

Once Again 461

Chapter 461

"Hello, senior!"

She greeted with a 90 degrees bow. The senior actor, who was greeted, waved back at *her* with a short reply. When *she* arrived at the set, the first thing she did was to greet all the actors and the staff members. Since *she* was initially nitpicked on because of her greeting, she always approached a senior actor whenever she saw one and greeted that person.

As there was no one that didn't like a greeting from a junior actress, *she* was able to go around greeting everyone energetically.

"Hello, senior."

She greeted the woman with a smile. Lee Miyoon. That woman had a faint smell of cigarettes and she just nodded before going away.

"She doesn't touch you these days, huh," Jiseok approached her and spoke.

"I can see that she hates me, but it's not like she's going to do something to me based on something I didn't do. I took the initiative today as well."

"What a tiring relationship."

"I'm used to it now. Rather than that, tomorrow is the first episode right?"

"Yeah, it's finally here."

"I guess I have to wait until the week after next if I want to see myself on TV."

"Why don't you do some monitoring for me while you wait?"

"I'll do it if I have time."

She stuck out her tongue slightly and smiled at him. Jiseok told *her* that she was being unfair while drinking a sip of water from the cup in his hands before snapping his fingers as though he had remembered something.

"Oh yeah, have you seen that?"

"Seen what?"

"The touching street performance of Daehak-ro."

"The touching street performance of Daehak-ro?"

"So you don't know about it. It's quite popular these days, you know?"

"What is it about?"

"You really don't know anything about it? Doesn't your boyfriend talk to you about it?"

"Maru? Ah! I did hear from him that he was preparing for a street performance."

“So he didn’t tell you because it’s not official yet. After the shoot, try going on ‘Acting Street’. It’s a blog that talks about issues in Daehak-ro and....”

“I know ‘Acting Street’. Though, I haven’t been able to go on it a lot recently because I’m busy.”

“Really? Anyway, try going on it and look at the popular posts from recent days. There are a few posts that have low-quality videos, but the reactions are great. I also had a look at it, and it’s worth seeing, especially if you’re aspiring to become an actor.”

Jiseok wished *her* luck with the shoot before going over to his own set. *She* wrote down Acting Street in a memo in her mind before turning around.

* * *

“Acting street, recent posts... here it is.”

After the shoot, *she* didn’t go home immediately and went to the nearby PC-bang because she couldn’t wait. *She* grabbed a seat, opened a browser, and went to a web portal. *She* logged in with her account and went to ‘Acting Street’, which she designated as a neighbor.

Acting Street was a blog that had many events and issues that occurred in Daehak-ro, and there was a lot of content, such as information about various plays, events, and even interviews of some actors neatly organized into various sub-categories. It was a blog that was visited by tens of thousands of people every day. Although it started off as a personal blog, it recently switched its format to a multiple-reporter administration, and thanks to that, the number of posts went up. Right now, it was a must-visit website for someone that was going to Daehak-ro for the first time. The first place *she* added as a neighbor when she started her own blog was Acting Street as well.

“Skilled actor Yang Ganghwan of Daehak-ro creates a unique sensational stage.”

She read the title in a small voice.

The photo right below the title contained a scene where many people were holding their phone cameras up in the air in the dark night. It looked like a small theater. The people that were colored in lights from phone flashlights, as well as a man wearing a guitar. Then, there were the actors. Just watching them made *her* smile. It felt as though the livelihood of the scene was transferred right into *her*.

“A stage where the audience becomes the actors. We are all the main characters of the play that is our life.”

She scrolled down and read the post. Late at night, heaters placed throughout, the sound of a guitar, the chatting of the people, and finally, there was the story.

The photo was switched to a much more serious one than the joy-filled one from before in the next paragraph. The photo contained people looking very sad, and perhaps serious. In the middle of what seemed like a stage, there was a man in his forties, and next to that man was instructor Yang Ganghwan looking at the man while wearing a white gown.

“But the stage called life sometimes cruelly pushes the person that’s supposed to be the main character out of the spotlight.”

After reading a rather ominous sentence, *she* watched the video right below it. It was the video that Jiseok talked about before. *She* could hear the man's voice through the speaker. Although the quality of the video wasn't that good, the voice could be heard clearly.

She collapsed her hands and stared at the monitor in silence. The man's words flew into *her* ears. Twenty minutes could be considered long, and it could be considered short. *She* watched the video without budging for twenty minutes, and when she realized that the video had ended, she sniffed.

It was a fearful story. It was a very frequent occurrence for people that aspired to become actors, so it was all the more fearful for *her*. *She* felt complex since she could neither cheer for the man nor sympathize with him. *She* just stared at the blacked-out screen for a long time.

She calmed herself down after taking a deep breath before scrolling down a bit further. There was a short evaluation from the blog reporter, who watched everything from beginning to end.

'This was a play, yet not a play. I felt uncomfortable, yet I could only keep watching; I felt hurt, yet I could not cry. A lot of people cried, but I did not. The one that uttered out the pain wasn't crying, so I couldn't cry either. Rather than tears, I sent a passionate round of applause. That applause contained my jealousy of the man who focused on acting his whole life, as well as a compliment towards myself who didn't live such a life. I did not have the confidence to live like that, yet he did. In a popular sense of the word, he wasn't the 'main character', but in that place, he clearly was. I cheered for such a foolish man.'

Beneath that comment was another video. It was a 3-minute one. It contained what happened after the man's story ended.

The man thanked everyone for listening to his story and tried to leave, but Ganghwan held him back.

-You're going to continue acting, aren't you?

-I think it's too late for me now. I'm past forty after all.

-Is there a suitable age for acting in the first place?

After that, the man didn't say anything, and the video ended with the man sitting back down again.

After reading the whole post, *she* checked the comments section. The post was from two weeks ago, and right now, the number of comments reached over four thousand. Every comment *she* saw cheered on for the man. Sometimes, there were comments that made cynical remarks about his foolishness, but those numbered extremely little.

It was a surprising thing. Although Acting Street was a popular blog amongst people who liked Daehak-ro, it lacked views compared to hugely popular blogs. Yet here, just one post had more than four thousand comments.

Just in case, *she* did an internet search about it as well.

Emotional stage of Daehak-ro.

There were numerous news articles about it.

* * *

“You really never know what will happen,” said Maru as he looked at the people in front of him.

After their first run, they did one more performance last Thursday in the afternoon. There weren't as many people though since it was during a weekday. Despite that, they were able to wrap up the play well thanks to the fifty-or-so people that stuck around to the end. The participation rate of the audience was similar to their first run, but there was no one that talked about himself or herself in detail.

Then, last weekend, they held another performance.

The number of people increased. While they were handing out coffee cans by the entrance of the train station, they came across some people who asked them if they were the street performance guys. Thanks to a man who gave them two boxes of hot packs as a gift, the performance that night was a lot warmer than before. Furthermore, thanks to the people that gathered that day, he found out that their first run was posted on a blog named Acting Street. He thought that it might have little effect in advertising their agenda but...

“This was outside of my expectations.”

Maru laughed as he looked at Sooil next to him. Sooil was the same. One more week had passed, and it was now 6 p.m. on a Saturday. They had finished their rehearsal and printed leaflets to hand out along with coffee, but the moment he arrived at the train station, Maru was overwhelmed by people. He felt overwhelmed because everyone was telling him that they were here to see the play.

When he returned to Marronnier Park like the Pied Piper of Hamelin and his group of rats, he came across Sooil and Hanna who were in a similar situation. People were lined up behind them like little ducklings.

There were at least four hundred people at a glance. They were at a point where some people wouldn't be able to watch the performance because of the sheer number of people.

The problem was that that wasn't the end of it.

It was early November. The sun set quickly, and the winds were cold. However, a wall of people surrounded the performance venue to the point that such cold winds could not pass through between the people.

In a situation where he was receiving the gazes of hundreds of people, Maru couldn't do anything but smile awkwardly.

“Excuse me! Coming through!”

One part of the human wall suddenly split in two before Ganghwan and Hanna pushed through. The two went out to get their props and stage costumes and looked like they had just been through a war.

“There are clearly too many people here,” said Maru as he looked around.

They needed to come up with something. If an accident happened, it would be detrimental for them.

The audience stared at the four who got into a circle to have a discussion. Maru looked at Ganghwan.

"I'm insanely excited, but it's gonna be chaos if we just went on like this, right?"

"More people are gathering around. But what's happening? There's no way so many people saw Acting Street."

The answer came from Sooil.

"We're on the media."

"The media?"

"I saw on the internet. We're now a hot topic in all sorts of communities thanks to that man in the first run," Sooil said with a grin.

"Now that's what I call advertisement."

At that time, some people in the audience asked them when they were going to start. The sheer crowd of people was attracting even more people. Ganghwan took a deep breath before climbing on top of a chair he brought to use as a prop.

"Everyone!"

The loud voice that came out from the bottom of his stomach made everyone around go silent.

"Thank you all for coming! But I didn't know so many of you would be coming today. We have only four people, so we can't control all of you. That's why I propose that we switch places!"

"To where?"

Ganghwan raised his finger and spoke.

"In front of the Arts Theater!"

The people all looked at one of the landmarks in Daehak-ro, the red building. Everyone started moving after Ganghwan asked them to move over slowly. It was Saturday evening. There were many people that just came out on a date or for a family picnic without knowing anything about the play. They were mixed in with the hundreds of people moving in unison. Maru could predict what kind of results such a phenomenon would bring.

"What an advertisement," said Ganghwan.

The Arts Theater had a huge clearing in front of it after the street was finished being reconstructed. It was capable of holding hundreds of people. It was a splendid choice for a stage.

Maru, who walked at the front, tried looking behind him. There seemed to be around four hundred, no, five hundred people here. The number four hundred did not sound like a lot, but actually standing in front of such a crowd felt completely different. People of all sorts of ages and heights rushed across Daehak-ro. The sheer movement of such a crowd was an eye-catching performance in itself, and it caused the effect of attracting even more people.

After arriving at the Arts Theater, Maru climbed up the temporary stage installed in front of it. From where he was, all he could see was a wave of people. He could see people holding large cameras scattered throughout. Someone came out of the ticketing office for the Arts Theater in confusion.

Maru smiled. The numerous gazes of the crowd felt nice to him. Ganghwan, Hanna, and Sooil were making similar expressions. They now had a bigger stage. Which actor would hate such a thing?

“Thank you all for coming!” Ganghwan suddenly shouted.

After a moment of silence, a loud cheer erupted from the audience.

Maru felt his palms sweating.

‘This is just great.’

It was an incredible way to start.

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“The children may get cold, so please come this way.”

“There are blankets here. Please use them and return them after the performance.”

Maru turned his head around when he heard the voice. He saw Sooil handing a blanket to a girl wearing a skirt. The two looked at each other and smiled before moving again. It was five minutes before the performance. Maru walked around amongst the people.

After guiding the elderly and the children to the heaters, he went up the temporary stage. Sooil also came back to the stage after handing out all of the blankets.

“Then we’ll begin the performance now. As I said before, those of you that want to participate should come up to the stage without hesitation. This is that kind of stage after all.”

Ganghwan’s voice spread throughout the audience through an amplifier. As soon as he saw that there were over four hundred people gathered here, Ganghwan made a call to someone, and not long later, a truck came, carrying various equipment. The man, that installed the amps and the microphones, wished them good luck with the performance and was watching from a corner. It seemed that he worked in a field related to stage equipment.

“However, it’ll be bad if you get injured while rushing up to the stage, so please take your time. This stage is not going anywhere.”

Ganghwan put the microphone in the holder and took a step back.

“Well then! We shall now begin the performance ‘I want to listen to your story’ right now.”

An even clearer and crisper voice than when he used the microphone spread out to the surroundings. The audience greeted the commence of the play with a round of applause.

Ganghwan and Hanna were wearing doctor gowns, while Maru and Sooil were wearing patient clothes. The flow of the play did not change from their first run. The start was a light skit. After that, Maru and Sooil would talk about their own ‘worries’ and Hanna and Ganghwan would give them consultation in a

funny manner. After doing some skits that required the participation of the audience to induce them, they would eventually hand over all control to the audience after a while.

The stories of the audience decided the characteristics of the play, so the performance they held last Thursday started and ended with laughter. A woman in her thirties, who introduced herself as an accountant for a company, came up on stage, and after gaining total control over the stage like a proficient actress, she used her words to entertain everyone as though she was a standup comedian. The only thing that Ganghwan and Hanna did that day was laugh their hearts out from the side.

Maru wondered what was going to happen today. Seeing some people in the audience making serious expressions, he felt that today's stage was going to be a little heavy. Many people here came after reading the blog post. It seemed that the story of the man that they met in the first run touched many people's hearts. That probably led to these people coming here for similar reasons as that man from before.

"Let's enjoy ourselves today too."

Ganghwan put his hand out with his palm facing the ground. Maru put his hand on top, and Hanna and Sooil followed suit.

"One, two, three."

"Eoi!"

After a short shout, Maru stood at the center of the stage and embraced the hundreds of gazes being thrown at him with a bright smile.

"There are loads of people today."

He said his first line.

This was the start of the play.

* * *

She left the theater with a short sigh. It had been a long time since she came to Daehak-ro. The play *she* just watched was a suspense-mystery play about a murder crime that happened in the neighborhood. *She* was so tense from beginning to end that she was fidgeting her fingers. Moreover, since the stage was right in front of *her*, she was startled whenever she heard the bang of the gun. *She* was so embarrassed that she couldn't raise her head when one of the actors pointed at her after the play and said that he was also startled because of her.

'But it was still good.'

She really liked plays after all. *She* learned that there was a different kind of fun acting in front of the camera thanks to shooting the sitcom, but she still liked plays better since she was able to check the reactions of the audience on the spot. The breathing of the actors, and the murmurs of the audience; such vivid sounds provoked *her* emotions.

She trembled as she remembered the expressions of the actors at the last part of the play. Today, *she* decided to take only the big roads when she went home.

“Ah, right.”

After checking the time on *her* phone, she started walking hastily. *She* was so absorbed in the play she watched at the theater that she had forgotten her original purpose in coming here. *She* grabbed tightly onto her messenger bag and started running.

“Haa, haa... huh?”

She blinked her eyes several times when she saw the empty performance venue. This place was definitely the right place according to what *she* saw on the blog. The round stone chairs, the single-story building, and then there was the stage which was slightly elevated above the ground.

“How strange.”

She had heard that there was a performance on Sunday evening. Was *she* wrong? *She* looked around before taking out her phone.

She wondered if she should make a call. Actually, *she* had come here today without telling Maru about it. *She* couldn't find the time to come until now since the schedule for her sitcom shoot kept getting delayed to Sunday, but it seemed that the problem was solved as it was moved back to Saturday. *She* was originally going to tell Maru so they could meet up on Sunday, but she became a little prankful and kept it a secret from him that she was coming here.

“Well, I guess there's no choice.”

She felt like she was going to get angry if Maru told her that there was no performance today. *She* pressed the number two on her phone for a long time. Maru's number, which *she* had saved on the number two, appeared on the screen and the signal beeps could be heard.

-The person you're trying to reach is either unavailable or...

The stiff announcement came back instead. *She* turned around with a short sigh when she saw a bunch of couples all heading towards one place.

“Apparently it's over there.”

She immediately understood what they meant. The Arts Theater right next to the ticketing office - the clearing in front of that building was filled with a lot of people. Despite the fact that the sun had set and the weather was quite cold, that place seemed warm from all the people there. *She* approached the Arts Theater in excitement but was unable to get through the crowd of people.

“Being a housewife is hard, you know? Isn't that right?”

“Right!”

She could hear the voice of a middle-aged woman through a speaker which was installed on a platform that seemed to be the stage. *She* tip-toed. *She* walked around a lot until she found a place where she could see the whole stage.

“Wow.”

She could see Maru standing on the stage from afar. He was wearing a patient outfit and was nodding as he listened to the woman's words. *She* wanted to watch from a little closer. *She* frowned and started to make her way through the crowd but was pushed back after being hit by a sturdy man's shoulder on her forehead.

"Are you okay?"

"Ah, yes. I'm fine. Hahaha."

She rubbed her forehead and smiled. The man looked at *her* with pity and with a strange smile. *She* was embarrassed and felt awkward so she left immediately.

The voice from the woman on stage, the woman herself, and the laughter of the audience made *her* want to watch the stage even more.

She tiptoed and started walking around again.

* * *

'That's....'

The figure that Maru caught when he squinted his eyes was the figure of a girl whose head poked out at the back of the audience from time to time like whack-a-mole. Sometimes, the figure jumped like a rabbit. *She* could be seen on the left at times, and a while later, she peeked over the audience from the right before disappearing again.

Maru chuckled.

"Sooil, I'll be right back."

"Where are you going?"

"I found a strange guest."

"A strange guest?"

"Anyway, I'm off."

"Alright."

Thanks to the housewife ranting about her hardships on stage, it wasn't necessary for him to stand on the stage. Ganghwan was fanning the woman to talk more about herself from the side. The man who presumably came with the woman, in other words, her husband, was lowering his head right underneath the stage. He could hear him say 'Minsoo's mom, please stop already.'

Maru smiled at the little child who waved at him before walking around to the back of the audience. He could see the figure of a girl busily moving around amongst the crowd which kept increasing in number. Actually, as *she* had done dancing since young, she had a good figure and her stature wasn't that small either, but thanks to her cute face and the thick coat she was wearing, she looked quite small.

Maru watched *her*, who was tiptoeing and hopping on the ground, for a while before taking out his phone. He made a call before waiting. *She* stopped her steps and picked up her phone.

“You called?”

“Huh? Yeah.”

For some reason, *she* crouched on the ground. Was she trying to hide?

“Why?”

“No reason. I just wanted to call you.”

“Really?”

“Yeah. But what are you doing right now?”

“Right now? I’m doing the play. The one I told you about before.”

“Oh, that.”

She moved her phone away from her mouth before smiling a little. After taking a deep breath, *she* spoke,

“Is it going well?”

“It is. What are you doing?”

“Me? Resting at home. I’m tired.”

“Oh, you’re resting at home? What about the shoot?”

“Right, I didn’t tell you about it, huh? It changed to Saturday. Yesterday was the shoot and today I’m resting.”

“That’s good.”

“What’s good?”

“Resting on a Sunday. You hate waking up early on red days more than anything, don’t you?”

“It’s not that bad you know?”

“I wouldn’t be so sure.”

Maru slowly walked up to *her*. The murmurs of the crowd hid Maru’s presence.

“How’s the performance, is it fun?”

“It is. Though, the audience likes it more than we do.”

“That’s a good performance. What a pity, I wanted to watch as well. It’s far away so it would be too late to go now. I should just rest at home.”

“You aren’t coming to see me?”

When he asked that question, *she* covered her mouth and smiled.

“Me? See you? Forget about it. I’m going to rest easy at home. I’m going to watch a movie on the sofa in the warmth of my home.”

“Wearing what?”

“Clothes? What kind of perverted things are you going to say now? I’m going to be fully covered, so don’t think about anything strange.”

Hearing that, Maru killed his footsteps and went right behind *her*. Then he lowered his phone and stood still.

“Hey, hey. Han Maru. Hey.”

She called out into her phone a couple of times before standing up abruptly. *She* watched the stage while tip-toeing before closing her phone with a sigh.

“You definitely are fully covered.”

Maru spoke into *her* ears in a small voice. *She* was startled and turned around. Maru could see *her* reddened cheeks and nose due to the cold. He sighed a little before covering *her* cheeks with his hands.

“Aren’t you cold?”

“Huh? Yeah. No, wait, how are you here?”

“You’re an idiot aren’t you? Think about the height of the stage. Then tell me whether I’ll be bothered about someone hopping at the back of the crowd or not.”

She said ‘aha’ in a small voice before making a sour expression.

“So you called me on purpose, huh?”

“I could clearly see that you were lying, so there’s no way I wouldn’t start teasing you for it.”

“You are such a...”

Her curled hands immediately jabbed into his waist. It was a rather accurate recreation of a right hook. *She* smiled in joy for some reason after hitting him.

“Wow, didn’t that look good just now?”

Maru immediately covered his aching waist and nodded his head. This was why he had originally held his wife back from trying to learn boxing after they married. He didn’t want to be cornered in a marital fight after all. Since *she* was a woman with good reflexes, her fists would be quite fierce if she learned.

“Hey.”

Maru grabbed *her* hand.

“What?”

“I’ll bring you to a VIP seat, so be obedient.”

She smiled with a bright smile.

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“Thanks,” she said, as she grabbed the canned coffee.

The VIP seat that Maru talked about was at the side of the stage. It was where the boxes with plastic chairs and blankets were. In a place restricted to the audience, *she* put a blanket over her legs and watched the stage.

‘So Hanna-unni’s doing it as well.’

Hanna showed up to the practice room from time to time during the beginning of the semester, but she didn’t show up even once ever since summer began. As Myunghwa High’s acting club seniors sometimes showed up even after graduation, it was always noisy even during summer holidays, and at the center was Hanna. *She* wondered what was going on since Hanna didn’t show up for more than half a year.

She sniffed once before drinking the coffee. Now that *she* thought about it, she was able to meet Maru properly thanks to Hanna.

She looked at Maru who stood next to Hanna. When that cheeky guy showed up to *her* appointment with Hanna, she was startled out of her wits. Even now, *she* just laughed whenever she thought about it.

Who would’ve thought they would end up dating?

“No, that’s not it. Let’s become more honest. You know? I get angry when I can’t do what I want to do. I get annoyed when there’s a menu I want but someone recommends something else. When that happens, I tell them: I like cheonggukjang better. Do you really think that your girlfriend, who’s sitting right over there, really gladly yields to you whenever she does?”

“Uhm, that’s....”

“You don’t have to hold back. The only people here are you, the one you love, and a quack doctor who loves to chat. There seems to be something like eyes floating around, but you don’t need to mind those. It’s not like you’re going to see them again after this. The only one you need to care about is the man in front of you.”

She breathed out a warm breath as her eyes chased Ganghwan’s hands. Ganghwan was pointing at the man who came up to the stage, as well as the lady sitting in the front row.

The man who originally came up to boast that his girlfriend was kind and that she was a good person who always listened to his words was now looking at his girlfriend with eyes full of worry.

It was a nervous silence. Everyone, including *her*, was staring holes into the lady’s mouth. *She* thought that this was a play filled with light jokes and dynamic skits, but it seemed that it wasn’t that light-hearted. Well, the post on Acting Street said that the essence of this play was ‘the uncomfortable truth and an even more uncomfortable fact’.

“Actually, yielding itself isn’t that fun.”

As it was a small voice, it probably wasn't heard by the rest of the audience. Ganghwan stood at the edge of the stage and kneeled down on one knee.

"Would you like to talk on the stage? I'm not forcing you or anything. However, you need to keep this in mind: what we want to hear from you on the stage are not lies."

Maru gave the microphone to the lady. The lady hesitated for a little before coming up on the stage with a nod. People's applause followed.

"This man is such an immature man. However, he's a really good man at the same time. Sometimes, he would ask me if he should stop working and pursue what he wants to do. Oh, we are planning to get married next April."

"Congratulations," Ganghwan said.

When the actors on stage applauded, the audience also cheered and followed suit.

"Thank you. We'll strive our best to live just as much as you cheered for us. Oh, that's not it. Anyway, whenever he tells me that, I always tell him to try. Of course, I'm not saying that light-heartedly. I'm always scared whenever I say it. Marriage is a reality after all. Both of us will be thirty in a while, we'll have a baby, and when that happens money will become extremely important. Even more than now."

The woman put her hand on her chest in nervousness and heaved out a shaky breath. The breath spread around through the microphone. She was unable to continue speaking for a while. The man sitting on the chair approached her and grabbed her hand right at that time.

The two took the center stage, and the four actors that filled the stage until just now took a step aside. The sun had completely set and the skies had darkened. The faint lights installed on the walls of the Arts Theater lit the stage up.

"But there's only one life, isn't there? Our life together may be important, but so is my husband's life. I do not want him to sacrifice himself for me, and the child. It will be hard, yes. Giving up on a stable job and starting anew will definitely be hard. We might lack money and perhaps one of us, no, both of us might have to break our savings account. We might regret it. Why were we so reckless back then? But I don't want to force my husband to bend himself for the reason that it's for 'us'."

Her breath was abated as she looked at the lady. The lady's voice sounded like she was crying.

"I keep digressing. The original question was about yielding, right? I'm also quite greedy. I want to wear pretty clothes, buy pretty shoes if I see them, and I'm also interested a lot in interior design, so I always imagine the house we'll live in and decorate it in my mind. However, there's one thing that makes me happy above all else. It's this man's smile. When this man's smiling like an idiot when I'm unhappy, I feel really good for some reason. All of the pressure from my problems are alleviated thanks to his smile. The opposite is true as well, when I see him sad, I don't feel happy no matter how pretty the clothes I'm wearing are, and no matter what kind of delicious food I eat. Yielding? I'm not doing that because I'm kind. It's all for myself. It's because I feel hurt when he's crying, and I have it several times harder when he is having a hard time. That's why I try to let him do whatever he wants."

But I am a little afraid - she was about to continue when she put the microphone down and started wiping her eyes. While the man was at a loss on what to do, she could see Maru pushing the man's back.

The man, who took a step without knowing, took another step of his own will and hugged the lady that was crying.

A slow applause started.

She, who was watching the whole scene, was a little envious of the two people's love and took a glance at Maru. At that moment, *she* had the feeling that the smile on his face looked a little mature.

"Huh?"

She could feel tears dropping from her eyes. It wasn't that *her* eyes had dried out due to the wind. It wasn't because of the beautiful couple who would become married soon either. The tears just fell without any reason at all.

Why was *she* like this? The droplets kept falling. *She* hurriedly took out a tissue from her bag. It was peculiar. *She* was crying all of a sudden.

She knew that she was a girl with a lot of tears, but she also knew that she wasn't so feeble that she would start crying for no reason.

She crouched down in panic and raised her blanket. *She* tried touching the pile of plastic chairs and also tried ripping out the fluff on the blanket as well.

She thought that she had calmed down, but for some reason, she started crying again. *She* really didn't feel sad at all. In fact, she felt jealous of the couple in front of her. But why were there tears?

Mysterious tears flowed out of *her* eyes for around a minute. *She* kept fidgeting as she wiped her tears off in fear that Maru on the stage might take notice.

"Why am I like this?" *She* muttered to herself after her seemingly endless tears stopped.

It was strange. *She* closed her eyes. Neither *her* heartbeat nor her breathing rate was in disarray. *She* still felt good. The tears that fell without any signs, like rain without clouds, just disappeared without leaving any meaning.

She looked at the wet tissue in a daze before taking out a hand mirror from her bag. *Her* eyes reflected in the mirror were bloodshot.

'It's good that I didn't put on thick makeup.'

The faint traces of tears were at a level where she could just wipe them off by rubbing with *her* hands. *She* put the mirror and the tissue in her bag before taking a deep breath. A soft wind brushed past *her* eyes, but perhaps due to the moisture from the tears, it felt very cold.

Meanwhile, the couple on stage thanked each other and were getting ready to leave the stage. The slight unease on the lady's face was gone now. *She* didn't know what promise the man made to her, but she felt that it was good that things turned out well.

She looked at the couple that went down after receiving presents. *She* cried when she looked at the two people and Maru together. Did *she* subconsciously feel sad about that scene?

"That's not it though."

She felt extremely fresh right now to the point that she could smile. There was no room for any tears to butt in. *She* pressed down on her eyes with her palms. Was *she* tired because of shooting the sitcom? *She* raised her head after the light massage to find out that Maru was looking at her with confusion.

She made an awkward smile and just shrugged as though to indicate that nothing had happened. There was no way Maru would be able to find tears which were blown away by the wind.

After watching *her* for a while, Maru chuckled before looking at the audience again. It was fortunate for *her*. He would've definitely been worried if he found out that *she* had cried for no reason.

'I should get some good sleep when I get home. I must be lacking sleep.'

Just as *she* thought that she caught a glimpse of a lady standing opposite to her. That woman, who was wearing a white suit, was holding a pocket watch in her hands, and she was looking at *her* with eyes that seemed to be lacking something.

The figure looked familiar. No, it was a complete stranger. *She* didn't get it. That woman looked pretty, yet not pretty, and *she* felt that *she* had seen her somewhere before, yet it also felt like *she* had never met her before.

'Who's that?'

Since *she* was staring at her, she looked around to see if there was anyone around, but they were the only people there.

She wondered if the woman was looking at her, but when she turned to look at the woman again, the woman had disappeared. *She* tilted her head and looked at the other side of the stage, but the woman in a white suit couldn't be seen anymore.

No, wait. A white suit and a pocket watch?

That kind of outfit was way too eye-catching. *She* wondered if she made a mistake.

At that moment, *she* had the feeling that she had forgotten about something important. What was this feeling? *She* felt as though she had forgotten something perhaps more important than her own life, and had just remembered it.

"What's wrong?"

Hearing the voice, *she* raised her head. Maru was looking at *her* worriedly. The moment *she* looked at his face, the feeling that she had lost something completely disappeared as though it never happened in the first place.

"With what?"

"You were in a daze."

"It was fun. It was touching as well."

"You're not hurt anywhere?"

"I'm completely fine, thanks."

She looked directly into Maru's eyes that were staring at her. When *she* did, Maru nodded.

"If you feel cold, just take out another blanket. The wind is cold."

"Oh, okay."

"We're going to finish soon so wait just a little more."

"Alright," *she* said with a smile.

The thoughts about the woman in a white suit, the tears, and that strange sensation had all disappeared.

Not sure how to describe this, so here's a instead.

Chapter 464

"I started designing an open stage-play like this one year ago when I lived homeless for a while," Ganghwan, who sat at the edge of the stage, spoke into a microphone.

The performance was over, but the audience stayed in their places.

"I came across all sorts of people in front of the station. Those that were born and raised in Seoul, those from Incheon, Busan, et cetera. Not only were our hometowns different, but our stories were also different as well. Writing a debt guarantee for someone else, failing business, familial trouble, and someone even told me that he was just fed up with the world. I could write dozens of books just by writing down the stories I heard there."

The reason why people, despite the cold and the time, still stayed was probably thanks to Ganghwan's voice. The strong sense of faith embedded in his nonchalant voice was what attracted people.

"Everyone was different, but there were a few things that were the same. It was that they all wanted to tell their story. They always said that they wouldn't be in that situation if someone listened to their story. At that time, I felt the need for a window of communication. However, I didn't want to do something amazing. That's why I thought about something that I could do in a small scale play. That's how this came about. I created a stage where anyone can talk about themselves. But today, I was a little overwhelmed, overjoyed, and even a little worried when I saw so many people here."

Maru started cleaning things up as he listened to Ganghwan's story.

First, he had to collect the heaters. As they weren't topped full of lamp oil in case of an accident, they should all have been turned off by now. If they knew that so many people would've gathered, they would have prepared more oil.

"Anything I can help you with?" She, who was watching from the side, asked.

"Sit down. You're a guest, you don't need to do anything."

"I don't want to just stay still. Should I collect the blankets?"

She wasn't someone who would stop just because he told her to, so he asked her to do it. *She* hummed as she walked amidst the people.

"Your girlfriend's pretty," Sooil approached him and said in a small voice.

"*She* sure is. Not only that, *she* is cute and kind to boot."

"Good for you. You're dating and all."

"You should do it as well."

"I want to do it, but I can't."

"Is it because of your contract?"

"Our president isn't that petty. It's just... I become hesitant due to various reasons."

"Sure, you do, even though you're so young."

Sooil raised his head and said that 'he was an expensive man'. Maru suddenly remembered the lady in front of Sooil's apartment last time. He came across that woman as he was going home after taking the drunk Sooil home. The way she offered him a 100 thousand-won cheque like it was nothing and then throwing it on the ground after he refused left a deep impression on him.

"Are you the youngest of your house? Did your parents dote on you when you grew up?" He asked in a roundabout way.

"I do have an older brother, but that doesn't mean I was doted on when I grew up. I was raised quite strictly actually."

"Really?"

An older brother huh. Then was that woman he saw back then a relative of his? Or perhaps his brother's girlfriend? As it was never fun to pry into someone else's family circumstances, he decided to put his curiosity to rest there.

"Please collect the heaters on that side."

Sooil nodded and walked to the other side. Maru gathered the heaters on one spot before stretching his waist. He could see her walking amidst the audience collecting blankets. He would probably get hit if he described *her* as a weasel, so he decided to describe her as a squirrel instead. *She* was able to shuffle around in the crowd so easily yet she was had such a hard time joining the audience before.

"Here!"

She returned with her arms full of blankets. *She* looked dispirited when she was sitting down, but right now, she was full of vitality.

"*She* probably has itchy feet or something."

"What was that?"

“Nothing. Rather than that, aren’t you cold? The weather’s gotten really cold. You should’ve worn pants instead.”

“So, you don’t like it?”

“It’s pleasing to my eyes for sure, but I was worried that you would feel cold.”

“Urgh, you’re such a creep when you talk.”

“Aren’t you used to it by now?”

“I hate myself for being used to it. Wait, now that I think about it, are you sure you didn’t get that habit from Hanna-unni?” *She* asked as she looked at Hanna on stage.

Maru shook his head lightly once.

“I’m still far off from reaching her level. The sheer concentration of jokes is different when it comes to her.”

“Well, I guess that’s true. If she decides to go at it for real...”

She became silent as though she had remembered something. The fact that *her* cheeks turned red shouldn’t just be because of the cold. Maru wanted to ask *her* what she heard, but he didn’t say anything when she clenched her fists and got into a boxing position. Just where the hell did *she* learn boxing?

“Do you know when it’s going to finish?” *She* asked carefully.

Maru was startled and looked at his watch. It was just past 9 p.m.

“Wait a minute.”

“Uhm, I can just wait. I asked just in case. I mean it.”

Maru looked at *her*, who grabbed his arm and shook her head.

“Have you had dinner?”

“N-no.”

“When did you come to Daehak-ro?”

“Around four, I think? I walked around by myself for a while and then watched a play before coming straight here.”

“Hey, you should get your meals on time at least.”

Maru clicked his tongue as he looked at the back of *her* hands, which had turned pale. He told *her* to stay before going to the stage. On the stage was a man with a camera as well as a woman with long hair. Since their performance was over, Ganghwan and Hanna shouldn’t have invited someone on the stage, so he was confused. Just then, he saw Sooil, who was standing by the heaters.

“Who are they?”

“Journalists apparently. They’re doing an interview.”

“For TV?”

“No, I don’t think so. I think it’s the local newspaper.”

“Really?”

“Anyway, that’s some proper advertising. Low investment, high returns. My father would love to hear that.”

Sooil smiled bitterly as he turned around.

Ganghwan’s voice echoed in his ears. Maru remembered him saying that he could write dozens of books if he compiled the stories he heard from other people. It seemed that this boy over here also had a story long enough to write a whole book. Maru patted Sooil’s shoulders. Sooil blinked his eyes.

“What are you doing?”

“What am I doing? I’m encouraging you. It’s free, so you can take as much as you want.”

Sooil chuckled before moving away, saying that he was okay.

“Anyways, is *she* going to keep waiting there?”

Sooil pointed at her, who was looking at the stage from afar.

“I was just about to tell Ganghwan-hyung that I was going to leave first. But now seems like a bad time.”

Maru looked at Ganghwan and Hanna who were doing an interview. They were holding a conversation amidst the applause of the crowd, and it was somewhat unfitting to interrupt at this point. He watched for a while before sneaking up the stage when they were taking photos.

“Uhm, hyung.”

“Oh, Maru. I was just looking for you. Let’s take a photo together. Where’s Sooil?”

“Over there.”

Ganghwan shouted at Sooil, who was below the stage, to come up.

“Hyung, I think I need to leave first.”

“Right, *she* must be waiting. Sorry about that. I should’ve thought about it. Then go after taking a photo. I don’t want you to be disappointed by not being in the photo after preparing all this time. Uhm, sir, I’m going to put these two in the photo as well. Half of this play can be attributed to these two after all.”

The four of them stood in a line and hung their arms around each other. After a few shutter sounds, the man with the camera said that it was done.

“Then I’ll take my leave first.”

He was just about to leave after saying goodbye when the female journalist held him back.

“Is your name perhaps Han Maru?”

“That would be me, yes.”

“Aha, then you must know who Mr. Kim Seokjoon is, right?”

Kim Seokjoon? Maru shook his head. He had never heard that name before.

“But he seemed to know your name though... he’s the man who became a hot topic recently. He said that he was able to restart acting thanks to you.”

“Oh, do you mean the man who said he was afraid of the camera...?”

Maru thought about the man who decorated the final piece of the puzzle during their first trial run. The man who had spoken about his life. Actually, what left an impression on him was not the man’s life itself, but the strange phenomena that happened to him back then.

“That’s him. He wanted to thank you since it was because of you that he was able to talk about everything that day.”

“Ah, right.”

“Don’t you have anything you want to say to him? I want to put it as a question when I interview him again.”

“Just tell him that he shouldn’t miss the opportunity he got again. Also, I didn’t do anything. It was his courage that allowed him to grab the opportunity.”

Maru bowed to her before getting off the stage. A shutter sound could be heard once again.

“That person seemed to be asking you about something, what was it?” She, who was waiting below the stage, suddenly asked.

“There’s an actor who participated in our performance two weeks ago. She asked me whether I had anything I wanted to say to him.”

“Oh, that person.”

“You know him?”

“It’s thanks to him that the Acting Street blog became so hugely popular. Even I read that post over and over again. But why would she ask something about that man?”

“I’m not entirely sure, but it seems that he picked acting back up again.”

“Really? I’m so happy for him.”

She breathed out in relief as though it was directly related to her.

They say the slightest opportunity triggered a man to change, and it seemed that that man was at the center of a hot issue. The foolish man in love with acting. Was there an item more suitable for advertising than him? Perhaps some theater troupe or some production company might have approached him already. It was a great opportunity to raise a positive image, so what kind of businessman would forgo that?

Like what Sooil said, it was a low-investment, high-return means of investment.

Maru turned around to see the stage. It seemed that things weren't entirely going as Ganghwan initially wanted. So many people had gathered today. If that man's story spread to others, there might be some people seeking to use that stage as an opportunity to make themselves known. Perhaps there were some in today's performance as well.

People with bad intentions always flocked to a large piece of pie. Perhaps today was the last opportunity to watch the play without frowning.

"What is it?"

"Nothing. I just thought that not everything done with good intentions leads to good outcomes."

"What do you mean by that?"

"Kids don't need to know. Rather than that, it's cold out here."

Maru grabbed *her* hand.

"You must be hungry, right? Let's get something to eat. I'm hungry as well."

"Where are you going to go?"

"Meat or noodles. Take your pick."

"Noodles! With soup!"

"A ramyun restaurant recently opened nearby. Should we make a visit?"

She pulled Maru by the arm as though no further discussions were necessary. Maru followed *her* footsteps, as his arms were shaken back and forth by her.

Chapter 465

The sensation it caused was much bigger than Maru expected.

Maru scrolled down with his mouse as he sipped the still-hot green tea. The titles of the news articles on the screen started scrolling down. Touching real life story, true actor, an actor who has gained a new life. All of them pointed to one person, Kim Seokjoon.

After scrolling down a little, Maru clicked on one of the articles. The man, who talked about the failures of his life during their first trial run, was now wearing a neat suit, doing an interview. There were ten such interview articles. It just went to show how many places had an interest in this man.

The story of a man who pursued his dream his whole life would definitely become a hot topic, especially in this time when there were articles about how employment was hard, how self-employed businesses were going out of business, and about a student who committed suicide after taking the CSAT.

Surprisingly, that man managed to shoot two commercials for large companies during the past three weeks, managed to participate in a play that was played in Myeong-dong, and seemingly received a few scripts from a few drama production companies. There was even a fan café about him, as well as an anti-fan café. He was now more well-known than most actors.

“So things can turn out this way too?”

The interview even mentioned that he called his ex-wife. At this point, it felt like the goddess of fortune was focusing her blessings on this man. All of his problems were being solved in such a short time. Even his fear of cameras seemed to have been fixed after the play, so the goddess of fortune must have been present during his participation. No, perhaps there were several goddesses of fortune back then.

At the same time, the interest in the street performance rose rapidly as well. Maru was surprised to see around five hundred people last Sunday, but on the Thursday performance after that, there were so many people that they weren't able to hold the performance in the same place. They blocked the entire road, and even the police came, making things worse. In the end, Ganghwan had no choice but to cancel the performance. The performances they scheduled to do on Thursdays and Sundays were entirely cancelled, and they had not decided on further action. The worries they had after seeing the crowd on Sunday had turned into reality.

From the way things were going now, it seemed difficult to resume the street performance. Ganghwan also said that the essence of the performance had been changed after the performances were cancelled, and from his expression and words, it seemed likely that there would be no further performances. A famous party would attract more people interested in the party rather than those coming to congratulate after all.

“Well, he'll probably take care of things himself.”

Maru looked at the brightly smiling Kim Seokjoon's face before turning off the computer. He could have become jealous in this kind of situation, but for some reason, he felt better instead to see this man do well. That day, among the numerous overlapping illusions, he and this Kim Seokjoon were very close to each other. He knew nothing about him - what kind of relationship they had, whether it was even true that they knew each other in the previous life. There was nothing that he could find out, but if they were really close, wouldn't it be fine to congratulate him and be happy for his success?

“Just what in the world was that though?”

He thought about it again as he looked up at the ceiling on his bed, but he could not get a clear answer.

Forty-five. That was the age he died while he was driving a bus. Just one life. Then what was the meaning behind the several overlapping illusions he saw back then?

“Are you listening to me right now?”

Maru tried talking into the void. There was only one person on Earth that knew the answer to this problem. That woman. The one wearing the pure white suit, and possessed a beauty that seemed to be out of this world. That woman was probably able to tell him whether this was a result of simply chaotic memories, or had a different meaning altogether.

“Can't you come and talk to me just one more time?”

The words left his mouth and spread through the air. There was no reply. Just as he was blankly staring at the ceiling, his door suddenly opened.

“Are you on the phone right now?”

It was Bada.

“No.”

“Then were you talking by yourself?”

“Yeah.”

“Oppa, if you’re gonna go crazy, then please don’t get me involved. Also, the food’s ready.”

Bada shook her head as she closed the door. Maru sighed as he stood up. This wasn’t a problem that he could solve with effort, so he should just give up, but that wasn’t so easy. Those strong images, he didn’t think they were all just imaginary. There was too much missing information in this problem. He could probably come to his own answer if he knew all the preconditions at least.

He pressed down on the side of his head as he left his room. He could see Bada in the living room, holding her bowl in front of the table on the sofa.

“You should really eat at the dining table.”

“I know, but Yooyeol-oppa is coming out.”

“Who the hell is that oppa?”

“You don’t know? He’s from Change!”

Bada waved her arms around in the air, seemingly describing something. She probably intended to imitate an idol dance, but she looked like a baby octopus instead.

“What happened to TTO who you liked so much?”

“The oppas of TTO are the stars of my heart.”

“And what about this Change-whoever?”

“The second stars?”

“Aren’t there things like the sun, the moon, or the planets?”

“Shut up and go eat already. I put your rice in the soup, so do whatever you want.”

When he went to the dining table in the kitchen, there was only a single bowl containing soup. All of the side dishes were in front of Bada. She was such a cocky girl.

He moved to sit on the sofa with the bowl and a spoon. He was watching TV while taking a spoonful of rice out, and just in time, the TV commercial was ending and the program was starting.

“Oh, the sitcom.”

The sitcom in which she appeared was now airing. Last week was the first episode, and today marked the 10th episode. As the viewing rates were quite low since the first episode aired during the week of CSAT, they rose a little with the start of each week.

“Unni’s here,” Bada said as she pointed at the TV.

She, who played the role of a poor high school girl, was going into the main character's house in secret today and was opening the refrigerator. The number of appearances as well as the duration of the appearance was very small, but *she* successfully made him laugh, so it could be considered a successful debut.

Maru had a look at Bada's expression. The scene was when *she* got caught stealing food, and it was a laugh-inducing scene, but Bada was just chewing on food. There were no reactions on her face at all.

'Am I the only one that finds *her* funny?'

He thought that he had to think more critically, but he chuckled whenever *she* came out.

"Hey, Han Bada."

"What?"

"Is *she* funny?"

"*She* is a good person...."

Bada did not say that *she* was funny. Maru stared at the back of Bada's head for a while before giving her a solid smack.

"Ah, why?"

"Why don't you learn to lie a little?"

"I'm really sensitive when it comes to comedy, you know? I can't say something that's outside of my comedic philosophy funny."

"What kind of philosophy is that?"

She was so funny. He was chuckling as he looked at *her* on screen when he felt a sharp gaze hit his face. Bada was staring at him with a spoon in her mouth.

"You're so dumb."

After hearing those words, Maru quietly stood up and walked towards Bada's room. Bada shouted 'what are you doing?' and followed him.

"The card."

"What card?"

"I'm taking it back."

"...Ah, oppa."

"It's only oppa when you want something from me, huh."

"Unni is really funny. I laughed my butt off."

Bada started laughing. Though, it clearly said 'fake' on her cheeks.

"Huh? It's Yooyeol-oppa's voice!"

Bada ran towards the TV. She was clearly seriously addicted to idols. Maru returned to the sofa as well. On the TV, there was a good-looking boy reading a book.

“He’s Yooyeol?”

“Yeah, doesn’t he look cool?”

Bada grinned from ear to ear. Perhaps a photo and a poster of that idol might appear on Bada’s wall soon. Now that he thought about it, she did tell him that she was shooting with an idol. Also, he felt like he had seen that face somewhere. The name ‘Change’ didn’t seem that unfamiliar either. Now, then, where had he heard about it before?

“Unni has it good. *She* gets to see Yooyeol-oppa up close.”

“Like hell,” Maru said as he stopped thinking about it.

He felt like it was a waste of calories to remember the face and name of an idol. He wolfed down some rice before standing up.

“Ah, right. Oppa, I saw a commercial yesterday.”

Maru, who was pouring some water, looked at Bada.

“What commercial?”

“You know, that historical drama. The one that you said you went to the countryside to shoot. What was the title again? I think it was four letters...”

“You mean Apgu?”

“Right! Apgu.”

“When does it start?”

“Third of December, if I remember correctly. Oppa, are you the main character?”

“I’m the second beggar.”

“What the, that’s it? I thought you were playing some amazing role since you went all the way there to shoot.”

“Sorry I’m not playing a significant role. But you do care huh. Even I didn’t think about it until now.”

“I remembered it to boast about it to my friends, but I guess that’s not happening.”

“My little sister, in dramas, minor roles like me have to create the foundation so that the main characters can...”

“But the viewers only remember the main character, don’t they?”

Bada was dumb at times, but she was very sharp at times like this. Maru bitterly smiled before shrugging. She wasn’t wrong after all.

“You mad?”

“Yeah, I’m mad.”

“Then why don’t you pour me some water while you’re at it?”

Maru didn’t know what kind of man would take this girl in the future, but he inwardly apologized to said man. Sorry for not educating her properly.

“How is it going with Dowook?” He asked as he handed her a cup of water.

“Right, since we’re talking about that,” Bada grunted before emptying the cup of water in one go.

“That oppa is not meeting me saying that he’s busy. Something’s clearly happening right?”

“What’s happening?”

“Dowook-oppa is good-looking, isn’t he? Unlike you, that is.”

“Hey, I’m not so....”

“Not so?”

“I do hear that I look gentle wherever I go.”

He couldn’t say that he was good-looking with his own mouth.

“Like hell that’s true. You know that you look really scary if you stay still, right? Not only are you not good looking, you even give off a bad expression. You should always smile.”

“Are you saying that while being aware that you aren’t that much different from me?”

“What do you mean? Mom said that she made you half-assedly, and made me with all of her efforts.”

“That’s incredible. I never knew we lived in an era where it was possible to do plastic surgery within the womb.”

“Why don’t you go look in the mirror before saying that? Anyway, that’s not the important thing here.”

Faces did matter a lot to actors, yet she just treated it as ‘not the important thing’ here. He felt a little sad, but he didn’t say anything since it wasn’t like Bada was going to listen to him anyway. He thought that he should halve her next month’s allowances.

Maru took a glance in the small mirror next to the TV. He did look a little on-the-edge because his eyes were a little narrow, but he didn’t look scary. Just as he was thinking about that, he felt a sharp pain from his knee. Bada had kicked him.

“He even replies to my messages late these days.”

“Let’s just conclude that his love for you has dwindled.”

Actually, the acting club went into a state of emergency because of the winter youth acting competition. The reason was simple - the prize money was revealed. The youth acting competition held in the winter, which was hosted by a business, had a total prize pool of 25 million won. It was several times that of last year’s, and the grand prize was a whopping 10 million won. Taesik declared that he would split the

money evenly across the members, and the kids who originally aimed for the 'title' with the prize, now aimed for the prize 'money', doing their best in practice.

"Perhaps he's two-timing me?"

"You clearly watched way too many dramas. He's just busy with practice."

"No, I feel like something's off."

Bada made a serious expression. Just then, her phone started ringing in her room.

"You got a call."

Bada nodded her head and went into her room. A while later, giggles started escaping her room. It seemed that Dowook had called.

"What a turn of events."

He clicked his tongue and returned to his room, and his phone vibrated as though it was waiting for him. He received a text. He picked up his phone and checked the message.

The contents were simple.

-Twilight Struggles in cinemas tomorrow.

After seeing that message, Maru sighed.

"Does it even make sense that you can't watch the movie you shot?"

An R18 movie.

He acted in it, but he ironically couldn't watch it.

College Scholastic Ability Test. for more info.

Chapter 466

He always thought that he should quit smoking. Dongwook put a cigarette between his lips and his nose and hesitated for a few seconds before putting it in his mouth. He crumpled the empty pack of cigarettes and stood up. It was sad that he lived in an era where he couldn't smoke in buildings.

Just as he left the building, lit his cigarette, and was about to take a puff, his phone in his pocket started vibrating. He stared at the bright red tip of the cigarette before throwing it away while wondering if this was heaven's decree for him to quit smoking.

"Hello?"

-Senior, it's me. Miyeon.

"Oh my. Journalist Choi. What happened that such a busy person like you would call me? Oh! Sorry, I just got something important so I think I need to hang up right n...."

-Senior, I tried digging into Lee Miyoon, and I found something interesting.

Dongwook groaned. This reckless junior of his clearly intended to speak without listening to him. Rather than that, something 'interesting' she said. He made a bitter smile. If that 'interesting' thing was what he thought it was, this junior had a huge misunderstanding.

"You were still doing that?"

-Am I the only one? I'm pretty sure you were on that case as well.

"I shouldn't have listened to you back then. What kind of journalist am I? I'm just an internet journalist."

Dongwook stomped on the cigarette on the floor with his heels.

"So? Where are you right now?"

* * *

"Senior."

Dongwook walked up to Choi Miyeon, who was waving her hand at him.

"Buy me food."

"That's the first thing you say to me?"

"Of course, what else would I say to you?"

"This is a café though."

"Then I'll have some bread."

"Do you really have to open your junior's wallet like that? Aren't you supposed to be treating me since you receive a monthly salary from JA?"

"But you get your monthly salary from Sharon, don't you? I heard that magazine journalists have a pretty decent income these days."

"That only applies to those that get good interviews. I'm already outside of their circle."

"Who told you to go around prying into other people's embarrassing things? You should've stuck to writing rumors. You know, things like who likes who, who and who wore matching shirts. If you dig into idols, you could've created a huge issue. Why don't you stop being the journalist of justice after today?"

"I'm not going to. Also, stuff like that doesn't interest me. What are you going to drink?"

"Something sweet."

Miyeon put in an order before coming back. She took out a few notebooks from her bag that she always carried around as soon as she sat down and put them on the table.

"What's all this?"

"Things related to the 'madam'."

The madam huh. Dongwook opened the notebooks on the table. There were various news article snippets from various newspapers. Ads, press releases, casting stories. All of them were related to the entertainment industry.

“What about this?”

“I tried tracing the changes in the actors after the madam - that is, Lee Miyoon - used her connections to help them out.”

“Connections? You mean this?”

Dongwook made a circle with his left hand and repeatedly moved his right index finger in and out. Miyeon shook her head in denial before slapping his left hand.

“It’s the same thing. Anyway, do you think you’ll be able to find the relationship? All of this will only make sense if you have the evidence that these men sexually serviced her before they scored themselves a contract or an ad.”

“There is a testimony from the actress I talked about before.”

“But she committed suicide. Did you get a recording?”

“No, I didn’t.”

“Well, let’s consider what you say is true. But just that alone can only prove one event out of many. What evidence are you basing your statements on to say that these people have sexually serviced her?”

“I got into contact with someone who used to work for her. He goes by the name ‘head manager Lee’, and he’s a broker who connects celebrities to the VIPs.”

Dongwook faintly smiled as Miyeon spoke,

“Through that actress’s connections. That man also said that he’s having a hard time, that he wants to quit, and that he wants to live a carefree life after putting everything down.”

“What a convenient coincidence.”

Dongwook closed the notebooks.

“Look here. You said that the actress that caused you to jump into this whole investigation committed suicide, right?”

“Yes.”

“A joint suicide with her son. However, the news article said that she was unable to endure the hardships of everyday life. It mentions that in her last will as well. For now, it will be extremely difficult to prove that she was involved in sexual bribery.”

“That’s why I went around asking questions myself.”

“That’s the problem. That’s all the information a mere female journalist without any investigation warrants has found out. Furthermore, a lot of time has passed as well.”

Just then, they were notified that their drinks were out. Miyeon sighed and brought the drinks. Dongwook took a sip before saying that it was bitter.

“Well then. Let’s leave aside the deceased actress and talk about the current situation. An actress belonging to MH Entertainer has caused an uproar regarding sexual bribery. Immediately after that, The Five, belonging to the same agency, revealed the unfair contract incident. Regardless of their relationship, the incident where that actress sued for sexual bribery has been forgotten to the point that no one knows about it anymore. After that, The Five went separate ways, and three of them joined the new agency named Soul. That’s the current situation, right?”

“Yes, that’s right.”

“And one of your claims is that one or more boy idols belonging to The Five was involved in sexual bribery and that Lee Miyeon is involved in it as well, right?”

“I told you that before, yes.”

“To use as evidence for that, you have the testimony of the actress who left MH, but she has already reached an agreement, and that actress does not wish for this to become any bigger. That’s also correct, isn’t it?”

“Senior, what do you want to say?”

Dongwook raised his index finger as he spoke.

“What I want to say is that all the facts that you are speculating are based on the testimony of just one person. All the evidence you have about the previous incidents comes from this head manager Lee that you met through the connections of that actress.”

“No. Of course, I wouldn’t be able to touch The Five-and-Lee Miyeon incident because I don’t have any concrete evidence, but if I spread the evidence I received through the broker, I should be able to one-up them.”

Miyeon spoke in a strong tone. Dongwook squeezed a lot of syrup into his coffee as he listened to her.

“This stuff is bitter even with sugar. Anyway, you’re thinking this, aren’t you? That there’s a connection between the broker and Lee Miyeon, and that you should be able to tie the current incident with the past one once the investigation begins.”

“Right.”

“Miyeon.”

“What?”

“You’re being way too hasty.”

“Hasty?”

“Did your skills rust after you quit the newspaper company? Or did you become blind because you want to beat up all the bad guys with your hands?”

Dongwook subconsciously reached into his jacket pocket and frowned after realizing that the only thing in there was a lighter.

“There are people related to the media in the list that the MH actress showed you, right? What do you think they did right after that incident became public?”

“Clean up after themselves?”

“They should have taken measures so that not only they wouldn’t get in trouble, but Lee Miyeon wouldn’t get into trouble either. If all your assumptions are true, Lee Miyeon and Soul must be tied to each other. I’m not sure if their CEO Hong Janghae is involved with her, or she’s involved with someone else in the company, but it’s true that they now harbor the idols that became problematic to other agencies. But you know? There’s no one that would hug a bomb that’s about to explode. Only after being assured that it wouldn’t explode would they then take it.”

Only after seeing Miyeon nod did Dongwook take out a notepad from his pocket.

“You told me back then in the pojang-macha, didn’t you? That nothing changes even if you know that the king’s ears are donkey ears.”

He opened his notepad and showed her a phone number. After seeing that number, Miyeon widened her eyes in shock.

“How do you know head manager Lee’s number?”

“I haven’t been fooling around after all. While I was digging into the 15 billion won scam, I looked into this as well. It was thanks to a certain junior of mine who went around rampantly like a damn horse.”

Dongwook closed his notepad and told her to call head manager Lee. Miyeon hurriedly took out her phone and inputted the number. She waited with a serious face as she put her phone against her ears, and after a while, she made a dazed expression.

“What happened? Why is this person arrested?”

“That just goes to show that you aren’t the only journalist in the world full of justice. A media journalist who investigated this incident just like you did, persuaded that broker and turned him in. That broker did not deny any claims and received his sentence cleanly.”

“I didn’t know. Just two weeks ago, he told me that I was the only one he told.”

“Like hell that was true.”

“Then this incident is solved right?”

Hearing Miyeon’s words, Dongwook smiled.

“It’s been packaged really well. It’s a typical case of cutting off the tail.”

“What?”

“The list that that broker left behind did not contain the names of anyone important, nor were there any names of celebrities. Lee Miyoon, the woman you hate so much, isn’t in it either. He apparently just connected the prostitution business to ordinary people.”

“No way. He told me that they were related....”

“Consider yourself fortunate that you weren’t the one who called the police. That other journalist that believed in the broker’s words and was preparing to broadcast it through the media has quit as of yesterday.”

“What?”

“In a few days, there will be a small article about it. That some journalist sued some unrelated people for prostitution. It will be a short issue, but the people coming across it will probably think that the prostitution issue is nothing amazing after all. That it was over after the investigation back then. Well, not that many people would have any interest in the first place.”

“I’ll try going to that journalist you mentioned.”

“Unfortunately, that sounds incredibly difficult too.”

“Why?”

“That guy went to Hawaii.”

“What?”

“Hawaii. You don’t know Hawaii?”

“But you told me that person wrote the report.”

“I did.”

“But why Hawaii?”

“People can’t stay just forever. They say a cornered rat will bite, so what do you think a human would do? First, they should have threatened that guy saying that they are going to sue back for false accusation and defamation. Being cornered, that journalist would try to reveal everything to the public, and right at that time, they would approach that journalist with the hand of reconciliation. Along with a hefty sum of money too. They’ll tell that person: ‘That was a good fight. You were splendid. But what good is that? Who would acknowledge you for your efforts? Take this money and have a nice rest.’ Well, they could also promise that person his return to the job. Lastly, they might console the guy by saying that they did their best.”

“Then what about the past incidents?”

“Thanks to a few journalists, they now have a clean ending. It’s to the point that you won’t be able to bring them up anymore. There is that case of sexual bribery of that actress from MH, but there shouldn’t be any room for you to dig into with regards to that.”

“What if I meet that actress again and tell her that we should fight together....”

"I heard she drew the line saying that she will no longer be involved, didn't she? You want to pry into people who already reached an agreement and received the money because of your exhausting justice? You'll probably come across a lawyer before that. That lawyer will tell you to stop digging into something that was resolved already."

Dongwook pushed his coffee cup to one side.

"That's why I told you that you shouldn't do this. I tried doing some investigations myself and burned up my sense of journalism, but this is how it ends."

Miyeon bit her lower lips and put the notebooks inside her bag.

"I don't plan to end things like this."

"I thought you'd say that."

"There must be a way. There are always whistle-blowers, aren't there? Perhaps someone is waiting for us to come to them."

"Maybe."

"Senior."

"What?"

"You said you don't want to get involved, but you looked into this quite a lot."

"That's because it's an opportunity to put my name on a huge scandal if things go well."

"Don't lie to me."

"What do you know about me? I'm the type of guy who was happy to see the monthly salary piling up even when I was a journalist at the TV station. I exchanged my pride as a journalist for candy a long time ago."

"I know that you're only saying those words and don't actually mean it. Let's go, senior."

"Go where?"

"You know this better than me. Tell me where I should start digging."

"I'd love to, but I have stuff to do too. I'm under a contract after all."

"Stuff to do?"

"I have to write about a movie. I need to do an interview as well. The movie produced by the proud JA is finally out, so I should get working."

"So, where are you going?"

"The cinema. I didn't go to the preview because it was way too troublesome. I'm going to watch it by myself quietly and write about it."

"Then let me go with you?"

“Why?”

“Because I’m a magazine journalist. I’ll write about that movie as well in our magazine.”

“It’s not a movie suitable to be talked about in a women’s fashion magazine.”

“What movie is it?”

Dongwook put his notepad inside his pocket and said,

“A movie about a crazy old man cracking open the heads of his own children with a frigging hammer.”

Chapter 467

“And why do I need to watch this with you again?”

“Because I bought the coffee. And also as compensation for not telling me anything even though you knew everything, which made me do useless things.”

“You must know that the world isn’t so easy to....”

Dongwook clicked his tongue as he looked at Miyeon turning around with the tickets. Journalism was a job that would be much easier with a thick face. As such, those that lived a long life as a journalist usually didn’t care about what others thought. Just looking at the junior who was waving at him to come was enough to see how true that statement was.

They passed the cinema employee who directed them to the 3rd theater. It was 1 p.m. on a Tuesday. Perhaps due to the fact that the CSATs had ended, there were quite a lot of students wearing uniforms.

“Over here.”

As the movie was age-restricted, and it was a weekday, they were able to get the center seats even though they were buying the tickets just before the movie. There were people seated throughout the theater. Most of them were men. It was to be expected since it wasn’t the kind of movie that a couple would watch.

“What a heavy story.”

Miyeon was looking at a pamphlet she got at the entrance of the theater. As Dongwook had brought one as well, he wordlessly looked at it as well. The pamphlet had a dark overall color. The first phrase that entered his eyes was ‘the last shout of an abandoned elder’. This movie had the characteristics of prosecuting society.

“It’s far from mainstream.”

Along with a beep sound, the lights turned off. After a few ads and the emergency exit guide, a sudden sound of rain could be heard. A hammer from which red liquid was dripping in the heavy rain was getting a closeup. The frame then zoomed out to show the back figure of an elder holding that hammer, and the face of the man by his foot could be glimpsed at for a while. The sound of the rain was eventually overtaken by the rough breathing sounds, and eventually, the sound of the rain disappeared completely while the sound of rough breathing filled the theater.

The screen turned dark for a moment before the words 'Twilight Struggles' appeared on the screen in calligraphy. The rough breathing sounds continued until the title disappeared, and then the scene changed to show a man who was pushing a bicycle. The clear sky without a single drop of rain and the sound of turning bicycle chains was very relaxing.

Dongwook crossed his arms and focused on the screen. The intro seemed pretty decent. His own breathing was a little ragged as he synchronized with the sound of the movie a little.

"This is a horror movie, isn't it?" Miyeon asked in a small voice next to him.

A horror movie. From one perspective, it could definitely be considered so. The abandoned elder, the killed children, and then there was no one. It was plenty horror-inducing.

'But I'm a little sleepy.'

He was watching the movie since it was a part of his job, but honestly speaking, watching movies wasn't something he liked. Ever since he turned thirty, he never watched a movie at the cinemas. It was rather fortunate that this was a thriller movie though. If it was some sweet love story, he might have left the work to Miyeon and just slept. As for the article, he could always whip up something on the spot. He lived his life like that until now, so he could do that with his eyes closed.

As he had that thought, he saw a pair made up of a man and a woman who hastily walked in after opening the door. Did they get the time wrong? Or was this the only movie they could watch at this time? If it was the latter, he would send his condolences. Perhaps he might be able to see the duo leaving in the middle of the movie.

The owner of a store who was piling cardboard boxes outside his business appeared in the vision of the elder who was dragging his bicycle slowly while carrying cardboard on its back. The elder's smile filled the screen. His smile looked as though he found a heap of treasure. He pushed his bicycle and stopped in front of the boxes and asked if he could take them. The store owner told him that he could with a sour expression before disappearing. The elder sluggishly opened each one of the boxes and was shaping them so that he could pile them neatly on his bicycle when a truck suddenly appeared out of nowhere. A scary-looking man got off the truck and stole the cardboard boxes that the elder was piling and took them to his truck.

The elder watched that scene in a daze before asking him what he was doing angrily, but the only thing that he got back was some insults from the man.

We set the rules on our turf so fuck off while I'm still in a good mood - those were his words.

"Things like that happen a lot recently."

Dongwook could hear Miyeon speaking. When he looked next to him, he saw her watching the movie with an expression filled with pity. She really was a good woman, when he considered that she was also investigating Lee Miyoon. That was why he always had this thought - why did she become a journalist? Someone who sympathizes with the pains of others should not become a journalist. Such people would bring themselves to ruin nine out of ten times because of their sense of justice.

"What?" Miyeon looked at him and said.

Dongwook shook his head wordlessly. He strayed off with his thoughts for a while when he realized that the scene changed. When he thought that he had lost the flow of the movie, his focus decreased dramatically. He started yawning and his eyelids became heavy.

He leaned back in his chair while looking at the screen with his tired eyes, thinking that he shouldn't fall asleep.

However, his eyelids still fell regardless of what he thought.

* * *

"Winter sure came soon."

Dojin sat down while shaking.

"I wish they turned the heater on," Daemyung looked at the heater on the ceiling.

"They turned it on for a brief period last year just before winter holidays, so that's probably what's going to happen this year as well." Dojin sounded like he had given up already.

"What was next class again? Maths?"

"Yeah, it is maths."

Maru took out his textbook as he listened to Daemyung's reply. He laughed bitterly when he saw that the textbook cover looked as good as new. Why was his good memory limited to Korean only? He sighed because the skill that the petty god bestowed on him was pathetic.

"You said the movie was released, right?"

"Yeah, it was just released yesterday."

"Did you watch it?"

"Even if I want to, I can't because I'm underage."

Daemyung nodded.

"You're allowed to shoot, but not watch?"

Hearing Dowook say that, Maru just shrugged.

"Should we go watch it at night?" Dojin asked.

"How? They check your ID."

Dojin kindly explained to Daemyung, who seemed curious.

"You just need to wait until the last air for that movie and go in once the employees leave."

"Without paying?"

"How would we pay? It's age-restricted."

"Wouldn't we get into trouble if we get caught?"

“At most, we’ll get an earful. If you’re so afraid, Daemyung, you can stay out. Maru, you come with me. A friend of mine appeared in a movie, so I must go and watch.”

“I’m going as well.”

Dwook said in a yawning voice. Even Daemyung said ‘me too’ after a while. Maru laughed bitterly after seeing his three friends look at him.

“Hey, there’s nothing lewd.”

“Really? That makes me rather disappointed, but it’s still your first movie, so I should watch it with you,” Dojin said as he raised his thumb up.

“Well, I don’t really want to go so far to watch it.”

Maru pushed on the floor with his feet a little. The front of the chair was lifted up and the center of gravity was pushed back. He maintained the balance of the chair that swayed on two feet.

“Why?” Daemyung asked.

“Because I feel like I’d regret it if I watch it.”

“Regret it?”

“I’m never satisfied with myself when I looked back at something I did. Only the parts I lack enter my eyes. It’s the same for this time as well. I thought that I couldn’t do any better when I actually shot that scene, but when I think about it now, I think I could’ve done better. Of course, there’s a limit to how much I can show since it’s just a few seconds but... nah, that’s just an excuse. It’s just embarrassing. That’s right, I don’t want to go because it’d be embarrassing for me.”

Maru leaned forward. The swaying chair leaned forward and made a loud thud as the front legs landed on the ground.

“Embarrassing? That’s all the more reason to go.”

Dojin and Dwook exchanged glances. They looked like they clearly wanted to go.

“But hey, what’s it about?”

Maru smiled and looked at Dojin.

“You wanted to go without even knowing what it’s about?”

“You told me it was age-restricted, so I thought it was something lewd, but you said it wasn’t. If it’s not something lewd, is it something cruel?”

“It is.”

“Do people die in it? Maybe something about the mafia?”

“No. The main characters are an elder and his children. To explain the synopsis, it’s like the modern version of the parent being buried alive, but that parent taking their children with them to the afterlife because they don’t want to go by themselves.”

“That actually sounds quite interesting. Don’t you think so? Dowook? Daemyung?”

Dowook nodded his head, but Daemyung just smiled. As Daemyung read the novel, he knew exactly what this movie was about. That was why he could only smile at Dojin who thought that it was interesting.

“Anyway, we’re going tonight, okay?”

“I’m sorry to throw a wrench in your plans, but it probably won’t be airing in any of the nearby cinemas.”

“It’s not airing?”

“It’s an indie movie after all. They shouldn’t have procured a lot of cinemas to air it in.”

After telling him to wait, Dojin walked to the front of the class. He turned on the PC connected to the TV in the classroom and opened a browser. The kids in class all told him that they should watch porn, but Dojin just raised his middle finger. The website for the cinema appeared on the screen. Maru also narrowed his eyes and looked at the screen as well.

“I really can’t find any. Hey, Maru! There’s an airing in the 5th theater in the cinema in front of Suwon station. It’s also the last air for the day,” Dojin shouted in a loud voice.

The kids in class all started asking what this was about. Dojin started explaining, seemingly quite excited.

“You shot a movie?”

“Hey, put me in as well.”

“Wouldn’t we get caught if too many of us go?”

“That’s why we should split up. A few of us should wait in the arcade and a few of us in the bathroom. Then we should all go in once the part-timers go.”

“The starting time is 12:40. We should get something to eat from the convenience store.”

“Hey, let’s go.”

“I don’t have anything else to do, so should I? I can leave the levelling for tomorrow.”

Maru frowned and looked at his classmates. Things were starting to go in a weird direction. There were more and more kids wanting to go.

“You really shouldn’t be doing this.”

Maru warned them, but it didn’t work at all. The driving force of high school boys who found something that interested them was quite scary indeed.

“God, these damned lunatics.”

Maru shook his head and just closed his eyes.

* * *

“Senior, you’re really going to watch it once again?”

Miyeon asked Dongwook who went to the ticketing office.

“Yeah,” after a short reply, Dongwook went to the ticketing office and reserved a seat.

“But you were watching from the halfway point.”

“I want to watch the first half again. I don’t remember a thing since I dozed off most of the time.”

“But still.”

Miyeon crossed her arms and trembled slightly. That was because the air in the hall was a little cold and the fact that she was momentarily reminded of the strong image at the last part of the movie. That actor really seemed like he had gone crazy. Feeling as though a dripping scarlet hammer appeared in front of her, Miyeon trembled once again. She once again realized the effect acting experience truly had.

“You should get going. You are busy, aren’t you?”

“I am going to, even if you didn’t tell me.”

“Put some distance if you want to dig into Lee Miyeon. If you get caught by her, you will run into trouble.”

“Don’t worry about that. I think I opened my eyes after hearing your words. Rather than that, is this movie that fun? To the point that you want to watch it again just because you missed the beginning part?”

“Fun, you say?”

Dongwook raised an eyebrow before nodding his head.

“I guess you could call it that. It is within that scope after all. But ‘fun’ doesn’t just mean funny, right?”

“I don’t think I can watch that two times in a row. No, to be honest, I don’t want to watch it ever again.”

“It makes you uncomfortable after all.”

“Yes, it makes me uncomfortable.”

The only thought he had as he watched the movie was the question: what would his relationship with his father be like in twenty years? The movie added the spice known as movie elements into an extremely realistic problem. That elder could be everyone’s elder, and the bleeding children could be everyone’s children. There was barely any gap between the movie and reality that Miyeon had to moisten her mouth with coke all the way through the movie. Struggles - that title was really fitting.

“Yo, journalist Choi.”

Dongwook turned around as he went into the cinema. Miyeon looked at him in confusion.

“Please write a good article for me, so that I get a bonus.”

“I’ll think about it.”

Miyeon looked at Dongwook, who turned around before pulling on his bag strap and walking forward.

Chapter 468

Lights turned on within the theater where the only source of light was the reflections off the screen until now. The lights on the ceiling scattered a faint light and the exit opened. The employees politely saw out the customers who left.

Dongwook stayed seated in the chair as he watched the ending credits roll up. This was the first time in his life that he watched a movie twice in one day. Half of it was because he wanted to write a proper article, and the other half was because he wanted to watch the movie again. That was his mindset as he watched the movie.

He reached into his jacket pocket. He really wanted to smoke right now. Unfortunately, he could only lick his lips after feeling only a lighter in his pocket.

By the time the names of the sound engineers started rolling up, the lights became brighter. The employees started walking around in the theater, picking up any leftover popcorn and coke that the customers left behind.

Dongwook stood up after feeling the gaze of an employee. He left through the exit and immediately got on the elevator. He visited the supermarket on the first floor and got six cans of beer and some dried squid before going to the counter.

“These and a pack of This Plus.”

He took the plastic bag and headed to his car which he parked in the parking lot. He put his stuff on the passenger seat and opened the pack of cigarettes. He put one in his mouth before lighting it up.

“They made a fucked up movie, those people.”

He puffed in a deep one. This was the first time he felt disgusted after seeing a video media ever since he watched a documentary about kidnappers when he was still pondering over what justice was all about. It really was a damned movie. He could still hear the sound of the hammer ripping apart flesh reverberating in his ears.

He flicked the cigarette away before getting in his car. His fingers were itchy already. He wanted to start typing on the laptop keyboard which was practically his twin. If he expressed his current feelings in words, the article should probably turn out pretty well.

Arriving at home, Dongwook brought a can of beer and the dried squid and sat in his living room. He turned on his laptop and opened a word processor. On the top of the first page, he wrote down the key topics: the joys and sorrows of an elder living by himself, the meaning of family, the fatality of insurances, the meaning of ‘support’ in the perspective of the era.

The movie threw a hard-to-handle question to its audience from the get-go. Who is going to look after the sick elderly? That kind of topic was too common, and probably wasn’t an item that was worthwhile, so the movie did not use it. Now that he thought about it, he heard that the movie was based on a novel, making him wonder if he should read it. However, he soon put that notion away since he felt awful just watching the movie, so there was no need to feel even worse by going that far. The other

critics should have done their job regarding the published work. His job was supposed to praise and criticize the movie that JA invested in.

Dongwook drank some beer as he pressed on his keys. His fingers, being boosted by the power of alcohol, hopped around the keyboard without getting tired.

After a chaotic round of typing, Dongwook grabbed the beer can again. The can was light, though, he didn't remember when he finished it. Just five meters away from him, there was cool beer inside the refrigerator, but it was nearly impossible to go there and get it right now. Once he lost his momentum, he would no longer be able to proceed.

He rotated his aching wrists before starting to write again. Only after writing five pages of text did he groan and do some stretching. His neck and shoulders screamed by making cracking sounds.

Standing up, Dongwook went over and opened the refrigerator, taking out a cooled canned beer. To replace the dried squid, he cooked a pot of ramyun. He brought the boiling ramyun and the cool beer with him as he sat in front of the laptop again. Now was the time for some relaxation. He turned the TV on and raised the volume up before looking at his laptop screen. What he had to do now was start reading from the beginning and remove things he didn't want.

Actually, the length of the article wasn't really a problem. Ever since he joined JA, all of his articles were being used by various media as a written-by-a-guest format. That was thanks to the power of Lee Junmin, the CEO. Popular celebrity magazines, internet magazines, and even movie magazines would use his articles. Of course, there were a lot of cases where it didn't pass the editorial department of such media and was returned back to him with requests for edits, or was simply ignored outright, but Dongwook did not care about that. After all, the number on his salary did not change depending on the number of media his article was used in. If this situation continued for a long time, and he started desiring reputation, he might have a change of mind, but as of now, he didn't have any complaints at all.

Despite that, the reason he edited his writing over and over, was because of his habit. He wanted to satisfy himself. Only when he removed parts of his writing and decreased its overall length did he feel that he was working. It was his way of acknowledging that he had a proper job.

He ate a mouthful of ramyun before going over to the next button.

As he wrestled with the backspace button and the undo button, the number of empty beer cans increased to four on the table.

"I guess that's done then?"

He put the final period before looking at the TV. The daily drama that aired every Sunday at 8 in the evening was just about to start. It had been a long time since he forgot about the time as he was immersed in work.

After reading the finished writing one last time, he changed the filename. Now, all he needed to do was to send it to Junmin. Junmin would then take care of the rest. Just as he attached the file to the email and was about to press send, he stopped.

He opened the document again and added one more line at the end. The content was quite simple.

-The future of the high school actor that acted as the delinquent in the middle of the movie looks quite promising.

“This is what’s good about it, okay?”

Dongwook smiled nonchalantly and sent the mail as he thought about Maru who would be nodding his head if he learned of this.

* * *

“Aren’t you guys going home?”

“What are you talking about at this point?”

“Then let me go home at least.”

“Hey, who do you think we’re here for? You can’t leave.”

“Who told you to be here in the first place?”

Maru clicked his tongue as he looked at his giggling friends. It was 9:50 in the evening. Miso’s lectures ended last week, and the play he was preparing with Ganghwan also came to a stop, so he wasn’t that busy. Today was the day he could go home and relax, but he was dragged by his classmates to Suwon station.

“Let’s get going. It’s almost 10.”

The kids that were playing games while shouting loudly all grabbed their bags and stood up. They left the male high school student’s den that was the PC-bang and looked around before one of them pointed towards the convenience store.

“Let’s go there and get something to eat.”

“I’m getting samgak-kimbap.”

“I’m getting ramyun.”

“Hey, can you guys treat me, I don’t have any money right now.”

There were twelve of his friends in that group. Dowook and Dojin were the leaders.

“Sheesh, it’s nothing special.”

“One of their classmates appeared in a movie. It’s not surprising everyone wants to watch it,” Daemyung said.

Maru shook his head.

“It’s not that they want to watch it, but that they just needed to do something to kill time. It should be much better to go home and sleep though.”

There were still around three hours until 1 a.m. Maru wondered just how they were going to spend all that time.

“Hey! Come here!”

“Don’t think about running away!”

His classmates all shouted in front of the convenience store. The passersby all looked at them. Maru walked towards the convenience store while acting like he was completely unrelated.

“Are you guys preschoolers? Stop screeching all the time.”

“We were worried you’d run. Dowook says everything’s on him. Let’s pick.”

As expected of the son of the oil-rich, Dowook bought most of the snacks for acting club practice as well. They picked a few items to eat before leaving. As they were excited before they committed the deed, they didn’t seem to be affected by the cold, from how they were giggling and chatting in front of the convenience store. Maru asked the others as he drank the hot ramyun soup.

“What are you guys going to do until 1 a.m.? Why don’t you just go home?”

“Go home now? I already told my parents that I’ll be studying with the others.”

“Me too.”

These guys lied like it was nothing.

Maru pressed between his eyes. What was he supposed to do with these kids?

“Hey hey, there’s the red light district next to the station. Do you want to sneak there?”

“What’s a red light district?”

“A fucktown, duh.”

“There’s something like that?”

Maru threw his chopsticks at the guys that had a lewd smile on their face.

“That place disappeared a long time ago. Also, you guys should do something more decent. If you use your middle leg in the wrong place, you might ruin your lives.”

They didn’t seem to have any actual intentions to go as they just shrugged and moved on to the next topic.

Around thirty minutes passed after they started eating the food they bought from the convenience store.

“Hey, it’s getting cold.”

“We have to wait two more hours, huh. Dammit, I’m going to go.”

“Me too.”

That was the privilege of those at their age who did things on impulse. Maru hit the Adam's apple of those that just waved their hands as they were about to go home. They left after saying their goodbyes.

“You guys should just go as well. It’s nothing fun to watch,” Maru said to Dowook, Dojin, and Daemyung who still remained.

“You’re sure that there’s nothing lewd in it, right?” Dojin asked.

Maru nodded.

“Then I guess I’m going to go as well. I don’t have any energy after seeing those guys leave. Dowook, let’s go,” Dojin hooked his arms around Dowook’s shoulders as he said that.

Dowook flicked his arm away angrily, but Dojin just smiled and hooked his arm again.

“Shoot something more famous next time, so that we can watch it during the day. What the hell are we doing, I wonder,” Dowook complained.

“I never told you guys to do this, you know? Stop talking nonsense and just go home.”

Dojin and Dowook waved their hands before leaving. The only one left now was Daemyung.

“You aren’t going?”

“Aren’t you going home?”

“Huh? I want to watch it though. It’s Joon-hyung’s work that’s been adapted to a movie, right? I want to watch it. I want to watch it and compare it to the original work and see how video is different from writing.”

Daemyung spoke with clear eyes. Maru did not dare tell him to do something unnecessary when he saw Daemyung’s eyes.

“Alright. I guess it’s a form of study for you. Then good luck with that. It’s cold, so you should go to the nearby fast food restaurant or something before you go there.”

He turned around after saying that. Just then, a burly hand was placed on his shoulders. Maru did not turn around and just twisted his body to get out of his grip, but he wouldn't budge.

“What now?”

“How am I supposed to do it alone?”

“Do what?”

“The movie... I’m a bit scared to go by myself.”

“Daemyung. There won’t be anyone there once it goes past one o’clock. You just need to look around before sneaking in.”

He explained in kind, but Daemyung did not loosen his grip. Maru’s shoulder started aching. This guy’s gripping strength seriously wasn’t normal.

Maru turned around to look at Daemyung. Daemyung made an awkward smile and asked him to watch it together.

“Just my luck.”

“I’ll buy you the hamburger as compensation.”

In the end, he was dragged by Daemyung to the nearby fast food restaurant. Two men eating a hamburger together late at night was something indescribably depressing. Moreover, Maru became even more depressed when he thought that he would have to watch his own unskilled acting.

“Let’s walk around for a while before going in.”

They walked around Suwon station for a while before going into the theater at exactly 1 o’clock. The hall was completely empty as they had expected. The lights were even off in the snack bar as though they had finished cleaning there.

“Can we really go in though?”

“Let’s not look for our conscience at this point in time.”

“Uhm, okay.”

Maru looked at the ticketing office before walking inside. He went past the entrance blocked by a red line and wondered if he should really do this, but somewhere in his heart, he wanted to watch the movie when he heard the movie sounds all around him. He dragged the uneasy Daemyung and opened the door to the 3rd theater. The light reflecting off the screen was faintly lighting up the audience seats, and there were less than ten people from a glance.

It was an independent movie, age-restricted, and the last show for the day. It was amazing that the staff turned on the movie at all.

“Gosh, this is unnerving,” Daemyung said as he sat down.

His eyes were uneasily tracking the entrance and the exit.

“Don’t you ever get involved in something like a scam. And don’t commit any crimes either.”

“Huh? Why’s that?”

“I bet my entire fortune that you will be caught within the day.”

He was such a naïve guy. Maru leaned back in the chair and looked at the screen. The ads were just ending.

The lights in the theater started dimming. The screen motor sounds could be heard. This signalled the start of the movie. The nervous Daemyung seemed to have calmed down now as he looked at the screen with his eyes wide open.

“Alright, let’s have a look.”

Maru crossed his arms.

The hour of embarrassment was nigh.

Lit. ‘triangular kimbap’. It’s ‘kimbap’ but rolled into the shape of a triangle

Chapter 469

The old man crouched down and started piling up paper and cardboard. The thick paper was at the bottom for support, on top of that was paper, then thin paper boxes, then milk cartons, then books with their covers ripped off were stacked on top, before wrapping everything up with a thick string. As the tower of paper became higher, the shadows on the old man's cheeks - whether it was a dimple or a scar, Maru didn't know for sure - became deeper.

There wasn't any background music. The only sounds that came out through the speakers were the old man's breath that scratched its way through his throat, the thin and sharp sound of thin paper rustling, as well as the occasional sound of cars. Maru watched the static scene with his breath abated. It was the scene of an ordinary life, but there was a sense of tension that made him thin out his breathing.

This movie was about to collapse - this could be felt even without knowing any prior information about the movie. The tower of paper and cardboard started leaning, the soundlessly squeaking bicycle chains stopped, and the noise from the surroundings was completely removed, making it feel as though the old man was the only one in the world. That absolute solitude made the viewers feel uneasy.

"Fuu."

Maru could hear a breath next to him. The breath that was kept at bay with difficulty, had escaped the mouth subconsciously. He slightly turned around to see Daemyung. Daemyung was absorbed in the movie with his eyes fixed to the screen. His half-open mouth was indicative of how immersed he was in the movie.

The scene changed. Yoojin, wearing a school uniform, appeared. She was eating some fruits while sitting on a sofa, and a while later, Suyeon appeared after opening the door. The two looked close enough to be real sisters. The awkward relationship they had during the read-through couldn't be seen anywhere. After the scene of close sisters on screen, the wife of the second son, Joohyun, appeared. Even though Joohyun and Suyeon were polar opposites of each other, they chatted while calling each other mother and daughter. It was nothing new, but Maru felt that money was really scary after all.

Suyeol, who played the role of the second son, talked about their family plans for the weekend. They looked to be a very harmonious family. The daughters, albeit being a little coquettish, respected their parents, and their parents treated them with love. They looked like the ideal family. Although it was a short scene, it was long enough to make the audience understand how much they endeared each other.

The cozy scene that looked like it had a faint orange light to it suddenly switched to a gloomy grey-colored scene. The old man, who was lying down on a thin piece of blanket, violently coughed before sitting up. The faint background melody had disappeared completely. What filled the theater now was the sound of the old man's coughing, and after that coughing, the white noise produced by the speakers themselves.

The back of the old man, who lifted up his aging body, was captured by the camera. The camera wordlessly captured the old man who walked around in the semi-basement kitchen where there was no light from the outside. After a few rattling sounds, the old man sat down on the floor. What appeared on the hexagonal sitting table with its paint scrubbing off, were some radish saengchae with only the sauce left over, some siraegi-guk with just the soup, a packet of seasoned laver, and some hard-looking rice. The camera shot the rice and side dishes on the table in a full shot.

The old man picked up his spoon. The contrast between the harmonious family dinner and the depressing old man's dinner was truly tragic. Behind the old man, who was eating while coughing, there was a shelf on which was a tattered frame of a discolored photo that he took with his children.

Maru felt his displeasure increase as the old man chewed and swallowed the rice with difficulty. The clanging of the ceramic bowl and the metal spoon rang a few times before the screen turned dark.

The scene changed and the crouching old man stood up. It was raining heavily outside. The old man put on a raincoat and took his rusty bicycle to the streets. He stacked the cardboard and paper he found, which should have been several times heavier than normal due to the rain, onto his bicycle before staggering towards a small shop. He took out two one thousand-won bills after much hesitation and bought the castella bread and milk that he had been eyeing. He sat under the roof in the rain and opened the milk carton fully and dipped the castella before putting it in his mouth. There was a smile of joy on his face as he looked at the rainy skies.

Maru laughed in vain when he saw that scene. Such a depressing scene felt rather romantic thanks to the elder's smile. That was the emotional skill of the actor who transcended the depressing atmosphere of the scene itself. The elder, who was eating the milk-dipped castella bread, should have been truly happy at that moment.

"Let's buy some bread and milk when we go back," Daemyung said.

The solitary life story of an old man in his later years continued after that. The old man met some of his friends from time to time and boasted to them about his own children: that his first son had a good job, the second son was a good businessman, and the third son was about to become a teacher.

Some words entered the old man's ears as he laughed.

-But do your kids ever ask about your well-being?

After that, the same life of the old man unfolded, but unlike before, the old man's expression was lifeless. The old man, who looked for happiness in the milk-dipped castella, now ate it like he was chewing on sand. The old man stepped on the empty milk carton as he stood up and then went home to change his clothes before heading somewhere. When he got off the rather shaky village bus, he struggled through some trains before entering a rather clean-looking residential area.

The movie gained a lot of speed from that moment onwards. After a quarrel with his first son, the old man fell into despair after hearing the malicious intent hidden in his son's words, but he went to visit his other two sons with hope. However, the only thing he got in return was the second son telling him that it was a little tough for him to look after him, and the third son who asked him about the death benefit. His daughters-in-law, who used to treat him nicely, now looked at him as though they would a bug, and the elder was slashed by those gazes as he was thrown out to the streets. He couldn't think about going back home and wandered around in the streets for a while before collapsing on a high street.

Maru knew that street too well. He felt pressured as though he had written a proposal and was about to get approval from his superior. Just as the old man curled in on a bench while groaning, some boys walking from the other side appeared on the screen. The group of kids, who were blurred at first as though they were just extras, had the camera focus on them once they stood in front of the old man.

On the screen was his face, and when he saw that, Maru was enveloped by a strange sensation. On the overwhelmingly large screen, incomparable to household TVs, was a full close up of his face, and his voice could be heard from either side of the screen. Jiseok's face could be seen on the side as well.

The line he had been holding onto for a long time flashed past. The him on the screen had already turned his back towards the old man and was walking away. Although it was just for a moment, he got to appear on the same scene as the elder. He felt happy, yet the disappointment of not having done better shook his body. He even felt sorry because he felt as though the stifling tension that the elder built up now had been shaken out of place because of him. Back then, he felt that he had done his utmost best and that he couldn't do any better, but now that he watched it from the audience seats, he felt that it was just 'his best' and not 'the best'. He felt as though the flow of emotions that connected each cut suddenly disappeared out of nowhere. He felt as though it would've been better if the whole thing had been edited out.

"You did really well. It was so natural that I felt unpleasant," Daemyung remarked.

That was good? He couldn't accept that. Maru felt a little angry and felt as though Daemyung was mocking him. However, he soon realized that Daemyung wasn't someone who would do that and that he was being too sensitive.

"That was okay?" He asked in a small voice.

Daemyung replied that he did really well, not just okay. Maru didn't know whether to rejoice or cry. He looked at the screen with complex emotions.

He wondered if he could focus on the movie with his current feelings, but that thought only lasted a moment. When the old man returned home and took out a hammer, Maru put aside all the disappointments he had about his acting, as well as his apologetic feelings to everyone else involved in the movie.

The old man's expression hadn't changed. He neither became agitated nor enraged at the fact that he was abandoned. After eating some rice and cold water, the old man just continued with his everyday life. He picked up waste cardboard and brought them to the junkyard. After finishing his work, the old man left his bicycle at home before taking a bus.

His eyes as he looked outside the shaky bus didn't look chaotic at all. In fact, they were very clear.

-It is not wrong of me to discipline the dogs that grew up with my life as their food.

He said those words as he looked outside. The camera closed up on the hammer that the old man was holding. After that, the scene changed. The third son, played by Geunsoo, appeared on screen. He, who was changing his clothes at home, opened the door when he heard the bell ring. The one that came was the old man who had a smile on his face.

-Father, so you thought about changing the registrant for the insurance?

As soon as Geunsoo's first words ended, the old man swung the hammer he was hiding behind his back. Along with a loud smack, Geunsoo flinched back. He was hit by the hammer, but it wasn't a fatal wound.

The old man rushed up to him while shouting with a cracked voice, and the third son, who fell on the floor, screamed at his father who assaulted him and kicked him back. The fight between the two wasn't the dynamic kind found in action movies. The camera angle did not change either. It was a fixed point of view, and a long take at that. The fight between the healthy son and the aging father was rather funny yet gruesome. Falling down, swinging awkwardly, rolling on the floor, etc. There was no 'clean murder'. The only thing shown on the screen was the struggle for life between two desperate humans.

The hammer that the old man swung hit the son on the top of the foot. Looking down at the back of his son's head as he curled up, the old man swung his hammer once again. Blood scattered. However, there wasn't a lot. The old man panted heavily while looking at his collapsed son before running towards the bathroom. The only thing that could be heard after that was the sound of vomiting which sounded as though the old man was vomiting his entire soul.

Maru frowned subconsciously at that scene. There was no corpse, nor a lot of blood, but precisely because there were only a few visual cues, it felt crueler.

The old man brought a sack. The sack which was supposed to house plastic now housed a corpse. The old man struggled as he dragged the corpse outside. People walked past him, but everyone looked disinterested. The old man and the corpse moved across the busy streets.

* * *

When the movie ended and the ending credits started rolling up, Maru tapped on Daemyung's shoulders. It was 2:20 a.m. The employee that opened the exit yawned as he came in. The customers then started standing up from their seats. They mixed in with the ten or so people and left the theater.

A chill air brushed past his body.

"It's well made, really well made. It's just like the novel. No, I feel like it's even better," Daemyung said.

Maru nodded his head. The core content of the novel he read through from start to finish several times was all in there. Some of the scenes had changed, but the important flow stayed the same. Such editing was only possible thanks to the fact that the original author participated in creating the script.

"But, I don't want to watch it a second time."

Daemyung shook his head. Maru also didn't want to watch it again. Watching once was enough. That was probably one of the disadvantages that movies with bitter endings had.

"It's late. Let's go down for now."

"Alright."

The footsteps of the two reverberated across the quiet hall.

Spicy radish salad (It's not really salad, but there's no better word for it). for more info.

Dried radish leaves and stem.

Chapter 470

"Strictly speaking, it's not an indie movie."

“No, there’s no need for ‘strictly speaking’. It’s very closely tied to money, so how can we call it indie? Of course, the exact meaning might be different from the American market, but going back to the roots of the word, it’s far from being independent.”

Junmin quietly looked at the two men who exchanged words with each other. One was General Manager Park from the distributor named ‘Bolt’, for Twilight Struggles, and the other was General Manager Choi from the parent company of ‘Dasarang Movies’, which was the parent company of Seoul Central Theater.

“There, there. Let’s stop talking about the boring stuff and have a drink. The food here is really good.”

When Junmin called for a waitress, the sliding paper door opened sideways. A woman dressed in a hanbok sat there and took a bow before walking inside with butterfly-like steps.

“Give us some food, and as for the wine, I’ll take your recommendation.”

“Understood, as for the flowers....”

“We’ll call them once we need them.”

“Then I’ll immediately get some food.”

General manager Park grabbed onto the woman’s hands as she took a bow and was about to leave.

“How fair. How old are you?”

The woman, who received the indecent gaze from general manager Park, made a calm smile as she replied,

“How cruel of you to ask a woman her age. How old do I look?”

“About, thirty-five?”

“That old?”

“Then thirty?”

The woman covered her mouth and chuckled. There was a smile on general manager Park’s face. Seeing him pull the woman towards him with some force, Junmin immediately coughed to make him stop.

“General manager Park.”

“Ah, yes.”

“The girls will be coming after a while, so why don’t us men talk among ourselves for now? It might not be fun, but it is definitely necessary,” Junmin said as he picked up a cup of water.

General manager Park was no fool. Although he was a playboy and had an arrogant attitude, he wasn’t an idiot who didn’t know the time and place.

“Right, right.”

General manager Park let go. The woman took a bow before leaving. Junmin lowered his head when he looked the woman in the eyes as the door closed. The woman faintly smiled as though to tell him not to worry about it.

“General manager Park. You should really fix that habit of yours,” general manager Choi narrowed his eyes as he said.

“A man is only a man when he seeks women, no? Men can only be real men if they bed some women and release their male energy. In that sense, you’re too gentle, general manager Choi. Don’t you think so, president Lee?”

Hearing general manager Park’s words, Junmin laughed without saying anything. These two general managers had known each other for a long time, so they didn’t hold back against each other. They even used the word ‘habit’, which was a taboo in business relationships, when talking to each other because they were quite close personally as well.

“General manager Park. Do you know who that woman is?” General manager Choi said in a condescending manner.

General manager Park pouted a little.

“Isn’t she just an employee here?”

“Oh my lord. General manager Park, you seem to have gone blind when it comes to the high class restaurant side of business since you’ve been golfing lately. Do you know where that woman you grabbed came from?”

“Where?”

“Samcheonggak.”

“Samcheonggak? You mean that Samcheonggak?”

General manager Park looked at the door with surprise.

“Consider yourself fortunate that you’re with president Lee right now. She’s not someone you can just fondle like that. If this was the 70s, you would’ve been dragged to the back alley, and... you know the rest.”

General manager Choi lightly swung his fist in the air. General manager Park made a sour expression as he spoke,

“But high class restaurant politics have ended a long time ago. If it was the Samcheonggak of before, I would find them amazing, but right now...”

“Even though the era has changed, there are people with the same connections. I heard rumors that a word from her will switch several politicians on the spot.”

Hearing that, Junmin clapped to gather attention and change the atmosphere.

“Let’s stop talking about that for now. We aren’t here to do politics, are we? We are here to eat nice food and talk about business.”

Hearing Junmin's words, general managers Choi and Park nodded their heads. At that moment, the door opened, and some ladies wearing skin-tight hanboks entered carrying food.

"My, my. My nose and mouth are in for a pleasure, but I think the same can be said for my eyes too."

Seeing the ladies come in, general manager Park smiled. When the lady that was putting dishes on the table next to general manager Park smiled at him, general manager Park couldn't endure anymore and started fondling the lady's thighs. Junmin did not stop him this time.

"Hey, pretty. What's your name?"

"I'll tell you if you call me later. I will be scolded by big sister if I talk about something else while I'm serving food. Please let me go for now."

The ladies walking around the room scattering fragrant scents all left in one go. After looking at the laid out food, Junmin picked up the ceramic pot which was placed in front of him.

"Let's have a drink for now."

"Sounds good to me."

"Very well."

He poured a cup for general manager Choi first, then general manager Park. The one that filled his glass was general manager Choi.

"The drink is so sweet," general manager Park remarked in pleasure.

The three of them talked about general manager Park's daughter for a while. General manager Choi, meanwhile, teased him for being doting, but also indirectly boasted about his son.

"Aren't you going to get married, president Lee?"

"I'm past fifty now."

"Who cares how old you are in this day and age? A man has all of the financial and authoritative power, right? Although age is king when it comes to women, who cares about a man's age. With your money and connections, there should be loads of women lined up wanting to marry you."

It seemed that he was a little drunk as general manager Park bashed on the table as he spoke.

"General manager Park. Do you think anyone will catch our president Lee's eyes? These days it's better to live alone when you're well-off. I also go home because of my son, not my wife. Rather than having your wife nag at you in your later years, it's much better to just not get married and do everything you want."

"I guess you're right about that, general manager Choi. That woman. I wish she would just go traveling somewhere or do something. She's holed herself up at home without thinking about leaving. All I see when I get home is her ready to pick a fight with me, and that really brings me endless headaches."

Junmin, who stayed quiet this whole time in this rowdy atmosphere, thought that the time was ripe and started speaking.

“Since we had our fill in both food and drinks, should we start talking about business then?”

Hearing his words, general managers Park and Choi both put down their drinks. They sat up and tied their neckties again. That was probably a habit for them.

“This is what I like about talking business with you, president Lee. When I talk to other people, they’d always talk about the irritating work stuff first, but with you, I get to have my fill at least. Well then. Please tell us how you’re going to proceed in the future.”

“First up, as I told you before, I’m going to maintain the current number of cinemas in which the movie will be aired.”

“Isn’t that too low?” General manager Park asked as he pushed up his glasses.

“There are 80 cinemas managed by us at Bolt, and that amounts to nearly 600 individual theaters. We’re the number one distributor and theater in the country. I’ve been thinking from the start of our discussion, but considering the actors and the amount of investment you put into this, there are way too few cinemas that air the movie. I thought you were going to just keep the feel of an indie movie, but now you’re telling me that you’re planning to keep the number of cinemas like that of an indie movie as well? Isn’t that a little off?”

“General manager Park’s words definitely makes sense,” said general manager Choi, who had been listening all this time.

“If you air your film in the Seoul Central Theater, then it’s an unwritten rule that all the nearby theaters will air it. Although the movie scene in Seoul is practically under Seoul Central Theater’s control, the flow has shifted to multiplexes like Bolt’s B-Movies, or SC’s SC-Cinema. The production, investment, and even distribution are taken care of by one company. The reason we at Dasarang Movies quit movie production and changed our lane to being the cultural icon is also because we don’t have a way to compete with such multiplex businesses.”

“That sounds like we made the Seoul Central Theater go out of business, making me a little sad,” general manager Park laughed half as a joke.

General manager Choi also laughed out loud.

“It’s possible to gain some airing cinemas if you air your film on the Seoul Central Theater, but if you want to spread it across the country, you would need support from Bolt. Although you put on the mask of an indie movie and even advertised like one, the knowledgeable people already know everything, don’t they? That it’s a commercial movie. As for the contents, well, it is a little on the new side, but everyone should know what kind of movie it is after seeing the amount of investment and the distributor.”

“General manager Choi, that’s precisely what I wanted to say. Since president Lee is in the arts business, I can understand that you want to place your bet on the artistic and cultural part of the movie. However, you invested so much. You should increase the number of cinemas and see results in a week, don’t you think?”

General manager Park emphasized the word result.

“Betting on the artistic side, huh.”

Junmin tilted the empty glass in his hands as he spoke,

“I’m not such a romanticist.”

“I know, I really do. But I really can’t understand your actions on this matter. It’s been three days since it was released. Since only the arts theaters in the countryside regions are putting it on the screen, the ticket sales are seeing rock bottom.”

General manager Choi followed up on general manager Park’s words.

“Although the Seoul Central Theater is airing the movie across two screens at alternating intervals, we can’t handle all the people. Wasn’t this movie supposed to be the comeback piece for the actor Yoon Moonjoong? There’s Park Taeho in it too. I mean, where can you find a movie with Park Taeho in it these days that didn’t hit 5 million views at least? Not only that, there’s Jung Yoonhoe, Kang Suyeol, Ahn Joohyun, and Hong Geunsoo as well. If it was some other movie, these people would all be playing protagonists, and yet they’re side characters here. This is such a movie, so there’s no way it would do bad, is there? People are flocking, and ticket sales are on fire, but it’s not increasing that much because there simply aren’t that many places that air it on screen.”

“That’s good news.”

“President Lee. You should row when there’s still water. Stop making it look like an indie movie and go on the offense.”

“Right, that’s what you should do.”

Junmin glanced at general managers Park and Choi once before telling them as though he was consoling them.

“I was going to tell you soon to increase the number of theaters.”

“I think it’s too late as it is now. Just when are you....”

“I’m going to ease control once public opinion becomes just a bit hotter.”

General manager Park was clearly curious, while general manager Choi seemed to have caught onto something as he stayed quiet. Junmin poured some drinks into the empty glasses in front of them.

“Being common will reduce its value. But if you can’t take it at all, there simply won’t be a price tag. When I told you not to increase the number of theaters, I wanted to increase the value of this movie. Right now, the articles about the movie go something like this: that actors are escaping the commercialization of movies in search of true acting. With such articles going around, if we switch to an offensive strategy and increase the number of theaters, don’t you think that’s being too hasty?”

Junmin locked his fingers as he continued speaking.

“Rumors don’t spread around for no reason. You can always give it a push. This is *the* Sir Yoon’s comeback piece. I cannot accept a half-assed score. Direction doesn’t just occur for movies. There’s direction in business as well. It’s especially true when it comes to culture business. The flow of the

public's opinion will change depending on who does what. There's a limit to literally copy pasting the movie across all the theaters through a colossal distributor and getting views that way. In the near future, once the multiplex movies managed by distributors themselves account for nearly 90% of all movies, there might come an era where distribution is the biggest factor in predicting the success and failure of a movie, but that time isn't now. The audience still has the right to choose what they want to watch."

Junmin closed his mouth and raised his glass. General managers Choi and Park raised their glasses as well while nodding.

"Wait just a little more. The voices of those that say that consuming this piece of culture will raise their dignities as humans will definitely become louder."

Clang – glass hitting sounds could be heard.

"Well, your predictions were never wrong before, president Lee."

"We'll just put our trust in you."

Seeing general managers Park and Choi, Junmin smiled without saying a word