a pervert!”

Maru snapped and grabbed the hand of a man he had seen beforehand. Then, he saw the man’s face before screaming out and letting go. The man, who gave him a good impression, smiled deeply at him and winked instead.

Ganghwan didn’t miss that moment.

“This fella looks rather dangerous. Why don’t you come up for a moment?”

Ganghwan quickly called that man up to the stage. The man waved his hand saying that he was okay, but when his girlfriend, who sat next to him, pushed him slightly, he made an awkward smile and walked out.

While Ganghwan had a talk with that man, Maru approached the girl he was talking to just now and asked if she didn't feel displeased or anything.

"It was fun. I think you can be a little bolder."

"Is that so? Thank you for your opinion."

He bowed in appreciation before walking towards Sooil. Meanwhile, Ganghwan had that man spit out his romantic history.

"The reactions are quite good," Sooil said.

People kept gathering around. Ganghwan's glib tongue shone more and more as the audience increased in number.

"I think we should do it like this for the official performance too."

"You're right."

The results were pretty good considering that this was just a trial run.

As they started off with comedy, it was hard to get anyone to talk about something serious, but today's performance could be considered a success just by finding out how much participation they could get from the audience.

"It's your turn now."

Maru tapped Sooil's back. When Sooil walked out with a refreshing smile on his face, people in the audience who recognized who he was cheered out loud. Maru watched the stage for a moment before walking around the audience, checking the heaters. Since they wouldn't be able to perform anymore if an accident occurred, safety was of utmost concern.

Maru walked amidst the audience while listening to the laughs that came from the stage.

Chapter 452

"Then I'll sing a song. I wrote this myself, and the title is Salary Day."

The audience smiled after hearing the title. Maru also became a part of the audience for this moment instead of being an actor on stage and watched the man playing the guitar. The reason the man started playing guitar was simple. Ganghwan had found him playing the guitar on the staircase opposite to their performance and brought him to the stage. The man was confused at first, but when the audience started applauding, he started playing the guitar, and when the audience asked for more after his first piece, he got into position again.

Salary day. The way the music started off with a cheerful rhythm but became stiff and slow in the later parts was probably meant to represent people's hearts when looking at the drying out account balance.

The lyrics of the song mostly talked about ordinary desires to buy what the character wanted. It was a good song that people could listen to with ease and sigh about.

“I’ve never heard a better song than this during my 30 years as a doctor. Just why did you come to this hospital?”

After the song ended, Ganghwan naturally had the musician participate in the play. The man, who hugged his guitar like he would a child, blinked his eyes several times before carefully speaking.

“I lack confidence.”

The man who was filled with vitality as he sang in front of the audience turned into a man full of embarrassments the moment the song ended. He couldn’t turn his head towards the audience and kept looking at Ganghwan.

“Confidence, you say? Wait a minute. This is not something I can diagnose by myself, so I’ll ask for some help. Hello, what do the other doctors think? Mister Street Poet here lacks confidence.”

“I don’t think that’s true at all.”

A woman who had a blanket over her legs spoke in a big voice. People in the audience exclaimed.

“Well, well. If it isn’t Doctor Lee, the emotional therapist?”

“My surname is Kim though.”

“Ah, yes, doctor Kim. I have a bad memory. Since you’re here, why don’t you diagnose our Mr. I-don’t-have-any-confidence-poet here?”

“Confidence? It’s nothing much. Just do what you did just now. You looked like you were full of confidence when you were playing the guitar just now,” the woman said in a firm tone.

“There you have it. How was it? Did that help you?” Ganghwan asked the man.

“Ah, yeah, well...,” the man smiled as he replied.

“You can’t do that.”

The woman put away the blanket as though she was frustrated with this man and stood up before walking to the stage. Ganghwan didn’t stop her and instead induced everyone to applaud. The audience started applauding.

“I really don’t have any confidence either. It’s to the point that I wonder if people are badmouthing me behind my back as soon as I leave a conversation. No matter what I did, I never became proactive. Actually, ‘showing off’ is such a popular term in our country, right? Even if you try to do something, you have no choice but to shut up if the people around you tell you ‘why are you showing off so much?’, right?”

“Oh, my. Doctor Kim. There are other doctors around so please watch your words. Consider the young doctor sitting over there.”

Ganghwan pointed at a child who came with their parents. The woman sighed.

“Anyway. It’s because you care about things like that, that you start losing confidence in yourself. I thought that I couldn’t help it. I mean, you don’t live in this world by yourself. You need to think about the people next to you and act in a way that doesn’t make them uncomfortable. But when I thought about it, I became really angry. I mean, it’s not like I’m committing a crime or anything, so why do I need anyone to tell me what I need to do?”

The woman became emotional and stomped on the ground. The people that seemed to be her colleagues shouted ‘that’s right’ from the audience.

“From that moment, I decided to be bold. But you know how things are - just making up your mind doesn’t change anything. That’s why I started taking action. If I didn’t like something, I voiced it out, and if I thought that someone was badmouthing me, I would go up and ask. I would raise my voice louder than usual and reject it if someone asks me to do something I didn’t like. At first, I felt really sorry. I felt like a lot of people were giving me weird gazes. But once you continuing that for a while, you feel your environment change. That woman isn’t a showoff, but someone who has confidence in herself. That’s when I realized that repetition was what was important. Also that taking action is the most important thing. Shouting at people to have more confidence in themselves is really not helpful at all.”

The woman calmed down her breathing after her speech. She looked like a sprinter who had finished a short sprint. Maru clicked his tongue. She managed to speak clearly in front of nearly 130 people without shaking at all. Her fights, whether they be big or small, with her environment should have made her who she is.

However, not everyone agreed with her.

“What’s up with her? Why does she sound like she’s above everyone else?”

“Right? She’s such a showoff.”

There were some people that didn’t look at her in a good way. Of course, the sarcastic remarks were so quiet that only Maru, who sat right next to them, could hear them. Their voice would not reach the woman speaking her heart out on the stage.

Amidst the audience, Maru looked around and groaned slightly. He could tell that people were visibly decreasing. Whether they didn’t like the woman’s strong speech, or they lost interest, or they were going home due to the late hours, he didn’t know, but it was true that more people were walking away than when they were still doing a comedic skit.

Even Ganghwan, who at first welcomed the woman’s participation, became visibly awkward when she talked for too long. The man with the guitar looked tired. What was fortunate was that the woman seemed to have noticed the atmosphere as well as she started wrapping things up.

It was good that she participated, but it would be bad if this turned into a speech of sorts when it was supposed to be a play. They had to keep this in mind during the official runs. The objective of this play was to break the barrier between the stage and the audience and talk about various things with various people. It was ultimately designed to be a refuge for people who couldn’t get consolation from anywhere. This was what Ganghwan said during lunch.

Ganghwan asked the audience to applaud the musician and the woman. Maru also clapped amidst the audience.

“Shall we get going?”

“Yeah, it’s getting cold.”

Maru looked at the time as he watched some of the audience leave. It was 8 past 10. It had been more than two hours since they started the play and listened to people’s stories. As this was a trial run, there was the case with that woman just now who broke the flow, but the overall mood seemed pretty decent. Though, they didn’t manage to get people to share their sadness since the comedic theme played a large role.

They also confirmed that the people didn’t have any rejection towards the doctor-patient theme, so all that was left now was to decide on what they would do during unexpected situations.

“Doctor! You’re ditching work again!”

Hanna’s voice could be heard. It seemed that she was wrapping things up. They had also shown most of what they had, so it would be fine to finish off things here.

Maru walked around and asked the members of the audience what they thought of the play today, and if there was anything they could improve on. Sooil was probably doing the same thing on the other side of the stage.

“It’s good that we got to talk together, but it was a little boring when there was nothing going on.”

“You mean when no one volunteered to come up to the stage, right?”

“Yeah.”

Maru nodded his head. The man also said that the blankets and the heaters were well prepared. He also added that he wouldn’t be here in this weather if it weren’t for those two items.

“We’re also planning to prepare tea next time, so please come around. Also, you should share your worries with us. Thank you for your opinion.”

He asked for the consideration of the people leaving and kept gathering opinions. Although the majority of people had positive comments, some said that it was too all over the place. Since this was a play with audience participation, the progression wasn’t that smooth, and it seemed like that was what annoyed them.

“But it was really great that we got to talk to the actors. No matter how many disadvantages there are, I think that alone is enough to cover up the rest. Of course, it would have to be interesting just like today.”

“Would you be willing to participate if we talked about more honest stories here?”

“Honest stories?”

“Yes, think of it as a consultation.”

“If it’s like that, I would have to reconsider. It’s difficult to talk about myself in front of all these people after all.”

“Ah, alright. Thank you for your opinion.”

Most people seemed to find that difficult.

This was a problem. At this rate, it was likely that Ganghwan’s wishes wouldn't come true. If it was just for advertising purposes, this was fine, but it was far from what Ganghwan wanted.

They had to find a way to get it started. Maru wondered if they should plant a spy like Ganghwan first talked about.

Just then, he saw a man in his late 30s or perhaps early 40s standing with a can of coffee in his hands. The man who had a wide forehead was wearing a worn-out vest, and some old-looking jeans. That man was staring at the stage in a daze, and for some reason, he looked desolate.

Maru carefully approached that person.

“Uhm, excuse me. May I have a word with you?”

“Hm? Ah, sure.”

“Did you watch the play?”

“Yes, I did. You were good. It was a lot of fun.”

“Thank you. Was there perhaps anything you liked or were disappointed about?”

“Hm, I’m not sure. I didn’t have any time to think about things like that. It’s such a good stage, and the actors look like they’re enjoying themselves as well.”

The man awkwardly smiled and scratched his forehead.

“You know, I’m also an actor.”

“Oh, you were an actor. Then I guess that makes me your junior.”

“Oh, no, it’s not like that. I’m not an amazing actor that you would have to treat me as a senior. I’m just....”

Just then, an applause could be heard. Ganghwan and Hanna, who walked amidst the people, clapped each other’s hands and laughed. The audience around them started clapping, and the man with the guitar started playing. The stage for a play instantly became a stage for a ball. More and more people gathered when they looked at the group. The watchers became participants and started dancing lightly.

Seeing that, the man Maru was talking to, looked at the group of people with a face that looked like a smile, no a face that looked like he was crying.

Maru was unable to say anything when he saw that.

“An actor that is loved is really good.”

The man lowered his head and turned around. Maru watched the man's back as he left before walking towards him.

"If it's okay, would you like to share your story?"

"Story? What story?"

"Your story. Anything is fine. I just, want to listen to you."

"I don't have any stories to tell in a fun situation like this."

"It doesn't matter. No, I'm not telling you that you have to tell me your story. You're an actor, aren't you? There's a stage right there. It might be small, but it's pretty decent."

The stage was filled with lights from mobile phones and the sound of music guitar, while the audience seats had no lights due to the broken street lamps and very faint music sound at best. Maru spoke to the man who stood on the border.

This man seemed to have a lot of stories with him. Maru didn't grab the man just because he simply wanted to listen to his stories. Honestly speaking, he wanted to use this man's stories to his advantage. He felt like this man had touching stories that would work on the people. He felt like someone was calling him a cruel mastermind, but what could he do about it? People didn't care about others that didn't say anything, they only cared about people that screeched for attention.

Since they were doing this play, he wanted it to be a big issue. Although this was a trial run, if the people gathered here talked about this play to other people, the official run would become even bigger.

"Don't you need a stage?" He reached out to the man as he asked.

Chapter 453

There's something called premonition. It is possible to predict the outcome of a business contract by looking at the face of the president of the business partner. Putting aside whether the business looked good or not, it was possible to see the success or failure of the contract purely based on intuition.

And right now, Maru saw the signs of success from the man in front of him. If he was working on some risky business, he would have to reconsider saying what was on his mind several times, but there weren't any risks at all right now. What was needed here was the man's courage and time. No one lost in this trade, and if things went well, it was likely to end on a good note.

The man faintly smiled and looked at the people dancing.

"I don't think that place needs me right now."

"You don't know for sure. Don't you have something you want to say?"

"Something I want to say?"

"Anything is fine. Every story is welcome here. This is not a stage that only welcomes funny and good stories. You saw what was written on the coffee cans, right?"

The man looked at the coffee can he was holding before nodding his head slowly.

“If it’s about things to say, I have a lot.”

“Then do it.”

“But it looks like it’s about to end.”

“There is no start or finish to a street performance. Is there?”

Maru pointed at where Ganghwan, Hanna, and the audience were. The man fidgeted with the can in his hands for a while before starting to walk. The direction? The stage.

Maru put the name tag that he put in his pocket around his neck again. Then he stood in front of the man. A rather old pop song was being brought to life by the strings of the guitar, while people were singing along and enjoying themselves. Maru pushed through that crowd like a servant serving his master. The man followed him at first but soon stopped in front of the wall of people.

He tapped on Ganghwan’s shoulders as he was letting his body go along with the music and pointed at the man. As Ganghwan was quick-witted, he seemed to have realized that Maru meant that it was the appearance of a new actor, and put his doctor’s gown on again.

Maru quickly unfolded the chair that was pushed to the side. At that moment, the audience seemed to have realized the change as they watched the stage with curiosity.

“Doctor! Doctor!”

Maru called out to the doctor with the loudest voice he could muster. As Ganghwan was prepared, he naturally returned the act.

“My, this fella. You haven’t gone home yet?”

“Doctor, doctor.”

“I’m not going anywhere so calm down.”

Maru panted heavily as though he was out of breath. He managed to attract everyone’s attention with his exaggerated breathing. When he breathed heavily a few times, the stage became quiet. The musician at the center of the stage made way after a guitar stroke.

“Doctor. I was going home right after the medical exam, right?”

“And?”

“I saw someone walking back and forth in front of the hospital.”

“Oh, really?”

“But that person’s expression looked really heavy. That’s when I felt that he’s the person who needs your help the most.”

He snapped his fingers and waved his hand exaggeratedly. From the moment he went on stage, he had switched his internal variables to fit the play.

“And?” Ganghwan also exaggerated his actions.

He looked around with eyes full of curiosity. He looked like a child looking for a four-leaf clover.

“And who am I? Am I not the person that sighs all the time because of my worries? When I looked at that man, I was so worried that I couldn’t go home. I stopped on the spot and wondered what I should do for ten minutes, and then I decided.”

“Decided on what?”

“To bring him here.”

Maru turned around and walked up to the man who was in the crowd. The man, who was still holding the canned coffee in his hands, had none of his resolute expression anymore and looked like he was hesitating. He was also taking steps back, as though to run away.

At that moment, what was reflected in Maru's eyes was not a bearded man in his 40s, but a little child. Not any little child, but one that was struck with fear. The man who introduced himself as an actor seemed as though he was a child who was afraid due to doing a presentation for the first time in front of his class. There was no excitement. There was only the feeling of wanting to run away from this situation. Maru could vaguely understand why he said that the stage wasn’t for him and why he stopped several times while walking forward.

“I don’t think I can do it,” said the man in a small voice.

The can of coffee in his hands crumpled pitifully. Maru looked at the man, who looked like he was ready to run away, for a while before grabbing his hand tightly.

“Just one step. One step is all it takes. Once you’re on stage, leave everything up to luck. Who knows? You might end up telling a cool story. I’m not telling you to do well. I just... want to listen to your story.”

Despite that, the man hesitated. Just like an old tree with deep roots, he looked like he was not going to budge. There was no meaning in dragging such a person to the stage. There was no use in pushing someone unwilling to talk in a space where vivid emotions were required.

The gazes of the people looking their way became fainter and fainter. Interest dwindled. Maru could feel the concentration they built up until now being reduced. Ganghwan in his doctor’s gown was doing his best to preserve the atmosphere by telling some of his episodes, but that could only last a few minutes at best. The audience would start going home after thinking that the performance was over.

“But you have a lot to talk about, don’t you?”

“Still, it’s a little...”

“You don’t want to because the stage is too crude?”

“It’s not like that.”

“Then is it because the level of the people here is too low?”

“That’s nonsense.”

“Then because you’re scared of the stage?”

“...”

“Sir, where can you find an actor who’s not scared of the stage? Everyone is scared. If you’re scared, you just go up to the stage while scared. This is a stage where it’s fine for you to make mistakes. Above all, these people didn’t pay money to watch us.”

“I don’t think an actor should go up to the stage with that kind of mindset.”

“How can you call someone an actor when that person doesn’t go up on stage? You must go up first to be called an actor, whether you’re evaluated well or not. We don’t call a person in the audience who’s good at acting, an actor, do we? Even if they’re just like a tree, that’s standing still, we call someone who’s up on the stage an actor. You called yourself an actor, didn’t you? Then you must come up to the stage at least. You must come up first and then see whether you’re a good one or not.”

Maru uttered his words to the man amidst the crowd that was laughing at Ganghwan’s play. Even he couldn’t understand why his emotions were stirred while he was speaking. At first, he was planning to use this man to his advantage to make the play successful, but now he was focused on putting this man on stage regardless of the success or failure.

He breathed out a heavy breath. The man was looking at Maru in a daze.

“Phew, I talked too much, didn’t I?”

“N-no.”

“If you really don’t want to, then you can leave now. It’s your decision, so I guess I can’t force you to do something. Next time, if you have the opportunity, please come up. Sorry for taking up so much of your time,” Maru apologized.

It was really strange. This wasn’t something he should be emotional about. He should have chosen to persuade him with words or to provoke him and have this man stand on the stage one way or the other. But instead, he ended up being swayed by his own emotions and said neither of the two.

Why was that?

No matter how hard he thought about it, he couldn’t determine the reason. Maru turned around to look at Ganghwan. He was going to shake his head to indicate that the plan was a no-go.

“Phew, alright. Whatever I make out of it, I should start at least. Even a young fellow like you knows it, geez. But don’t expect too much from me. While I did introduce myself as an actor, I’m actually nothing much,” said the man as he walked towards the stage.

When he stood in front of the audience, he breathed out every now and then and spent the first ten-plus seconds just standing still without being able to say anything.

No one seemed to mind him. Ganghwan also just watched without any signs of urging him to talk. Maru felt himself becoming more and more hurried as time went by. This was the first time he put so much emotion into someone else - Go on, talk!

He looked at the man desperately. The man made his presence known with a nervous breath before speaking out,

“U-u-uhm, can I have a w-word with you?”

He wasn't 'acting' like he was shaking. He was truly shaking. If that was acting, then he would be god-level. The nervous voice was soon drowned out by the noise in the surroundings, but Ganghwan seemed to have caught his words.

“Looks like our final patient for the day is finally here. Well then, make yourself at home and come here. This place is a quiet one with just you and me.”

Hearing Ganghwan's words, the murmurs in the audience died down magically. The man was incredibly flustered due to the sudden arrival of silence, but he did not run away. He slowly walked and sat down on the chair that Ganghwan provided.

“What was that about?”

Hearing a voice behind him, Maru turned around. Sooil was looking at the man on the stage.

“You looked like you were angry when you talked to him.”

“What, me?”

“Who else? What happened between you and that man? I was nervous because I thought you got into a fight.”

“Was that what it looked like to you?”

“Was it not? I thought you were shouting because you were angry.”

Sooil shrugged before leaving at Hanna's call. Maru looked at the man on the stage chair in a daze. Why did he act like that? He still couldn't make anything out of that question.

The man coughed a few times before carefully speaking.

“Uhm, I hope you can understand even if I s-stutter a bit. I tried to fix it many times but I couldn't.”

The man started telling his story by starting off with his immaturity. Maru crossed his arms and decided to watch for now. He would probably find out what made him so emotional if he watched on.

Chapter 454

The man tightened and loosened his fists several times to show that he was nervous. The audience stopped chatting after seeing a new actor on stage.

“It might be a bit old-fashioned to say this, but our night is very long. Take your time.”

When Ganghwan's calm voice reverberated outwards, the people who were gathered around the stage took a step back. A strange sense of tension spread around, making the audience breathe out carefully as they watched the man.

Maru crouched in a spot where he could see the man's face from upfront. Some of the people next to him crouched down as well. Whether it was thanks to the heaters doing their job, or because people were flocking together, they weren't shivering in the cold even though the night wind was pretty chilly.

“I...”

After saying his first word with much difficulty, the man breathed out in nervousness before raising his head.

“I am a person who once wanted to become an actor.”

How much hesitation and worry he had leading up to the point when he said those words could be felt from his low voice and his twitching eyelids.

“When you say that, it sounds like you aren’t an actor now,” Ganghwan said in a calm voice.

The man looked at Ganghwan’s face once, then at the sky above the crowd before speaking.

“I’d call myself a half-actor. No, at this point I’m confused whether there was a time I was even an actor at all. Oh, before I tell you this, it’s an honor to meet you. I enjoyed your plays.”

After seeing the man’s extended hand, Ganghwan shook his head before replying.

“I am a doctor. I might be a quack doctor, but I’m a doctor that can listen to other people, and can only listen to other people.”

“Ah, right. I see. Sorry about that.”

A faint smile appeared on the man’s face. He tried to relax his expression and look at the audience directly, but it didn’t seem to be that easy for him as his gaze was directed at the ground. The shoes of the audience. It seemed that that was the limit of how much he could look at the audience without becoming nervous.

“How old do I look?”

The man slowly raised his hand as he asked.

“There’s only a wall in front of us, but peculiarly, the wall is speaking.”

Hearing Ganghwan’s words, the people smiled and voiced their opinions.

“Thirty-seven?”

“Forty-two?”

“Maybe unexpectedly thirty-three?”

The man quietly answered that he was forty-one after listening to a few replies. Ganghwan clapped after pointing towards the member of the audience who got it right.

“I was really nervous when I just came up on stage, but I feel okay now. Maybe it’s because there aren’t any cameras here,” said the man as though he was talking to himself.

“In your eyes, what does forty-one years old mean to you?”

After a moment of silence, a member of the audience spoke. He looked to be of similar age as the man on the stage.

“I think that it’s the age where you must look after your family,” that member of the audience spoke while looking at a small child in his arms.

There was a girl in his arms, dozing off.

“An age where you must act like you look!” Said a youth who seemed to be a college student.

“An age where you must see results from your work, whether it’s big or small,” said a middle-aged woman wearing a tiger-striped scarf.

The watch on her wrist seemed to be of considerable value.

The majority of the audience seemed to agree with that as they nodded. Maru thought similarly. Forty - it had a different feeling to thirty.

The man sitting in front of the audience nodded a couple of times.

“Yes, you’re all right. It’s an age where you must act like you look, look after your family, and be responsible for your work. Forty - I’ll call this age the age of responsibilities. Responsibility, it’s a very difficult, unfamiliar, and perhaps scary, word to me.”

The man locked his hands and put them on his knees. He gulped before continuing to speak with difficulty.

“I don’t have a family that I must protect. Ah, both of my parents are alive. The family I’m talking about here is a family headed by me. I got married when I was 27. Back then, I was doing all sorts of work: the petrol station, restaurants, and construction sites on the weekends if conditions allowed it. I paid my semi-basement apartment rent and my living expenses with that money and spent the rest to apply to an acting school. My wife really went through a lot back then. I mean, obviously. A young man who was supposed to be looking for a stable source of income was going around learning acting, of all things.”

The man stroked down his face before saying that he was rather embarrassed. His beet-red face, as well as his pale lips, indicated his current mindset.

“My wife was a wise woman. I was so pathetic and greedy that I ended up telling her that I wanted a child, but my smart wife told me that it wasn’t the right time yet. Now that I think back, perhaps my wife saw through my true nature after marrying me.”

Even the slightest murmurs died down.

It was 10:32 in the night. Despite the late hours, people did not leave. In fact, more and more people were gathering. A silent crowd of people was a really effective way of advertising.

“My wife worked for a pretty decent company. Now that I think about it, I wonder why someone like her married someone like me. Perhaps because we were both young, she might have found my challenging mindset attractive. A year passed after our marriage. I still had no job, and gathered money through part time jobs, and lived the same life while going to acting school. When I came home, I ate the food that my wife made me, and we would talk about insignificant things and watch dramas together before going to sleep. Then, another year passed. My wife quietly brought up the topic of divorce.”

The man scratched his head before making a twisted expression and clenching his fists. A scream that did not escape his throat was banging on his vocal cords right now.

“At that time, I took out my stamp from my pocket. That’s right, from my pocket. I didn’t put it anywhere else. I always carried it with me. I stamped the divorce papers without any difficulty, and we spent the divorce mediation period without any trouble. Then, we became strangers. There was no sadness, and there was no pity. I wasn’t even qualified to feel something like that. When I looked at my empty home, I finally realized why I always carried my stamp with me at all times. I always had myself ready to run away - from my wife, who always consoled me with warm words and food; from my wife who always told me that it’s okay and cheered for me. My guilty conscience, my apologetic feelings towards her made me stifled.”

The man breathed out nervously.

Maru frowned as he heard his story. It wasn’t because that man was someone bad, or he pitied him.

It was a sense of *déjà vu*. He felt as though he had seen this scene somewhere before. If he was remembering a scene from his previous life, he wouldn’t have minded at all. The problem was that this tenacious *déjà vu*, or rather, *déjà vus*, were overlapping with each other.

The figure of the man talking while wearing a red jumper, the figure of the man wearing a suit happily talking about his life, as well as the figure of the man grabbing the hand of a gentle-looking woman.

Maru clenched his teeth and pressed down on the side of his head. He felt dizzy as though he was experiencing vertigo. He pushed himself up against the ground with his hand and lowered his head. The man in various expressions, clothes, and even situations had formed an angry wave and assaulted the ship that was his memory relentlessly.

Maru subconsciously scratched the asphalt to the point that his nails were breaking. When he groaned in pain, someone sitting next to him asked if he was okay.

“Ah, yes I’m okay.”

After barely uttering those words while suppressing his pain, he stood up and staggered out of the crowd. He left the crowd of people and took a deep breath. When the cold air filled his lungs, the pain disappeared like it never happened.

The trace of the intense memories still remained in him, confusing Maru immensely over this situation. He tried putting his hand under his clothes and reached towards his back. In that short while, his t-shirt had been soaked with cold sweat.

‘Is this a type of memory confusion? A side effect of coming back to life, huh? I can’t even talk to someone else about this.’

The *déjà vu* that stirred his mind seemed to be a mistake caused by his memories. But just in case, Maru decided to go to the hospital attached to Seoul National University next week. After all, perhaps there really was a problem with his head and not just a weird side effect of supernatural powers. He might have injured his head unknowing.

He tried running on the spot. It seemed that there were no problems with his sense of balance. Maru chuckled before returning to the crowd.

The man was holding a handkerchief. It was a pretty one that looked like it didn't belong to him. He wiped his eyes with the handkerchief and apologized to the lady in front. The handkerchief seemed to belong to her.

"Even after I separated from my wife, my life never changed. I still wanted to become an actor. After some time passed, I actually felt a load off my shoulders. I escaped that responsibility I talked about at the beginning after all. Then I became thirty. I appeared in numerous works as extras and I even had some lines in a few dramas. I was happy. The dream of becoming an actor that I had since I was twenty, seemed to be coming true, and the ten years of nameless acting was over. But, that was as how far as I got. Minor role, minor role, and then a minor role. There were numerous actors who were at my level, and there were even more who had a character."

He laughed in self-loathing.

Maru felt a stinging sense of déjà vu again when he heard that laugh. If he had seen this scene somewhere before, he wouldn't even mind it, but the image popping up in his head was very detailed and was telling a different story about the man in front of him.

Was this how déjà vu worked? Maru closed his eyes before opening them again. On top of the man, who was wearing worn-out clothes, was the same man, wearing a suit, faintly overlapped. It was a scene straight out of a movie or something. He closed his eyes once again. When he opened them again, he could, fortunately, see the man living in reality this time.

At the same time, the sense of thick déjà vu disappeared. Only one, true reality was in front of his eyes, being accepted by his eyes and brain.

'Geez, this is just...'

Maru wanted to explain this situation to that woman and get some answers.

The woman that seemed to possess a beauty that seemed to be out of this world.

The woman that introduced herself as an angel, or perhaps the grim reaper, no, the one that didn't care what Maru called her.

Chapter 455

"I spent a long time as a minor actor. But since it wasn't like the work was continuous, I ended up needing money for everyday expenses. However, since I was over thirty, it wasn't like I could reach out to my parents for help, so I went back to the construction site again. After thirty, I couldn't work part time jobs anymore. When I say that I'm here for a part time job interview, people would scan me from top to bottom and say that they can't hire me because I'm too old."

The man's emotions calmed down as the story progressed. He was telling his story calmly as though he was telling someone else's story. However, the audience watching him felt the opposite - they expressed pity for the man, became angry at him for living his life like that, and sometimes would feel sad as though it was about themselves.

The more relaxed the man became, the more vigorous the emotions on the audience's face became. Maru captured that change with his eyes as he listened to the man's story.

"Since young, adults around me told me that I should have a dream. Everyone here must have heard that at some point."

The audience nodded at once.

"That's why I had a dream. It was to become an actor, and I never doubted myself living as an actor. Although it's hard right now, I will definitely become successful. Light will shine upon those that put in the effort. Eventually but definitely...."

The man raised his gripped fist up in the air before letting it fall down again with a loathing laugh.

"I turned thirty-five, and I still lived in the semi-basement apartment. The frequent offers for background acting were reduced considerably once the leader I was working with decided to quit. Then, the opportunities to be a minor actor in a drama disappeared entirely. Back then, I was acting in a theater troupe near this place. I had my own popularity as well. I got to know some good and reliable friends. I was far from appearing on TV, and I was poor, but back then, I thought like this: are there any superstar actors on TV right now who didn't spend a long time being a nameless actor? I mean, you know that famous saying don't you? 'This too shall pass'. I believed in those words and put my all into acting. However, I knew in my heart. That line was my last line of refuge."

After saying those words, the man took out his phone before speaking in a careful voice.

"It's gotten very late. As you can probably tell from how I look, there won't be any good stories after this. I feel sorry for taking your precious time, so I think I'll wrap things up here."

The man then stood up from his seat.

"It's been a long time since I last talked in front of so many people. I feel a little lightened, and I also feel like nothing happened at all. Yet, I felt so nervous at first. So weird, isn't it?"

He then went on to say his goodbyes when,

"I want to hear more from you."

The man holding his daughter spoke. The girl in his arms was also looking at him with wide eyes. She wasn't even grumbling.

Maru, who was absorbed in the man's words, stood up slightly and looked around. There were numerous people around. The people that originally sat in a semi-circle around the man had now circled the man altogether. What was surprising was that despite the increase in the number of people, it was still completely silent.

Now that the man stopped speaking, people started breathing again and began cheering for the man.

"We can't leave at this point after having heard all that."

"It'd be somewhat strange to call it fun, but your story's really good. I want to keep listening to it."

"These people didn't stay here and listen to your words just because they had time left over."

Many people wanted to hear more from him.

“There, there. Please calm down. You must give the patient time to think. How about it? I think we still want to listen to your story.”

“...Would that really be fine with you? It’s not a story that will make you feel pleased or anything.”

“A hospital is not for the intact. This place is the same. All of the people here have one area where they are in pain. It’s because they have pain that they can sympathize with you. I also want to listen to your story, Mr. Pati- no, Mr. Actor.”

Hearing Ganghwan’s words, the man stood up from his seat and looked at the people in the audience. He sat back down after a laugh.

“The world sure is strange. What I couldn’t gain at all when I most desperately wanted it was people’s attention, and yet I get to receive it here. Uhm, sorry, but can I get some water? I have a sore throat after blabbing on for so long in front of so many people.”

“We have plenty of water.”

Hanna gave him a bottle of warm water as though she was prepared beforehand. The man took a sip before breathing out, creating a white breath.

“That happened all of a sudden. A senior actor of mine that I stayed close with put me in a drama minor role. It was a morning drama for a public TV channel. I would play the role of a secretary for a company president and I had quite a few appearances so I wouldn’t have to work part time jobs for a while if I worked on that for a while. I was running out of money too so I gladly accepted that job. You wouldn’t know how many times I resolved myself as I walked towards the shooting set. I have to greet people, I have to catch their eyes, I will appeal with my acting. I will become successful. But then...”

The man shut his eyes before gulping down a lot of the water.

“I became afraid of the camera. No, back then, I didn’t know why I was like that. It was just a simple line: President, let me guide you. - How easy is that? Even someone completely clueless about acting should be able to say that line after practicing a couple of times. But I was unable to say that line until the end. President, le... sorry. P-president. President. President....”

After coughing once, the man faintly smiled.

“I, who never had a proper job even once, called all the presidents I would probably call in my lifetime on that spot. Thirty minutes. That’s the time I’d been shouting president for on the shooting set, and it was also the time that signalled the end of my career as an actor. The senior that introduced me to the job didn’t say anything as he looked at me. He probably couldn’t. He would only be able to say something if he understood what happened, right? I couldn’t even say that I was in a bad condition. After all, the problem wasn’t something on that level.”

Maru looked at the man who was unable to speak anymore, before looking up at the sky. For some reason, he thought that his story wasn’t just his. Everyone has their dreams and may strive towards their dreams. Does the life of everyone that strived towards their dreams have a happy ending?

The answer was right in front of him.

For one happy ending, an endless amount of bad endings were kicked around.

For some, it gave them a sense of warning, for some, interest, and for others, perhaps joy. Maru looked at the expressions of the audience. A sad story didn't always invoke sympathy within others. Opposite to that man, the woman who was sighing in relief was perhaps looking down on that man, saying that it was fortunate that she didn't live a foolish life like he did.

Ganghwan dreamed of a place to share sadness, but it turned out to be a space to heal oneself using twisted consolations. Almost invisible loathing laughter was directed at the man. Was this a zoo? Or was this some public execution ground? Why was it that the chair the man was sitting on looked like a guillotine instead?

Perhaps he shouldn't have done what he did?

Maru vaguely, no, clearly realized that things would turn out like this. That was why he originally thought of 'using' that man to his advantage.

After talking with him, he had the guy go up on stage with a mind that cheered for him, but perhaps he should have stopped when he said he didn't want to do it.

He never saw anyone lasting long while doing business with other people's pains. Maru sighed. Why couldn't he be more rational that time? Why did he not tell the man that things would turn out like this? What did all of this have with the déjà vu he kept having?

'I don't get it. I don't get anything.'

The only feeling he had right now was the sense of apology towards that man. He didn't put the guy up on that stage to have him become a target of mockery.

"It's fine."

At that time, he heard a voice behind him. Someone had said a word of encouragement for that man. Maru turned around. A man in his thirties, who looked like he was about to cry at any moment, had spoken out after putting his glasses back on.

Maru closed his eyes shut and opened them again before looking around. Only then did he see the people that seemed to have a pain similar to the man on the stage entered his eyes. That number was overwhelmingly more than the people that disdained him. Maru thought that the emotions they didn't express until now because they were looking at the man, had erupted a beat later.

The encouragement was for the man, but Maru felt like he was healed as well.

At that moment - it was quite absurd, but - he had a thought like this: Did he have the man go up on stage because he wanted to have him listen to those warm words of encouragement?

It felt rather strange since that kind of thought process was neither logical nor his style, but a corner of his brain was shouting that that was the right answer.

The man continued speaking. He kept mentioning a series of events that seemed to be nightmares without any hope in sight at all.

From some moment onwards, Maru could feel some water droplets falling onto his hands. Was it raining? When he looked up, the skies looked dark, but not cloudy. The droplets had come from his eyes.

Why? - Before he even had that question, Maru bit his lips because of the aching sensation in his chest. Whose sadness was this?

At that moment, Maru saw someone else standing next to that man in his eyes.

The man who had a warm smile on his face. - Maru knew that it was an illusion. It was an image that his brain was showing him and only him. The man who appeared along with a strong headache was patting the shoulders of the man on the stage as he talked about his dark and depressing life.

His vision shook again before the figure of the illusory man put his arms over the shoulders of the man on the stage. Maru put his hands on his head and narrowed his eyes. The face of the illusory man, which looked like it had been blurred out, became clearer and clearer.

The illusory man was smiling while putting his arms over the man on the stage, who wasn't wearing worn-out clothes anymore, but a stylish suit. The moment Maru saw that man's face, Maru made a twisted groan.

The illusory man smiling next to the man on the stage... was none other than himself.

Chapter 456

"I thought I was going to die at that rate and ended up writing something called a resume. It was for a small factory, and in the 'experiences' slot, I could only write the word 'actor' and nothing else. You wouldn't know how long I stared at that piece of paper while holding my pen. I went to a factory with my resume, and even now I am working at that factory, from morning till night, and at times, from night till dawn. When I'm working, I don't know who I am nor how much time has passed. It's just like the military. Around five to six people would sleep side by side and someone would come in once morning came, and then a phone alarm would start ringing. People start going in and out, and I would wake up once again when I hear someone cooking something. When my phone rings, I would wake up in a daze. The scene I see then is - well, how should I say it - very hard to describe. Maybe this is why I never became a good actor."

The man was speaking with ease.

As Maru heard the story reaching its end, Maru thought back to the illusion that he saw ten minutes ago. Could that even be called *déjà vu*? Maru himself was standing alongside the man wearing a luxury suit. His ever-so-smiling face indicated that he was in a close relationship with this man.

If there was only one case of *déjà vu*, it would be understandable for him, but the number of illusions wasn't one. There were cases where Maru himself was next to the man, and there were cases where he wasn't. He saw the man standing with someone that looked like his wife, and sometimes, there were scenes where he was holding the hands of what seemed to be his children. There were cases where he looked worn out like he was now, and there were cases where he wore a fully-tailored suit.

Maru felt as though numerous photos were flashing past his eyes. The completely different states of the man, as well as the figure of himself, every now and then confused him greatly. *Déjà vu* was supposed to

be the brain making a mistake, but could the brain make so many distinct mistakes continuously in such a short period of time?

If this phenomenon was a result of the friction between the memories of his current life and the memories of his previous life, there should be just one illusory man. If this wasn't a case of déjà vu, nor the memories of his previous life, then where did all those memories come from?

'No, in the first place, are those my memories at all?'

If he knew this man in his previous life, he would have some point of contact with him, but from the story he told on the stage until now, there weren't any places that sounded like Maru could have come into contact with him. Above all, what point of contact would a high school student have with a man in his forties?

Maru gulped before concentrating. Although the memories of his previous life had become faint, he could still remember the general traces of the life he lived. He graduated high school then went to university. After his military service, he worked as a road manager before entering a small company. He seemed to be progressing without any hitches but was then stopped by someone who came to the company on the company president's personal connections. During that process, he discovered that that employee had messed with the company expenses while doing business with some other company. After he revealed that fact to the public, he left the company to become a bus driver.

'Life can become different, so I might have met that man in my previous life due to a coincidence, but even after considering that, were there any opportunities that led me to hang out with that man while hanging my arms over his shoulders and walking the streets of Daehak-ro?'

Maru shook his head. Although his memories weren't perfect, he knew the general outline. There weren't any opportunities at all in his previous life that would lead him to become close to a man who was more than 20 years older than him.

Even if his memories had errors, that didn't explain everything.

'Regardless, how would I know so many different versions of that man?'

He knew that in this world, there were things that couldn't be explained with logic.

He was living proof of that after all.

However, the order of progression had to be consistent at least, right? There was no way the images that popped up in his head just appeared out of nowhere. He should have seen them somewhere or heard about them at least. There couldn't be an output without an input. Well, was this him being too complacent as well?

Maru looked at the man who had stopped talking to take a deep breath. The figure of the man wearing a suit was overlapped over him, and then by the same man wearing a thick, padded jacket. One, two, three, four... when he gave up counting, someone tightly grabbed his shoulders.

He breathed out nervously and turned around.

"Are you okay?"

Hanna was looking at him worriedly. Maru slowly nodded.

"I'm okay."

"I don't think you are though. Why are you sweating so much?"

"It's a bit hot."

"This weather, hot? I think you must be sick right now."

"Don't worry about me. I'm really fine."

"Alright, then... did you think I'd say that? Hey, come with me. You're sweating a lot so there's no way you're okay."

Hanna grabbed him by the neck before pulling him. Maru started walking along after seeing the numerous overlapping figures of the man melt into his current state.

"When did this start?"

"I'm really not sick at all. It's just because I was thinking about something else for a moment."

"So kids these days sweat profusely when they think about something else? Man, they must be full of yang energy. How much porn do you have to watch to be like that?"

Hanna put her hand on Maru's forehead before clicking her tongue.

"Look at all this cold sweat. This won't do. We'll take care of the cleanup so go back home."

"I'm really okay."

"Go home while I'm telling you nicely, or otherwise, I'll strip you down and chase you out. Go home, wash your feet, eat some antipyretics and get some sleep. No, if you're dizzy, should I tell Ganghwan-oppa to drive you home?"

"He should wrap the play up here. And like I said, I'm really...."

Maru shut up after seeing Hanna glare at him. She didn't look like she'd listen no matter what he said. Well, it wasn't surprising since a completely normal boy was sweating profusely with his eyes half-loose.

"Then I'll go home for now. Tell Sooil and Ganghwan hyung-nim that I said sorry."

"You shouldn't be. Everyone knows that you worked hard. Don't worry about it and go home. Also, take this."

Hanna took out five ten thousand-won bills from her wallet.

"Take the taxi home. Wait, is this not enough?"

He stopped Hanna from going to the nearby ATM before walking towards the train station.

"Hey! I told you to take a taxi!"

"It's fine since I'm not going to collapse on the spot. I'm really fine. Also, noona, you should go back. From all the clapping sounds, I think they're about to wrap things up."

Hanna turned around and looked at where the play was happening.

“I’ll get going, noona. See you next week.”

“Alright, be careful on your way home, and call me if something happens, okay? You should call me.”

After patting Maru’s back, Hanna waved her hand before leaving.

Phew - Maru sighed subconsciously.

“I should visit the hospital, and if they tell me I’m really okay....”

It would be problematic if he was diagnosed as normal, but it would also be problematic if he was told that there was a problem with his brain. He could neither talk to anyone about this nor find a solution.

He was born through a superpower that transcended the laws of physics, so no one in this world should be able to give him an answer to this phenomenon.

At that moment, he saw a street stall on the way to the station. It was a tent that did not allow people to see inside, and he saw a man and a woman walk out of it.

Fortune telling. That was what was written on the tent.

“Han Maru, Han Maru. Just because it’s supernatural doesn’t mean you should do that.”

Fortune telling, rituals, exorcisms. If this was his previous life, he would have snorted. Ghosts? It wasn’t even funny. He would confidently say that his head manager was the ghost that haunted him for work, and that president Park would be the celestial emperor. However, right now, he had experienced death and even came back to life.

The realm of the unknown could only be countered with the powers of the unknown.

Even though he was doubtful, he went inside the tent just in case. A woman who seemed to be in her early thirties was sitting there next to an electric heater. He thought that an old man reading some weird fortune telling books would be here instead, so it was rather unexpected.

“Uhm....”

“Tarot?”

“Ah, tarot, huh.”

It did look a little non-eastern, too. The glass orb on one side had some lights sparkling inside as though she bought it from an interior items store or something. This was a cozy and cute store.

“Uhm, how much does it cost?”

He didn’t want to be ripped off, so he asked the price right off the bat.

“It’s free. If you like your fortune, then you can always donate some money to the charity box for ‘food for the lone elderly’ right here. You don’t have to, though.”

“Ah, free.”

The woman smiled back at him.

“What? Is it too suspicious because I said it’s free?”

“No, I was just wondering how you got by,” he laughed and replied with a joke.

“But is this tarot thing really accurate?”

“Well, I’m not sure, since I learned it half as a joke rather than seriously. I don’t believe stuff like this either so I don’t know if it’s accurate or not.”

“Can you say something like that even though you’re a fortune teller?”

“Who cares? It’s not like I’m receiving money for it. Well then, what did you want to know about when you came here?”

“...Anything.”

“Anything? Then what about solving your worries?”

“Haha, that sounds great. Solving my worries.”

The woman started mixing the tarot cards. She looked very proficient as though she played games of go-stop quite frequently, but sometimes, the cards popped out and spilled onto the table.

“These cards are way too big.”

“Aren’t you being too sloppy?”

“I’m starting to become tired. I was going to go home after that couple, but you came in. So don’t nag me and stay still.”

She took out three cards from the mixed deck of cards and placed them on the table.

“Also, tarots don’t tell whether something’s right or wrong. It just provides a direction. So don’t act according to the tarot and you should always value your own opinion when you take action.”

“That’s some deep fortune telling.”

“Think about the worry you’re having now as you pick one of these three cards.”

Just where was this going? Maru sighed. It seemed that he was tired after all. He was thought he was possessed when he came in here.

He placed his hand on top of a card thinking that he should try it out anyway since he was here.

“Excuse me, you can’t install something like this on the side of the road.”

Just then, a man wearing an orange glow-in-the-dark vest spoke as he came into the tent. The woman apologized before putting the cards away. In that commotion, the card that Maru chose fell on the ground.

Maru picked up the card and returned it to the woman. He only saw the back of the card so all he saw was some strange pattern.

“Since you picked one, wait a minute.”

The woman took out an envelope before putting the card inside. More men wearing orange vests shouted at the tent to put things away.

“Open this when you go home.”

“I wouldn’t know even if I look at it. I don’t know stuff like tarot at all.”

“Is the internet there for show?”

The woman started dismantling the tent while apologizing to the men outside. Maru looked at her for a while before turning around.

Today was a rather tiring day.

He got on the train in a daze. The train rattled. As he sat down and stared out the window opposite to him, he soon arrived at Geumjeong station. He changed trains there. In his head, he was still thinking about the man.

“I’m home, huh.”

He was out of himself to the point that he didn’t know how he got there. Maru shook his head. His mother would be worried about him if he went home with a serious expression. He decided to stop thinking for now.

He went inside and greeted his mother before going into his room. He took off his jacket in order to change clothes when an envelope fell on the ground with a small sound. It was the envelope he received from that woman.

‘I completely forgot about this.’

His mind was preoccupied with the thoughts of that man that he had forgotten about the fact that he received a card. He thought about opening it immediately but then decided to wash first. After a shower, he came back to his room with a better mind. Then he picked up the envelope he placed on his desk.

He unfolded the folded envelope before putting the card on his palm.

The first thing he saw were the words ‘The Fool’. The clown, huh. The illustration was simple as well. A man wearing skinny pants was standing on top of what seemed like a stage made out of wood.

“I wonder what this means.”

He thought about how the woman told him to look it up online and was about to sit in front of his computer. Just then, he looked at the card again. On the hand of the clown that had a mysterious expression that looked like he was neither crying or smiling, was a mask. The mask was a mix of black and white.

Maru had seen that mask before.

Chapter 457

Mr. Kang put his hand inside the vending machine. He watched as coffee filled the cup before pulling it out of the exit. The weather was quite cold so the warmth from the 200-won coffee was very appreciated.

“We’ll be done after we clean up that side so let’s go quickly.”

“Fine fine, I’m going.”

He followed Mr. Lee, who urged him to get going. Mr. Kang’s job was quite simple. It was the so-called administrative service. His job was to warn illegal street stands. The forced takedown was for the thugs that would come afterwards. His job, along with Mr. Lee’s, was to just give them a warning.

“There is one again,” Mr. Lee said as he pointed at a tent on the street. The tent, which took a whole half of the street, had the words ‘fortune telling’ written on it.

“Looks like this is a good spot. These illegal stalls pop up every single day.”

“Yeah.”

Mr. Kang buttoned up his orange vest and went inside the tent. Inside, a boy around high school age and a rather decent-looking woman were sitting face-to-face.

“Excuse me, you can’t install something like this on the side of the road,” said Mr. Kang.

If there were some old men sitting here, he would’ve shouted right off the bat, but since it was a young woman, he just told her in a calm voice. The reaction came back quickly. The woman apologized immediately and started cleaning up. In the midst of that, the woman still managed to put a card into an envelope and hand it over to the boy.

After watching the boy leave, the woman turned around and apologized to him once again.

“No need to apologize to us.”

A pretty lady who had nice manners to boot. From how the fortune telling was free and there was even a box for charity, it seemed that she opened the stall for good purposes. There shouldn’t be a need to be picky against people like this.

“Mr. Kang. I’m going to make rounds over there, so please take care of the other side.”

“Alright, please do.”

Mr. Kang sniffed and took a sip from the coffee in his hands. Meanwhile, the woman stood in front of the tent, blankly staring at the road to the train station.

Was she not planning to take down the tent?

“Uhm, lady. If you don’t take this down, you’ll be in big trouble. Some thugs will come and make a mess of everything. Take it down before you see a horrible sight.”

“Yes, I should do that.”

She replied properly, but her gaze was still directed towards the train station.

“Looks like he managed to go. He should’ve been very dizzy.”

“You aren’t saying that to me, are you?” Mr. Kang asked.

The woman smiled and stared at him before nodding.

“Would you like to know your fortune as well?”

“My fortune?”

“I’m going to leave soon. The strict man doesn’t allow me a lot of time here after all.”

The woman hummed before mixing the palm-sized tarot cards in her hands in an awkward fashion. Mr. Kang crumpled the paper cup in his hands as he watched her. For some reason, he became energetic when he looked at her.

“Well then, try pulling out a card.”

The woman offered him three choices. Mr. Kang didn’t believe in stuff like fortune telling, but he decided to have a go for fun since it was free. He pulled out a card that had straight patterns on it before flipping it around. The card had the illustration of a lion and a woman.

“Reverse Power, huh.”

“Is it bad?”

“No, it’s not like that at all. Just that, you might run into monetary problems today, and since it’s quite trivial, I’ll tell you something for free.”

Mr. Kang perked up his ears when he heard that it was monetary problems. Although he didn’t believe it, it wouldn’t do him bad to just listening to it.

“30 thousand won in the pocket,” said the woman before starting to take down the tent.

“What do you mean by that?”

“You’ll find out soon.”

Mr. Kang looked at the woman in a sour manner. What the heck did that mean? 30 thousand won in the pocket? When he saw the woman struggling to take down the tent, a white truck appeared. The truck was extremely white for some reason, but the headlights were strangely red.

‘Looks like this person washes the truck quite often.’

Mr. Kang got going after watching the woman take down the tent for a while. This was Daehak-ro on a weekend. There were so many illegal stalls on the streets.

“Authorities are going to come around in a while, so take care of yourself. It’s late too, so it should be better for you to wrap things up and go home.”

Mr. Kang warned a lady who was selling fruits right outside the entrance to the train station before walking towards the building where he promised to meet up with Mr. Lee. Maybe because it wasn’t long until midnight, but he started shivering. So October was nearing its end as well.

“Yo, you done?”

Mr. Lee, who had arrived first, said as he flicked the cigarette he was holding. Mr. Kang nodded shortly.

“It sure is cold. Mr. Kang. Let’s eat some warm gukbap before going home. What do you think?”

“Sounds good.”

“Ah!”

Mr. Lee put his hand inside his shirt pocket before making a panicked expression.

“What do I do? It seems like I left my wallet at the office.”

Seeing Mr. Lee scratching his head, Mr. Kang sighed. Mr. Lee was a good guy. He started this job thanks to him, and he would always come to Mr. Kang’s celebratory family events. People around liked him as well. It was just that, he always acted cheap when it came to eating. How could he not have his wallet with him every single time? If he usually acted like a cheapskate, Mr. Kang would’ve gotten fed up with him already, but Mr. Lee would spend a lot when it came down to it, so he didn’t want to nitpick this time.

However, he couldn’t entirely control what his brain was doing, so Mr. Kang made a sour expression when Mr. Lee asked him to treat him this time.

At that moment, Mr. Kang remembered back to what the woman said back at the tarot tent. Thirty thousand won in the pocket. Wasn’t this the perfect situation for that?

Maybe...

“Isn’t there 30 thousand won in your pocket?”

When he said that, Mr. Lee widened his eyes before bursting out laughing.

“What? Mr. Kang, how did you know that?”

“What the, you really had money?”

“I do. I guess I do. But I’m really curious now. How did you guess the correct amount?”

Mr. Lee’s oblivious smile made Mr. Kang unable to become angry. This Mr. Lee was as nonchalant as always. He had the urge to nitpick, but Mr. Lee’s smile blew away any intentions he had.

“You’re buying the gukbap then.”

“Gosh, you really aren’t easy to deal with, Mr. Kang. Fine, I’ll treat you. But really, how did you know? Did you look inside my pocket or something?”

“Do you take me for a thief? I don’t go through other people’s pockets.”

“Then how?”

Mr. Kang smiled and explained to Mr. Lee what happened.

Mr. Lee exclaimed when he heard the story.

“So that woman told you about it? Whoa, she’s godly.”

“She must have been lucky. Thirty thousand won is just the suitable amount to be carrying with you. It must be beginner’s luck or something.”

“But she still got it right. And then there’s the thing about monetary problems. Are you sure she’s not possessed?”

“No way.”

“Looks like I should make a visit as well.”

“She’s not there anymore. She took down the tent and left.”

“Who knows? She might have pretended to leave and stuck around after you left. Moreover, from what I heard from you, she doesn’t sound ordinary. You know? I had a good piece of land I was eyeing recently. I should ask her about it. Maybe she will tell me something good.”

Mr. Lee’s words made sense. The precise amount of 30 thousand won, as well as the ‘trivial monetary problem’. It was rather accurate for a lucky guess.

“It’s right next to the gukbap restaurant, so let’s make a visit.”

“Well, alright.”

There weren’t any big problems since it was on their way.

Mr. Kang started walking towards where the tent was before. The two walked along the street lights before turning around at the end of the road.

“She isn’t here.”

Only empty space greeted them.

“What a pity. She must have been possessed by some divine spirit. Mr. Kang, you were lucky.”

“You’re right about that. Thanks to her, I get to be treated to gukbap.”

They walked by the spot where the tent was when Mr. Kang caught sight of a wall painting. The wall painting was covered by the tent before, so he couldn’t see it last time.

“What is this rabbit? It’s wearing a tuxedo and is holding a pocket watch?”

“Geez, Mr. Kang. Even a stupid country bumpkin like me knows what that is.”

“I’m not that knowledgeable when it comes to pictures.”

“That’s not any ordinary picture. It’s a children’s tale.”

“A children’s tale?”

“You don’t know? It’s Alice in Wonderland.”

Mr. Lee pointed at the wall painting. There were pictures along the wall, and after hearing that it was a children’s tale, he seemed to have found the relevance.

“Ah, I did hear about it. So this rabbit is from that story?”

“It is. When my daughter was young, she really liked that story. She would crawl into closets after reading it and look for holes in the ground.”

“That sounds cute.”

“Let’s not go there.”

“But why would a rabbit carry a pocket watch?”

“How would I know? All I remember is that that rabbit is what triggers the story. The little girl follows that rabbit into a strange fantasy land.”

Mr. Kang nodded his head. He knew that it was a famous story, but he didn’t know what it was about. It wasn’t like it would change his life even if he knew about it, so there was no need for him to find out either.

“It’s cold. Let’s get going. I want free food.”

“But it’s not free for me though?”

Mr. Kang grabbed Mr. Lee and dragged him to the gukbap restaurant.

Chapter 458

“Don’t give up on maths. You guys are going to major in engineering, aren’t you? Maths is the fundamental subject no matter which department you end up going to.”

“I’m going to go to the game development department though.”

“And? Do they not use maths over there?”

“Sure they don’t.”

“Like hell that’s true. When you game, you have your avatar, don’t you? Every single movement that character makes is done based on maths.”

The maths teacher tapped on the blackboard and told everyone to focus. It was 4th period - just before lunch. The mind of the students already belonged to the cafeteria so they didn’t bother listening to the teacher.

“What have you been looking at since morning?”

Maru looked at Dojin, who talked to him after poking his waist.

“What do you mean?”

“What do I mean? I mean the thing you put in your desk. Is it a lewd photo? If it’s something good, share it with me.”

Hearing Dojin’s words, Maru sighed and took out the card that he put inside his desk drawer.

“What’s this?”

“A tarot card.”

“What’s it about?”

“How would I know?”

While Dojin was making a sour expression, Maru saw the maths teacher raising his hand above his head. As he knew what that action meant, Maru immediately ducked down. As he ducked, he saw a flash of pink chalk making a straight line.

Along with a sharp smacking sound, the chalk hit Dojin’s forehead before splitting apart into two.

“Nice one!”

“Teach, your skills haven’t rusted.”

While Dojin scratched his forehead with a frown, the bell signifying the end of 4th period started ringing.

“Have a nice lunch. Don’t doze off during 5th period. Also, don’t run.”

As soon as his words ended, the students left in a flash.

“I’m going off first! Hey, wait for me!”

Dojin tapped on Maru’s shoulders before leaving through the back door. The only ones left in the desolate classroom were Dowook, Daemyung and Maru.

“The radio is so bothersome.”

“Even though you say that, you put a lot of effort in once you do start.”

Daemyung patted on the back of Dowook, who fell flat on the desk.

They didn’t know what kind of strings Yeondu, who was in her third year, pulled but the acting club was able to eat in the broadcasting room. It was quite exhausting to run to the cafeteria to get lunch and immediately go to the broadcasting room without rest, but thanks to this, they had a much easier time eating lunch.

“Dojin was saying something to you before. What’s that about?” Daemyung asked with a curious face.

Maru took out the tarot card he showed Dojin. It was the card with the clown holding a black and white mask.

“Tarot?”

“You know it?”

“A little. I read about it on the internet. But why do you have one?”

Daemyung received the card before looking over it. Dowook also sat up and looked at it as well.

“There’s this fortune teller tent I came across after finishing the performance in Daehak-ro, right?”

“A fortune teller tent?”

“Yeah. I went inside since I was having some trouble, but I didn't hear anything and only got that from it.”

“This is the only thing you got? That's strange.”

Dowook picked up the card before asking if it was expensive. Maru shook his head.

“There's no way she'd give it to me if it was expensive.”

“Then throw it away. You're not a girl.”

Dowook threw the card. The card made a parabola in the air before hitting Maru's chest and falling down on the desk.

“If it was just an ordinary card, I was going to throw it away as well, but something about it tugged my mind.”

“What do you mean by that?” Asked Daemyung again with curiosity.

“I went home and looked this tarot card up online, but I never found a card with a picture like this. I get that there are a lot of tarot cards out there, but I didn't find a single similar image, so I found it strange.”

Of course, that wasn't the only strange thing about it.

Maru had seen a clown wearing the mask with the black and white mix of colors.

It was in his dream. In a number of dreams he didn't know if it was a nightmare or not, Maru experienced a situation where a man wearing a mask similar to that one was talking to him from a stage. As it was a dream, Maru couldn't say for sure whether the mask worn by that man in his dream had the exact same pattern as the one in the picture, but he felt that it was considerably similar.

The place that the clown on the card was standing on was also a stage, which was the same as the man in his dreams. This strange equivalence tugged Maru's mind.

After looking at the card for a while, Daemyung spoke,

“There isn't just one set of tarot cards.”

“Yeah, I found out about it already. I did look up tarot cards on the internet yesterday, and there were a lot.”

“There are cases where the illustration differs by region. There are differences in their nature, and even in their interpretation.”

“You sound knowledgeable.”

“I just know the general outline.”

“So? Have you seen a clown card like this before?”

Maru pressed on the clown's face with his thumb as he asked.

“Well, no. It’s my first time seeing this too. Usually, the clown, that is, The Fool card, is depicted as a person standing with an animal on the top of a cliff. Though, don’t take my words for granted. I just looked into this stuff during middle school because I had interest in it.”

“That sounds plenty reliable. So you’re saying this kind of image is not that common?”

“Yeah. Also, these clothes. Don’t they look modern to you? It also looks a bit like a suit.”

“You’re right.”

The hems were just a bit tight, but the general look didn’t look that different to suits worn by salarymen these days.

“Also this. It looks like the man’s wearing a tie.”

When Maru had a closer look at where Daemyung was pointing, he saw a blue line around the neck. At first, he thought it was just a blue line, but when Daemyung mentioned that it looked like a tie, he thought that it was a tie as well.

“I don’t think this is the usual set of cards, but a custom-made one.”

“Really?”

Hearing that it was custom-made, Maru stared at the card for a while.

“Seonbaes! Food! Food! Food!”

Aram, who busted the door open as though it was her own room, came in while shouting food while dancing in an indescribable manner. Bangjoo followed suit with the same dance, while Jiyeon, who came in last, just jerked her shoulders in embarrassment. After flailing her arms up and down, Aram made a V with her arms and shouted ‘Food!’ at the end. Bangjoo imitated her well, but Jiyeon ended up looking down in embarrassment.

“Let’s get some food for now. We should get ready for the broadcast.”

Maru folded the card in half before putting it in his wallet. It wasn’t a problem that he could solve by thinking still on the spot, so it would be better to put it aside for now.

They went to the broadcasting room on the 2nd floor. When they went in, the spicy smell of kimchi-guk greeted them.

“Welcome, welcome.”

Yeondu, who started eating before them, waved her hand and greeted them. Daemyung and Aram quickly took seats and picked up their spoons and chopsticks.

“Thanks for the food.”

Maru also sat down. He scooped a portion of rice which was in a big bowl. As for the side dishes, they were piled up like a mountain on one of the food trays, so there was no need to worry about running out.

“Let’s start immediately after eating. Today, we have a story from someone, so it’ll take some time if we want to read that before the drama,” said Yeondu with food in her mouth.

“I get it, so please don’t talk while you eat. You’re spewing food everywhere,” Maru said as he looked at the grain of rice which flew all the way to in front of his food tray. Yeondu quickly picked up that grain of rice and ate it.

“Continue eating. I’m going to get things ready.”

Yeondu stood up first. It seemed that she was going to be busy preparing for the broadcast. Now that Maru thought about it, that junior of the broadcasting club couldn’t be seen anywhere.

“I got an earful from his homeroom teacher because I’m apparently taking too much of his time. I found out that he’s really good at studying.”

“Why would he be here if he’s smart?” Aram asked with a spoon in her mouth.

“He came here on the condition that he receives a full scholarship. I was ordered to not take him out so much since he’s precious to the school. Apparently, he’ll let them hang up the banner for Seoul University or something when he graduates. Aram, can you help me out if you’re done eating? Pull out that microphone cord for me.”

“Okay!”

Maru also ate his last spoonful before standing up. Only Daemyung remained at the desk now. After making an awkward smile, Daemyung stuffed his mouth with five cherry tomatoes before cleaning up.

“But who’s cleaning up all this?”

“I am,” Yeondu said as she was checking on some broadcasting equipment.

She was moving around so busily that her short hair was fluttering. She did everything from planning the radio broadcast to menial chores. She was an incredible girl.

“Oh, and today’s story is about romance.”

“Romance?”

After reading a story they got through the in-school mailbox, Maru reached out and received the script that Yeondu gave him. It seemed that this school benchmarked how drama scripts were written in the country as the scripts for the high school audio drama also came out just before the shoot. Rather than perfection, though, the objective laid in the revival of the student radio, so there was no problem with that.

“Wasn't it Jiyeon and me today?”

“Yes.”

Maru skimmed through the script. The script looked like a stereotypical youth drama, and it depicted a girl hesitating between two boys: one she liked, and one that confessed to her.

“Huh...”

Jiyeon read the script once before making a difficult expression.

“Should we do some practice?”

“Yes.”

Maru looked at Jiyeon and said the line in the script. It seemed that whoever wrote this script seemed to like romantic comedies as each one of the lines sounded like it was dripping with sweetness. No, it went beyond sweet. At this point, it was chemical additives.

“Uhm, I... pfft,” Jiyeon laughed while saying the line before making a teary expression.

“Sorry, seonbae.”

“I don’t think this will do.”

She got the same line wrong three times in a row. From how she was making mistakes despite the fact that she was reading off a script, it seemed that it was a stretch for her to do this.

“Daemyung, you try. You should be better than me at least.”

Maru thought that she would feel better talking to her real boyfriend so he let Daemyung take his place.

Seeing the two, he gestured at them to start, but neither of them said anything for a while.

“What are you doing? We’re going to start in 10 minutes.”

“U-uhm.”

Daemyung took a glance at Jiyeon. Jiyeon also looked at Daemyung.

When the two met eyes, they flinched in surprise before staring at their scripts.

Only after repeating that action two more times did the two start saying their lines while stuttering.

“So I really I-lik....”

“S-seonbae. Y-you shouldn’t stutter....”

“Sorry. I was too nervous. Sorry, but can you do it first?”

“Eh? M-me? Uh...uhm....”

It took half a minute for their beige-colored skin to turn beet red. Maru brushed down his face before closing the script. The real-life romantic comedy was right in front of him.

“What are you doing!”

Yeondu interrupted before taking their scripts.

“If you can’t do it, I’ll do it instead. Is that alright with you? You guys should look through the stories. We have to choose an interesting one,” Yeondu pushed over the mailbox as she spoke.

“You’re doing it?”

“What, you dissatisfied with that?”

“No.”

Maru shrugged. There was a limit to how good an on-demand acting would be. It would be fine as long as they could continue saying the lines without bursting out into laughter. The priority was to let the students enjoy themselves while listening to it, so it should be fine even if they screwed up some words here and there. Though, Yeondu probably wouldn't allow that since she strived for perfection.

All members of the acting club took out stories from the mailbox one by one and started reading them. The mailbox was usually empty, but for some reason, there were over eighty letters in the box today.

“I went around telling people to write if they had any stressful incidents during after-school self studies, and that's what I got in just one day. Oh, I also told them to write something that was memorable. After all, graduation isn't that far away,” Yeondu said.

Ah, stress. The stress of an examinee student was really scary after all. On top of that, there was graduation.

When they had a look at the memos, there were all sorts of stories ranging from problems with school facilities, friendships, and even domestic politics. They picked out suitable topics for the broadcast among them. A moderate amount of criticism, praise, as well as heart-warming or heroic deeds.

“I think this should do,” Daemyung said as he put away the non-chosen mail.

“Well, then. Let's get ready.”

Yeondu set up the microphones and got ready to start the broadcast. It was about time the students started coming back to class after lunch. They started off the program with an idol song.

“The weather has become really cold. But why aren't they turning on the heater? We want heaters!”

Yeondu shouted into the microphone as though she was singing rock. Hearing her comment, laughs could be heard outside the broadcasting room.

“Today, we got a bunch of stories for our Woosung High's broadcasting club. If we had enough time, we'd love to read them all to you, but there's no way the principal would allow that. Principal, I hate you!”

Was she trying to make today the last broadcasting session? Maru faintly smiled as he looked at Yeondu, who spoke with excitement.

Chapter 459

“It's hard to go to the cafeteria when it's raining. Everyone puts their umbrellas up and it's complete chaos. I wish there was a roof.”

“I sympathize with this a lot. Lunchtimes during rainy days are practically warzones.”

“If any of the teachers are listening to this broadcast, I hope you can bring it up during the teacher's meeting.”

Yeondu signalled Bangjoo. Bangjoo nodded and spoke into the microphone.

“Well, that’s the last suggestion from the students. Next up is the audio drama from the acting club Blue Sky. Today’s topic is about love.”

Yeondu raised the volume of the background music while Bangjoo’s commentary was going on. The sound that would be outputted by the school speakers could be heard through her headphones, and the music went really well with Bangjoo’s voice as it sounded really pleasant.

“Seonbae.”

Hearing Maru’s call, Yeondu nodded and switched seats with Jiyeon. Since the only Jiyeon needed to do to broadcast her voice was to control the volume knob for the background music and the microphone button, she shouldn’t make a mistake.

“I won’t make a mistake with pronunciation. I’m actually quite skilled, you know.”

Yeondu made idle remarks as she opened the script. Ever since she started the school radio program, she researched radio programs done by famous radio DJs. The progression, the tone of voice, and even the pronunciation. She did not have any experience in acting, but she was more confident than the kids from the acting club when it came to speaking in a clear, consistent voice.

“But you have to be more proactive when acting, Maru. That’ll make it easier for me.”

“Understood.”

Yeondu read down the script as she perked up her ears. She listened to the music from her headphones and looked for the right time to cut off the music before gesturing towards Jiyeon. Jiyeon’s hands moved and the music died down while the microphone went up. Yeondu gave Jiyeon a thumbs up before focusing on the script.

Today’s story seemed to be based on the recently popular high-teen romance. There were quite a lot of students in her class who also read these types of novels. A girl hesitating between the boy she likes, and the cool boy that confessed to her. Then the struggle of love that ensues.

Thinking that it would be an envious scenario, Yeondu looked at the kids sitting around her. She had gotten quite close to the acting club since they had started working together for the audio drama broadcast. The first thing she thought of when she had the thought that she wanted to create audio dramas was Yoonjung, who was in the same class as her. Even now, she thought that it was a good thing that she asked Yoonjung for help since she used to lead the acting club. Thanks to that, she was able to proceed with her ideas without any problems.

“Isn’t Chaeho quite decent?”

Yeondu said into the microphone. She exchanged a couple of lines with Dowook, who had sharp eyes. Although the contents were pretty cheesy, she didn’t feel anything when she actually read them out loud. When she thought that she wasn’t playing around here, she was able to say the cheesy words without any difficulties.

Yeondu glanced at the clock. Their time limit was 5 minutes before the next period. She had to wrap things up before then.

After gesturing to Daemyung to hurry, since he was a slow-talker, she followed suit. Daemyung was proficient at adjusting the speed, so he took care of himself after telling him what to do once.

Yeondu flipped over the script. It was the last page. As the drama didn't contain any narration and was instead made purely of lines from characters, the content wasn't that long. Maru, who had been silent until now, half-turned around and readied himself to speak.

Yeondu also looked at Maru without thinking much.

"Uhm, Min-ah."

At that moment, Yeondu flinched backwards subconsciously. Maru's eyes contained deep affection. She didn't feel anything when she exchanged lines with Dowook or Daemyung, but for some reason, she felt weird when Maru looked at her.

"Yeah? What is it?"

She checked the script before speaking.

"What are you doing after school today?"

She felt as though Maru's face was closing in on her, but when she had a second look, Maru hadn't changed his posture at all. Yeondu licked her lips. For some reason, she felt nervous.

"Go home, of course."

"Then... would you like to watch a movie with me?"

At that moment, Yeondu widened her eyes and looked at her hand. On her hand, which she placed on the table, Maru had placed his hand on top of it. Yeondu tensed her toes. What was this kid doing?

"Seonbae-nim, your line, your line."

Just then, Jiyeon whispered to her from behind. Yeondu hurriedly put her microphone against her mouth and said the next line. Her voice was shaking against her will. Thinking that she was saying her line infinitely close to the affection-filled voice that the script required, she shouted 'yes' inside her mind. However, after realizing that Maru's hand was still placed on top of hers, she gulped in nervousness.

Now that she looked at it, there was a line on the script. Open parenthesis, 'while grabbing her hand', close parenthesis. Yeondu fidgeted and tried to wriggle her hand out, but Maru forcefully grabbed onto her.

Yeondu looked at Maru in a panic. Maru had the expression of a boy full of love, nay, an expression much deeper than that.

In the end, Yeondu wrapped the play up while being so nervous that she didn't know how it ended. She felt her heart racing.

"Is there a love story like that around us too? I hope there is. Unfortunately, though, it never happened to me."

Aram did the finishing commentary. Only then did Maru let go of her hand. Yeondu quickly pulled back her hand as though she had touched something hot, before laughing and putting the hand back on the desk slowly.

That was because Maru's expression as he tidied up the script was extremely calm. No, he looked a little sleepy.

'He's even yawning.'

Seeing Maru yawning with his mouth wide open, she felt funny that her heart was racing until just now. At the same time, she wondered if that was what acting was about.

So even lies induce reactions.

She felt good now since she thought that she learned a new thing. As Yeondu aspired to become a producer for a TV program in the future, this kind of experience was very precious to her.

'One of the methods to seduce the audience is a charming lie. Oh, that's a good line, I must say.'

Thinking that, Yeondu looked at Maru and Dowook alternately. Actually, based on face alone, Dowook looked a little more handsome than Maru. But curiously, her heart did not flutter when she exchanged lines with Dowook. So it was the difference of acting skill after all? It was understandable since Maru even appeared on TV.

She stood up and placed her hands on the control panel that Jiyeon was in front of. She played relaxing music that would play until the end of the lunch period before turning around and clapping.

"Thanks for today. We didn't encounter any accidents today either."

"Thank you for your work."

Just as she sighed, Aram burst out laughing and spoke,

"Yeondu-seonbae. Why were you panicking so much? I thought you liked him for real."

Bangjoo, who was next to her, also chimed in.

"She's right. You were beet red just now."

Yeondu crossed her arms and snorted.

"That's right, I was a little nervous. Satisfied?"

As she didn't have a personality where she would snap out at trivial things, Yeondu reacted nonchalantly. Her heart did race so she didn't have any excuses either. It wasn't a sin to feel embarrassed and excited like she was being confessed to for real, was it? In fact, it was instead Maru's fault for being too serious about acting.

"As expected of you. You admitted it quite easily."

"Maru was good at acting. I thought I was being confessed to for real. You guys saw that, right? The way he grabbed my hand and looked at me with a deep gaze. His acting is so on point."

"I did see it. Hehe, it looked good though."

Aram made a rectangular frame with her fingers and placed it in front of her eyes. Jiyeon slapped Aram on the shoulder and told her to stop.

"Sorry about that, seonbae-nim," Jiyeon apologized.

Yeondu immediately shook her head.

"You don't need to apologize. I'm not such a picky person. I can take a joke or two. Don't you think so, Aram?"

"Of course. Our cutie here is too courteous for her own good."

Yeondu winked at Jiyeon. Jiyeon smiled back at her. She thought that having a little sister like her would be great. After all, there would be a lot of fun in teasing someone like that.

"Rather than that, Han Maru. You were pretty good back there, huh?" Yeondu said as she slapped the back of Maru's neck.

She found out just today, but an assertive boy didn't seem too bad. If someone confessed to her the way Maru did, she might end up accepting on the spot.

"What do you mean?"

"Your acting was pretty good. I knew it was a lie, but even then I was nervous, you know? I was wondering what you were up to all of a sudden. Tell me honestly. You actually have feelings for me, don't you?"

Yeondu didn't hold back since everyone was throwing around jokes everywhere. The people from the acting club all burst out laughing. Yeondu also just shrugged and enjoyed the situation.

"Seonbae. Maru-seonbae has a girlfriend already."

"Really? Then is he a two-timer?"

She grinned and had a look at the clock. It was about time they went back. It was fine for Yeondu to be late to 5th period since she had her work in the broadcasting club, but the rest of the people here would get an earful if they were late to the next class.

Just as she was about to tell them to go to their classrooms, Maru, who was cleaning up the papers on the ground, spoke,

"It was an act, but it wasn't a lie."

"Huh?"

Yeondu tilted her head in confusion. It was an act but not a lie? It took her three seconds to understand what he meant, and her head became complicated immediately. Even the others, who were listening from the side, stopped laughing and looked at Maru with surprise.

“An actor I respect once told me that I shouldn’t put on a lie when I act. Although it was an act, and it was just for a short time, I really tried to like you for real, seonbae. Grabbing your hand was just a byproduct of that,” said Maru as he placed the neatly piled script on the center of the table.

“So I felt really good when you admitted that you were nervous because of me. I thought my acting was praised.”

Only then could Yeondu smile back.

“Oh, and here I was thinking about something completely different.”

The others also chimed in.

“That startled me. Maru-seonbae, I almost swore at you because I thought you were two-timing.”

“I was also surprised as well.”

Maru pushed his chair in and said ‘I thought we were all joking here?’. The people from the acting club giggled as they cleaned up.

“Seonbae-nim. We’ll take our leave.”

“Alright, thanks for today. Also, there probably won’t be a drama tomorrow.”

“Then we don’t have to come?” Aram asked as she opened the door.

“You don’t have to, but you can if you want to. It’d be great if you can help me out.”

“Then I’m coming.”

“Instead, you’ll have to eat at the cafeteria. There won’t be any food here tomorrow.”

“Okay!”

Yeondu waved at the kids leaving the room before quietly closing the door. Then, she leaned on the door and spoke in a small voice,

“Maru, huh. He’s pretty decent. I might have confessed if he didn’t have a girlfriend already.”

So that was what it felt like for someone to like her seriously. Yeondu fantasized for a while before shaking her head. She had a mountain of work to do. She had to stop her delusions and take care of the problem in front of her.

“Ah, I think that song will be good tomorrow.”

She always had a problem picking the right song every day, but today, she thought of a suitable one to play tomorrow. It was a song about love that would perfectly portray what she was thinking right now. It was quite childish when she first listened to it, but right now, she thought it was pretty good. It was a pretty old song. Yeondu started humming that song as she cleaned up the cables. Just then, the bell for the next class started ringing. Since it would be okay for her to be ten minutes late to class, she thought that she should rest a little before going.

At that moment, the door to the broadcasting room suddenly opened before a junior came in. He was panting as though he came here in a hurry.

“What the, why are you here?”

“T-to help you out, seonbae.”

“Your homeroom teacher told you not to miss any classes though.”

“It’s fine. I came here after saying that I needed to go to the bathroom. Seonbae, what should I help you with?”

“Help, you say...”

At that moment, Yeondu caught sight of her junior’s eyes as he looked straight at her. Those eyes, they were the same eyes that Maru looked at her with just before. She felt her calm heart start racing again. She calmly stared at her junior who smiled brightly, telling her to give him work, before giggling and speaking,

“Hey.”

“Yes?”

“Do you like me?” Yeondu asked as she raised her glasses a little.

Her junior froze up on the spot. Yeondu sat on the table and waved her feet around like she was playing by the stream before laughing out loud. She could hear the sound of the wind, as well as the deep voice of a teacher from the corridor seeping through the door.

“What are you doing after school today?”

“E-eh? Ah! I go home. No, I actually don’t.”

Yeondu threw a pen from the desk at her junior and spoke,

“Then come watch a movie with me.”

Chapter 460

“Well done today as well. It’s quite cold today, so don’t just take off your tops when you play ball. Also, these days, many students get caught smoking in the park, and I’m not sure about drinking, but don’t ever smoke. Ordinary-looking folks like us don’t look cool even if we smoke, so you really shouldn’t. You’ll really regret it later.”

“Are you smoking because of the taste, then?”

Someone sitting in the 2nd column asked in a joking manner. Taesik, who was the homeroom teacher, chuckled as he ended the school day.

“Maru, see me for a sec.”

Taesik called out to Maru as he left through the front door of the classroom. Maru put his bag on his desk and approached Taesik.

"I saw you on TV. I did watch your acting quite often, but looking at you through a TV does feel quite different."

"I looked really awkward, didn't I?"

"Of course not. Even a clueless person like me thought that you were good."

Taesik walked out to the corridor. Maru walked next to him.

"So from what I see, you decided on your career path - an actor, right?"

"Yes, I'm going to try. I'm going to go at it head on without any room for regrets."

Of course, it wasn't that Maru didn't have a place to run away. Maru's iron rule was that he should always have some room for retreat. He couldn't let a spider put a web over his mouth. The three hundred million won in his bank account was his room for retreat.

"I see. So you're going to be busy in the future as well?"

"I'm not sure about that. This field is the same as the others in the sense that I have to run around looking for work until I become famous. I think I'm still far from work coming my way without me doing anything."

"You'll do well. No matter how harsh this world is, someone who is skilled in one area is bound to be used in that field," said Taesik as he nodded his head.

They went to the cafeteria and Taesik bought a cup of hot chocolate for Maru. Maru thanked him as he received it.

"You talked to your parents about it?"

"They know that I joined an agency. They didn't ask anything specific, but they are the kind of people who would let me do something if I set my mind to it, so you don't need to worry about that."

"I see, if you are confident in that, then I guess it's fine."

Taesik patted Maru on the shoulder and told him to drink. So that was the end of the consultation? Maru sipped the steaming hot chocolate and asked,

"But teacher."

"Yeah?"

"Have you decided on a date for the marriage?"

Taesik smiled and looked at the paper cup in his hands. After swirling the cup around for a while, he spoke,

"You'll be hearing good news in a while."

"Really?"

"Look forward to it. I'm also graduating from being a bachelor."

“Don’t forget that you need to fit me with a suit once you decide on a date. You know that I was your cupid, right?”

“Cupid? Haha, what a way of putting it. Fine. I don’t think I can do a suit, but I can give you a nice little souvenir from our honeymoon. I’m having a hard time these days.”

“Did instructor Miso already take over the financial power?”

“That woman’s pretty vicious.”

That last line was a joke, but there was a sense of bitterness that couldn’t just be taken as a joke. As Maru knew how he felt, he silently nodded and drank the rest of the hot chocolate.

“Cheonho’s in class right?”

“Yes, he should be on cleaning duty.”

“Then can you call him here?”

“Understood.”

Maru said goodbye before leaving the cafeteria. Meeting a homeroom teacher like Taesik for even just one year out of the three years of high school would change school life, and beyond that, life in general. A good teacher was just that incredible. Also, precisely because they were incredible, they were dangerous.

“Damn kid, follow me!”

He saw a student being dragged to the faculty office with his hair grabbed by the teacher. Maru watched that scene for a while before returning to his class. Now that he thought about it, a lot of factors in this world were decided based on luck. Environments, parents, fellow classmates, and appearances couldn’t be decided by choice. Perhaps it was precisely because of that that people struggled in order to survive.

“Cheonho, you should go to the cafeteria.”

“Why?”

“A first year girl wanted me to call you out.”

The boys that were mostly cleaning under the desks all stood up and glared at Cheonho. Cheonho asked back if it was true in disbelief before pushing away the others and running towards the cafeteria.

Seeing him rush towards the main staircase at full speed made Maru feel bad for him. He thought that he should treat the guy to something later. He told the truth to the boys that flocked to him and asked if the girl was pretty.

“What a pitiful guy.”

“He was definitely serious.”

“Maru, you should watch out. He has a knife in his drawer.”

Maru chuckled and replied that he would.

“What did the homeroom teacher say?” Daemyung asked as he returned to the class with a mop in his hands.

Maru replied that it was simply a career consultation.

“Is he going through us all?”

“Probably. He called Cheonho out just now.”

“Cheonho? He seemed so excited though.”

Daemyung wondered if it was such a good thing to have a consultation with the teacher.

“Did Dowook go up first?”

Maru picked up his bag. Today was Monday. He had to go to Seoul.

“He went to the bunsik restaurant in front of the school to buy some kimbap for the others.”

“He really looks after the juniors quite a lot.”

“He’s a good kid after all.”

While putting away the mop, Daemyung asked as though he just remembered something,

“Ah, the tarot you showed me during the day. Do you know what it means?”

“No. I was looking for similar pictures before I turned it off so I don’t know about it. Looking it up on the internet didn’t do any good.”

“I see.”

“Why?”

“You looked quite serious even though you got that card purely through coincidence. That’s why I asked, if you were so bothered over it, I wanted to tell you about it a little.”

Maru took out his wallet from his pocket. Daemyung really had great observation skills.

“So, what does this card mean?”

“I’m not entirely sure, but I shouldn’t be that far off either. It’s the card with the number zero, so I came across it a lot, and I liked it as well. Hmm, the interpretation depends on which direction you come across it, but generally, the meaning of The Fool is just like the image of a clown that you typically think of. In tarot, it means adventurous spirit, curiosity, commencement, free spirit when it’s in the upright position....”

After saying that, Daemyung groaned for a while before saying ‘that’s all I remember’ before finishing it off.

“I get what kind of image it is.”

“Right?”

“So if there’s an upright position, there’s a reverse position as well?”

“Yeah. It’ll be easier if you think about opposites. Impulsiveness, recklessness, carelessness.”

“That’s not good.”

“It can change depending on how you interpret it. I don’t know the details either though.”

Daemyung picked up his bag. Since cleaning was over, it seemed that he was about to go to the clubroom. Maru took a glance at the clock. It was about time he left.

“But what kind of consultation did you have when you received that card?”

“I said that I was worried about something.... No, wait, that’s not right. That woman told me that she wants to solve my worries.”

“Solving worries? That’s a very broad meaning. So, when you first received it, was it in the upright position or the reverse position?”

Maru took out the card from his wallet and tried flipping it around. Yesterday, he didn’t get to see the front face of the card at the tent. He only checked the card when he got home. Even that woman didn’t tell him whether it was the upright position or not.

“Why?” Daemyung asked after approaching him.

“I didn’t hear about it - whether it was in the upright position or not. But I think I can deduce that.”

Maru looked at the pattern on the back of the card and thought back to yesterday. It was a repeating pattern on the back, but the colors at the end of the cards were different. One side was slightly red and the other side had a bluish tint. Before that man interrupted, the card lay still on the table. Back then, it was definitely...

Maru unfolded the card that he folded to put in his wallet and put it on the desk face down. Then, he turned it so that the red side faced him.

“It was in this state.”

“Try flipping it.”

Maru flipped the card. The picture was not flipped. The clown on the stage was facing him.

“Usually, a fortune teller interprets based on the seeker, so....”

“What’s a seeker?”

“The one being told about the fortune. In this state, the card is in its upright position.”

“So it’s interpreted in a good way?”

“Normally, yes.”

“That’s good. Well, not that I really like adventurous spirit and curiosity and stuff like that.”

“Still better than recklessness.”

“True.”

Maru picked up his bag and left the class. Daemyung climbed up the staircase while he went down. After exchanging goodbyes, Maru went down the stairs.

“Adventurous, huh.”

It was such a vague word. As it had a broad meaning, the interpretation would differ according to how the one doing the fortune telling interprets it. Fortune telling really wasn't reliable after all.

Before he left through the left entrance, he saw the trash cans that the classes had put out. Maru fiddled with the tarot card in his hand. He wondered if he should throw it away or not.

The clown holding the mask within the card did bother him a little, but it was probably a coincidence anyway. Even The Phantom of the Opera had a similar mask with black and white. Meaning, it wasn't anything special.

After seeing the clown wearing a necktie on the stage, Maru muttered 'adventurous huh' to himself once again and put the card back in his wallet. It wasn't that he believed it, but just being in possession of it shouldn't do him harm.

'Let's think of it as a souvenir or something.'

Maru put his wallet in his pocket and put anything regarding the card in one corner of his mind. Right now, he shouldn't be worried about that meaningless card, but rather, about the many different overlapping illusions of that man from before.

He got on the bus and put his transit card against the reader.

'I wonder what the heck that was about.'

Since he didn't have a single clue, he couldn't start deducing things. For a brief moment, he thought that there was something wrong with his brain, but no matter how hard he thought about it, he didn't feel like there was something wrong with his body. He didn't encounter anything that might have shocked his brain, and if some pathological problem occurred within his body, he should be encountering abnormal body conditions, but there were no signs of that either.

In the end, he reached the conclusion that it was related to his reincarnation.

Hearing the warning that the train was coming, Maru took a step back. The train arrived with a loud sound.

'Will things like that happen again in the future?'

If that was the case, he had to get ready for it. An uncontrollable wave of emotions and a splitting headache would be a huge problem if it happened while he was shooting or performing.

He wondered if he should learn meditation or something. He had to find a way to calm himself down in any situation.

After arriving at the academy, Maru greeted Gwangseok and Gyunglim, who arrived earlier than him. Gwangseok was talking to someone over the phone. He was probably talking to a girl. Gyunglim was fiddling with her phone. So she's active in that calligraphy café?

“Maru.”

Sungjae appeared behind him and greeted him while hooking his arm around his neck. The two had gotten close ever since they drank together at the elder’s house. Although they were at ease before when talking, there was still a sense of distance when they talked to each other, but now they felt close like old buddies.

“Is everyone here?”

Following that, Miso came in and pointed at Sungjae while saying ‘attendance’. Sungjae raised his hand and shouted ‘one’ in a loud voice, and following that, Gwangseok, Maru, then Gyunglim said their numbers.

“Good. All four of you are here. Then, let’s begin our class once again.”

Miso clapped and told them to stand up.

Maru stopped thinking about the déjà vu and stood up.

Right now, it was time to focus on class.