

## Once Again 481

### Chapter 481

'I know that person' was a play about the interactions between a normal person, who was hospitalized due to a mistake, and the patients. At first, the man distanced himself from the rest and told everyone else that he was different. He eventually found out that the people living there are just people just like him, and the story ended after the man talked about his escape plans from the hospital.

"Don't come close to me. I'm different from you people. You know? I'm normal, not a freak."

Daemyung pushed his hands out in wariness. The club members around him stared at him for a moment before laughing all at once.

"He says he's normal."

"Everyone says that at first when they come here."

"I never get tired of it."

"Fine, normal guy. You're the best, okay? So you came here because your head was normal?"

Everyone stood in a circle around Daemyung, held each other's hands, and started spinning around Daemyung. Daemyung got angry and waved his hand outwards, but Aram quickly dodged while Daemyung just fell over like that.

"He's a crazy guy just from a glance."

"Right."

The four people that teased him snorted before going back to their respective places. Daemyung sat down on the spot and sighed.

This was going well. Maru coughed and pretended to open an imaginary door. When he did, Daemyung immediately ran up to him.

"D-doctor! I'm not crazy!"

"Yes, yes, Mr. Patient. You are not crazy. You're just a little sick. But don't worry, I'll make you better soon."

"Doctor!"

Maru walked between the four people, who were lying down neatly on their beds while Daemyung followed him on his knees. When Maru pretended to watch over Dowook, Aram abruptly stood up and started tickling Daemyung. Maru turned around after hearing Daemyung's laughter.

"Mr. Patient. Something good happen?"

"N-no. That woman just!"

"Yes, yes, I know. You must be seeing women from time to time. I'll give you some medicine so don't worry."

"It's not that, that woman tickled me."

"Is that right? Well, then. Princess Choi."

Aram stood up and answered 'yes' like a child.

"Did you tickle this person?"

"No."

She replied brightly like a preschooler before lying down again. Daemyung jumped around in frustration.

"Mr. Patient. If you keep acting like that, I'll move you from the group ward to the solitary ward. Okay?"

"But I'm saying I'm normal."

"Everyone here says that at first."

Maru smiled and left the ward.

"See that? I knew he was a crazy guy."

"He looks young too. Such a pity."

Dowook and Jiyeon commented. At that moment, Bangjoo, who had been still this whole time, started laughing in a loud voice while grabbing his stomach. After rolling around sideways for a while, he turned serious and stood up before glaring at Daemyung.

"Am I funny to you?"

After saying that, Daemyung lied on the floor again, where the bed was supposed to be. After that was Daemyung's monodrama. He utilized the stage to the fullest and talked about the events that happened to him. Maru held the script in front of him and compared Daemyung's acting to the script. At the same time, he looked at the other members who brought out the characteristics of each character.

"Why do I need to come here? Huh? Huh? What did I do wrong? Just who reported me? My wife? She's been looking at me suspiciously these days. No, wait, was it my son? Did he send me in here because I didn't pay his tuition? No, there's no way that's true. Then is it mom? Ah, wait, she passed away."

Maru subconsciously snapped his fingers as he looked at Daemyung who blankly stared into the sky as he said 'passed away'. The rather dazed expression was a laughing point here, and Daemyung brought it out really well. Bangjoo, who had to start laughing out of nowhere while lying down, was doing so at the right time - when Daemyung's lines had a break.

"Uhm, wait," Maru said as he entered the stage. Daemyung, who just finished his acting, spat out a short breath.

"What is it? Is something awkward?"

"It's good, but, Jiyeon."

Jiyeon, who was crouching down with her knees together, raised her head.

"I think you should exaggerate your actions more. I can't tell what you're doing even when I'm right next to you, because your actions are too small."

"Should I do it like this then?"

Jiyoon then pretended to wipe her tears off with the handkerchief she was holding.

"Do you think you can show your face a little more? I get that showing your teary sniffing face is something embarrassing, but if you're too shy about it, the audience wouldn't be able to understand what you're doing with the handkerchief."

Jiyoon nodded before distorting her face a lot and stamping down on her eyes with the handkerchief. Since she was at it, she even blew her nose. She really did have the courage to accept and try when someone gave her advice.

"How cute. Let's do it just like that. Daemyung, what do you think?"

"I think that she should definitely exaggerate her actions like she is now."

"No, I asked if you think she's cute."

"Huh? Uh, yeah."

Seeing the two laugh shyly at each other, Maru clapped before leaving the imaginary stage again.

"Bangjoo's doing really well right now. I can't spot anything off. Dowook, why don't you try expressing your anger in many different ways? This play is supposed to be humorous after all. I think it's important to make the audience laugh with exaggerated actions."

"But I can't really make a sound, you know? It'll interrupt everyone else's lines. Hm, should I try flailing my legs in the air?"

"That sounds good. Try it."

"Right now?"

"You can't exactly do that at home. Okay, try."

"God dammit."

Dowook, who didn't want to do it in front of his juniors, just gave up and lied down before flailing his legs in the air.

"Dowook-seonbae. You look like some fish," Aram said.

Everyone laughed.

"That looks good. Let's try that during practice. It should be fine as long as it doesn't look too disorderly. Also, Aram, your sexy eyes are good and all, but you should look at Daemyung, not me. Looking at the audience is good as well, but you should try it with your fellow actors first, don't you think?"

"That's because you kept staring at me."

"Then I won't. Well, then. Let's keep that there and...."

Maru looked at Daemyung. Daemyung looked around before speaking,

“Let’s continue where we left off. We didn’t make a mistake until now.”

“Alright. Then let’s start from where your lines end.”

Maru took a step to the side and waited for Daemyung to get into his character’s emotions.

The play continued along with Daemyung’s slow breathing.

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“So? What do you suppose we do? Quit? Give everything up just like that?”

“Who said that?”

“How is it different from giving up when you’re saying that we should switch roles at this point?”

“Hey, isn’t it your fault in the first place for letting someone bad take that role? I’m saying that we should set that straight now. Why are you picking on me now? Oho, you’re taking her side because you’re close to her, aren’t you?”

“Are you for real?”

Seeing the two girls - juniors - that looked like they were about to start tearing each other’s hair out, Heewon thought that the mood was seriously hostile.

“Aren’t they going to get into a fight at this rate?”

He could feel Inho staring at him. Heewon asked ‘what’ in a small voice.

“It’s funny when you say it.”

“What’s so funny?”

“At least they look like they’re acting at least. Meanwhile, you’re just....”

Inho closed his mouth and shook his head.

“Seonbae-nim, how was it?”

“I think it’s better than before. But you know what the instructor said. You shouldn’t act realistically, be actually real. Of course, I can’t really give you any advice on that because I can’t do it either, but I think you should make it more realistic.”

Hearing Inho’s words, the two girls looked at each other and wondered if they should actually get into a fight.

“But you can’t actually get into a fight because of that.”

“This is hard. I thought it was okay, too.”

“I’m not saying that it was bad. I’m just saying that there’s room for improvement. You remember the play we all watched together last time, right?”

The club members sitting in a circle all nodded at once. Heewon wondered for a moment when he heard the word 'play'. He couldn't exactly remember the contents properly. He nodded and pretended to know about it since everyone else seemed to. However, it seemed that he couldn't fool Inho's eyes.

"Hey, Lee Heewon. You don't remember it, do you?"

"Why are you saying that? I do remember. I'm not a fish."

"You are a fish. Then talk us through what it was about."

"He's right, seonbae. Tell us what it was about."

His juniors and friends looked at him with a sharp stare. Heewon sniffed.

"Why does everyone hate me?"

Muttering in a small voice, he looked at everyone else. At that moment, a light bulb lit up inside his head and he remembered what it was about.

"Ah! The story is about a policeman! I remember it now, I mean it."

He laughed and scratched the back of his head. The club members booed him before smiling.

"But seonbae. How was it in your eyes? Were we good?" One of the girls that acted just now asked him.

Heewon just said what was on his mind.

"Hm? I liked it though. I almost thought that you were fighting for real."

"Really?"

"Yeah, I mean it."

Hearing that, another junior spoke,

"I don't get what's good and what's bad since you say it's good all the time, Heewon-seonbae."

"I'm saying it's good because it is. If you still don't like it... you make me want to cry."

He couldn't say something was bad when it was good, could he? Heewon truly thought that the acting of the people here was really good, each had their own unique traits.

"Also, I don't have the skills to evaluate someone else."

"You? No way. That's not true."

"What do I know?"

Hearing that, one of his friends sitting opposite of him rested his chin on his hands and spoke,

"Honestly, there's no one here who knows better than you. That's why we're asking. The instructor also told us to ask you if we're stuck on something."

Heewon made a disinterested face. The instructor definitely said such a thing - to help the others out. However, he didn't know how he could help someone else. He had a headache just thinking about how he should teach others.

"Then just show it to us."

"Show what?"

"That scene. Do it in your style and show it to us."

Inho pushed his back. He almost blurted out not to annoy him, but he had to stand in the middle of everyone else when the juniors dragged him with an evil grin. These people had no respect for him at all.

"Your acting was really good, you know?"

"Okay, we get it so show us yours? Show us how you interpret it."

"I'm really bad with things like this, you know?"

"We'll be the ones making that judgement."

"Tell me honestly. You don't consider me a senior, do you? You just consider me some servant that you can use as you wish, don't you?"

He grumbled and tried to sit down, but Inho placed his foot there so he couldn't. He heard that 'friend' was another name for 'enemy', and it really seemed to be the case here. Heewon scratched his head and sighed.

"You won't get anything out of it even if you do see it. It should be similar to you two's. No, I should be worse than you two's."

"We get it, so get into the mood and try."

Heewon took a deep breath. Let's see. It was a fight between friends, was it? He narrowed his eyes and looked at Inho in front of him. How would it be if he fought Inho for real? It would probably make him sad. He would feel depressed at first and lack energy.

Heewon loosened his shoulders. Then, he focused on his breathing and listened to the story he made up. A ticklish feeling welled up inside him. He also felt a lump in his throat, and it was a bit hot. Hot? Hot means red, right?

\* \* \*

"I told you not to do it!"

Heewon waved his hand outward violently before pulling his body back. He then shouted, causing his voice to reverberate in the hall. He stomped on the ground like a grumbling child before flipping his eyes over and saying his lines. His lips were stretched to either side and looked somewhat indescribable. Inho thought that Heewon went through three unjust events just now to be like that.

"It's quite funny whenever Heewon-seonbae says he can't explain his acting. He's so good at it. No, he's scarily good. I think he's much better than the actors on TV. Also, I think that's way beyond the point where he can't explain things to us, but he always says that he doesn't know."

Inho smiled bitterly hearing the junior's words.

"He doesn't know."

"What?"

"He really doesn't know how to explain his own acting rationally. I guess you can say that he can't conceptualize it?"

"What do you mean?"

"Hey. Do you know what it means to see pink light from a smile?"

"What do you mean, pink light?"

"That's what his acting is like. He says that he can see color from emotions."

"Color?"

"I asked him once before about how I could bring out a depressed emotion from within me. Do you know what his reply was?"

"What did he say?"

"He said: gather the yellowish stuff and slap it like this."

Inho tapped on his chest. Seeing that, the junior frowned.

"You don't get what it is at all, right? I don't either."

He smiled and shrugged. Inho crossed his arms and looked at Heewon who was in front of him.

"He's a little different from all of us."

## **Chapter 482**

Heewon breathed out over a long span of time before calming down his emotions. He needed several breaths to calm down his thumping chest.

"That's the gist of it, isn't yours much better?"

He asked his juniors who were watching.

"Uhm, we'll just do it our own way."

"See? I told you that your acting is better than mine."

"It's not that, it's just that your acting is too good. I don't think I can do it like you."

"Me neither," the girls were pouting as they spoke.

At that moment, Inho clapped to gather attention.

“But it helped at least, right? You now know what kind of elements make it look more realistic.”

After saying those words, Inho stood up.

“Let’s do a full run then. Try to reflect on the things you saw in your acting right away. If there are any parts you find lacking or want to change, keep it in your mind and say it right after we finish the run. Also, the staff members should also say something if they want to give advice. Whether that person’s older or younger than you, we’re trying to learn right now. The acting club was just created. We should put our minds to it and do our best.”

Heewon applauded. Inho was really great with his words. Heewon felt that during Inho’s presentation in history class, but Inho’s talking skills really were extraordinary.

“Inho. I really think you should be the president.”

Although he said those words, his opinion was ignored immediately. Even his juniors didn’t agree with him. Heewon grumbled and complained to his other friends, but they only replied to him that he should be the president.

“Just do it. They aren’t making you the president for no reason.”

“It’s just a huge burden on me.”

“What do you mean, burden? You just can’t be bothered. You’re going to quit and become a staff member if you weren’t the president, weren’t you?”

“That’s true, but still.”

“Quit yapping and get going already. The main character can’t be here.”

One of his friends kicked him on the butt. Heewon massaged his aching buttocks and stood next to the club members.

The acting club was created early this year. Inho, who always said that he wanted to do something new during his first year, created the acting club as soon as he became a 2nd year. When he heard the club name ‘First Dream’ from him, Heewon said that it was really good. Up until then, he never knew that he’d be in the club. He was in the computer club as a 1st year, and planned to enter the computer club again as a 2nd year since he liked games.

However, he was dragged by Inho, who was in the same class as him for two consecutive years, and became one of the founders of the acting club, which he thought he would never do. Inho tried to scout his brother as well since they were in the same school, but Haewon was interested in English speaking, and had already set his mind on the study club.

Heewon entered the acting club because he was tempted by Inho’s words when he said that it should be way more fun than computer games, and that he’d buy snacks. That was the start of his pain. Acting, which was supposedly several times more fun than games, was a repetition of studying and pain. Since the club started off with absolutely nothing, they had to do all the research and find the things they



liked by themselves. Only after they invited an instructor thanks to a program from the city hall did they get some time to breathe, but the intensity of learning started rising after that.

In the youth section of the acting competition they prepared for, for the first time, they somehow managed to get 2nd place, whether it was through pure luck or skill. First place went to Myunghwa High, which was known to be the pride of acting clubs in Suwon.

First time participation and yet they became the runner-up. It felt like it was yesterday when they all hugged each other and cried, but now they were already preparing for the winter competition.

'It's fun, it definitely is.'

He didn't deny it. Playing games was fun, but acting was just as fun. However, acting was also hard. There were mountains of things he had to learn. When he realized that the things he had studied until now were merely the fundamentals, Heewon seriously considered quitting and becoming a staff member. A staff member was relatively more free after all. They could also not participate in practice should they choose to. It meant that he would get the time to go home and play games with the others.

The runner-up prize was definitely sweet, but to taste that sweet emotion, he had to endure through harsh practice. They say patience is bitter, but its fruit is sweet, but the patience was way too bitter for him to endure.

As his desire to go home and eat the ramyun his brother cooked for him in front of the computer and run around on the online battlefields was skyrocketing, Heewon declared that he would quit acting and become a staff member. However, the position he got as a result of that was not the position of a staff member, but the club president.

When Inho said that the club can't run without a president, he looked as though he had calculated everything. The result of that was his current situation: gathering on a day off in such cold weather to do practice.

"You guys are so evil."

Heewon stood in the middle after glancing at all of the club members including Inho.

"Let's get this done quickly and go to the buffet!"

Buffet - that word was what supported Heewon right now. Heewon tensed his eyes and got into position.

"Begin whenever you're ready."

Hearing his friend's words from opposite of him, Heewon nodded. Wait for me, ribs. Wait for me, pork belly. I'm coming for you.

\* \* \*

"You should have just been the main character if you had the time, seonbae."

Aram, who walked ahead, turned around and spoke.

"It's just a short break. I might become busy again."

“Are you shooting something again?”

“I need to apply for an audition. There’s not long left.”

Maru pointed at a puddle with his finger. Aram hopped over it.

“New Semester, right? The one you’re auditioning for this time,” Daemyung asked.

Maru said yes as he nodded.

“Hope it goes well. If you pass, I’ll watch it every day.”

“That puts too much pressure on me, so please don’t. Oh, yeah, is the new place any good? I heard that the quality of meat is really bad in stores that are just trying to profit off the season.”

“From what I heard from the guys that went last week, they said that it was really decent, though the price is a bit high. There are things you can eat other than just meat, just like a buffet. Oh, they liked the tangsuyuk there.”

“That’s good then. Rather than that, the guys in our class are really knowledgeable when it comes to things like that. You know, things like good restaurants and noraebangs with good service.”

“It’s because we don’t have after school studies. Everyone seems to flock to Anyang main street or Suwon station.”

It was 3 p.m. A rather awkward time that was neither a late lunch nor an early dinner. While they chatted inside the bus, they soon arrived at Suwon station.

“I think that’s the place,” Daemyung said as he pointed outside the window.

There were flags of various nations flapping outside a building in front of Suwon station. Quite a lot of people seemed to be going there.

“Do you think there are enough seats for all of us?” Bangjoo asked nervously.

He looked like he was about to cry if there weren’t enough seats and they had to go back.

“The restaurant takes up the whole floor, so there should be plenty of seats.”

Daemyung consoled everyone as they got off the bus. Bangjoo and Aram nervously rolled their feet in front of the traffic light and ran as soon as the pedestrian light turned green. After going inside like a lightning bolt, they came back out by the time Maru crossed the street.

“They have enough seats.”

Maru followed behind Dowook since he was the one buying. The salad bar was installed in the middle, while the meat was on one side of the wall, inside a refrigerator with a glass window. The interior design was clean and the rooms and the hall were separate, so this place looked like a suitable place for a company get-together as well.

“Are you perhaps from Hwasoo High?”

A rather burly-looking man approached them and asked. From how the employees were glancing at him in secret, he seems to be the owner.

“No, we aren’t from Hwasoo High,” Aram replied quickly.

The owner replied ‘oh, I see’ before laughing.

“So you’re here with your friends. I’ll put the drinks on the house as a service.”

“Wow, thank you.”

“Okay, eat all you want and tell your friends about it.”

After the owner went back, Maru sat down and asked Daemyung.

“He mentioned Hwasoo High just now, right?”

“Yeah, but what about it?”

Daemyung, who was wondering what it was about, soon realized what Maru was talking about.

“Hwasoo High! It’s that Hwasoo High?”

“I’m not sure if it’s the same Hwasoo High or not, but...”

At that moment, the door opened and a bunch of high school students entered the restaurant. There looked to be around twenty people. One of the students, who looked around by the entrance, approached the owner, who was cleaning up the refrigerator. The owner welcomed him warmly while the student smiled. He could hear a faint ‘dad’ from the boy’s mouth.

“I think they’re from Hwasoo High,” said Jiyeon, who was sitting quietly next to Daemyung.

It seemed that everyone remembered what Hwasoo High was. They looked at the students that were being guided by the owner with curious, or perhaps sharp, eyes.

“Hey, hey. They might not be that Hwasoo High, so don’t stare at them.”

“What if they are? We lost the prelims thanks to them,” said Aram as though she was ready to pick a fight with them at any moment.

Maru raised his hand and blocked Aram’s view.

“Just start eating, don’t pick a fight. I’m really worried because you might actually go and pick a fight with them.”

“I’m not that reckless you know?”

“But you are going to, aren’t you?”

“I can at least ask if they’re that Hwasoo High or not.”

“What if they are?”

“Then I’ll start complaining to them and just start...”

Aram clenched her fist. Maru thought that he shouldn't talk to her anymore and gave a glance to Jiyoong. He signalled her to watch over the reckless girl.

"I'll go get the meat."

"Then I'll bring some vegetables and rice."

Daemyung and Dowook stood up. Aram, Jiyoong, and Bangjoo also walked over to the salad bar. Only after seeing Jiyoong hold Aram back from walking over to Hwasoo High's table in secret did Maru stand up from his seat.

Hwasoo High's table was diagonally opposite to where Maru was sitting. He picked up a plate and walked to the salad bar before sneaking glances at Hwasoo High. They looked harmonious. While putting some kimbap on the plate, he perked up his ears to listen to their conversation.

"Seonbae, you should give it up already. There's no one else for the club president role but you."

"Right. Heewon-seonbae. The position of the president of the acting club has been fixed to you."

Acting club. It seemed that they indeed were Hwasoo High from Seongnam. The reason they came all the way here was probably because of the owner.

"Dad, I'll take care of this."

"Just sit down. If you run out of drinks, you can always take more out of the fridge."

It seemed that one of the members was the son of the owner of this place. The owner was dragged by the student to stand in front of them. Then, everyone stood up and thanked the owner for the food. Their voices were pretty loud, so the other customers stared at them.

"Seonbae."

"Whoa, that startled me."

Maru twitched his lips when he looked at Aram who narrowed her eyes. From her expression, it seemed that she had heard that they were Hwasoo High's acting club.

"So they're the people that made us fail, huh?"

"They didn't make us fail. We failed because we were lacking. Let's set things straight."

"Same thing. Anyway, we would've gone to the regional finals if not for them."

He took Aram, who was staring at Hwasoo High intensely, back to the table. The others also came back and sat down.

"So it seems that they're indeed that Hwasoo High," Daemyung said.

"Then that means there's the incredibly good person among them, right? The one that got the best actor award," Jiyoong asked with curiosity.

Acting club from another school. Everyone looked at Hwasoo High with deep interest. It seemed that they were even more mindful of them because they belonged to an acting club in the same region and

because of the fact that they lost to them once. Daemyung also gave them glances as he placed the meat on the grill.

“But why are there so many people there?” Bangjoo asked.

“Our acting club had a lot of members before as well. You saw the album right? There was one year where there were more than thirty members. Back then, you would have to go through a test to go on stage. Though, I only heard about it as well,” Daemyung explained.

“Hm, due to an accident, the number of members decreased drastically, and thanks to the seniors leaving, we have only six members in the club now, but more members doesn’t necessarily mean better, right?”

“But more is definitely better than less. Just thinking about the pains we went through to make the stage makes me sigh.”

Hearing Aram’s words, Daemyung smiled awkwardly. More members was definitely better than fewer members. There was nothing bad about gaining more labor force.

“Hey, hey. The meat is burning. Let’s eat for now.”

Maru refreshed the atmosphere and directed their attention to the meat.

Everyone seemed to be hungry and started moving their chopsticks without talking about Hwasoo High.

\* \* \*

“Hyung, what are you doing?”

Hearing Haewon’s words, Heewon narrowed his eyes.

“The people over there. I think they’ve been staring at us for a while now.”

“The people over there?”

When Inho turned around, he said ‘ah’ in realization.

“I felt that too.”

“But why? Why would they stare at us? Is there someone they know?”

“Who knows? Don’t mind them and just keep eating.”

Heewon looked at the people sitting opposite of him before picking up his chopsticks. Just then, he met eyes with a girl with short hair, and that girl stuck out her tongue and made a funny face. Heewon flinched and turned around, wondering if she was doing that to someone else. However, there was nothing behind him but an empty table. Meaning... She did that to him?

Heewon raised his head and looked at that girl again. She was still making that face as though she was teasing him.

“Haewon.”

“Yeah, hyung.”

“Nah, just keep eating.”

He couldn't ask his brother to switch places with him because he was scared.

Batter-fried pork with sweet and sour sauce. for more details.

### **Chapter 483**

“Uhm, Inho-hyung,” Haewon carefully called out to Inho.

Inho wondered why Haewon called out to him. Heewon, who sat next to them, also naturally looked towards Haewon.

“Please take this.”

Haewon handed him a stash of half-folded bills under the table. He was being careful to not be noticed by the others. Inho asked as he looked at the money.

“What's this about?”

“When you said that we were going to eat meat, I thought you were going to buy some from the supermarket and eat at someone's house. I didn't know we'd be eating at your father's store. I heard that it's not right to eat for free in a newly opened store...”

“Hey, hey. It's fine. My dad isn't such a petty person.”

“Of course, I know that. But it just tugs at my mind. Please take it quickly. If the others notice, they might feel unpleasant.”

It's just enough for the food - Haewon added before giving Inho the money. Inho refused at first saying that it was okay, but he had no choice but to accept it in the end.

Heewon looked at the two in an awkward position. He was just about to put a ssam into his mouth.

“I brought my wallet too though.”

“Don't you do that to me too and just eat quietly. We don't want the atmosphere turning weird after someone notices,” Inho said firmly.

Heewon nodded and put the ssam in his mouth. His younger brother did what he was supposed to do. Well, it wasn't like this was the first or second time such a thing happened, so he didn't mind it that much.

“Haewon, you should eat some as well. It's really good.”

“Okay, hyung.”

“Also... you can reduce this week's allowance.”

“I was going to even if you didn't tell me. We'll have to eat at home all week.”

“I wasn't serious though.”

“But I am serious, you know?” Haewon tensed his eyes as he spoke.

Although he was a kind younger brother who did most of the chores, he was very rational when it came to living expenses.

"Looks like I should eat a lot then."

"You'll upset your stomach again."

Hearing that, Inho tried to give back the money, but it ended up going into his pocket because Haewon politely refused.

"Heewon, eat a lot, okay?"

"I'm going to eat my money's worth even if you didn't tell me."

He picked up an empty plate and went to the refrigerator to pick up some more meat. He picked up some skirt meat that was piled up like a mountain and reached out for the marinated ribs right next to it when,

"Please go ahead first."

A rather chubby boy spoke as he retracted his hand. He was one of the students at the table diagonally opposite to them.

"Thank you."

He nodded before picking up the tongs. While moving the meat to his plate, Heewon coughed awkwardly and glanced sideways. The chubby boy hurriedly looked away. He wondered what it was about.

'There's that girl from before too. Did I do something wrong?'

No matter how hard he thought about it, he couldn't remember doing something that would make a complete stranger hate him.

"Excuse me," he spoke up.

"Eh, yes?"

The chubby boy replied, visibly flustered. He didn't look like a bad person.

"The girl sitting at your table kept staring at me and teased me. Is there something I did wrong?"

"Ah, no! That's just a mistake of a junior of ours. Sorry about that."

He apologized politely. Heewon was also rather confused because he apologized so easily. He thought that he would try to pick a fight with him, but he turned out to be rather polite.

"You don't have to apologize. I must have been a little sensitive."

"Not at all. My junior just wasn't mature with her actions. I'll bring her here and have her apologize."

"No! Don't do that."

Heewon grabbed the boy's arm as he was about to turn around. He intended to stop him, but he was dragged instead because the boy was so strong. Maybe this was what it felt like to be dragged around by a bull.

"W-wait! Don't."

"No, if she did something wrong, it's only right to apologize."

"Please."

Heewon shook his head. That girl seemed quite strong-willed. Also, she had a good build as well. He thought that he'd lose if he fought her, so he had absolutely no thoughts of meeting her face-to-face.

"Ah, okay."

The chubby boy turned around. Heewon sighed in relief before letting go.

"Uhm."

"Yes?"

"You are from Hwasoo High, right?"

"Yes, we are."

"You do acting, right?"

"Yes."

The boy nodded in acceptance all by himself.

"But how did you know?"

"Things happened. And also, do you know about Woosung Engineering High?"

"Woosung Engineering High?"

Heewon pondered for a moment. He thought that he had heard that name somewhere before, but nothing lit up in his head.

"No, I don't think so."

Hearing that, the chubby boy said 'I see' by himself before smiling awkwardly.

"Aha, so you don't know us."

Heewon was startled when someone said that behind him. The chubby boy was also surprised and took a step back. When he turned around, the girl that teased him a while ago was standing there. She looked very sturdy - despite how weird it might sound for a girl - from up close.

"Aram," the chubby boy said.

It seemed that the girl's name was Aram. The girl looked up and down before snorting and walking past him to the refrigerator.



“Get out of the way so I can take some meat.”

“Ah, okay,” Heewon quickly replied before taking a step aside.

At that moment, the chubby boy tensed his eyes and said to her,

“Jeon Aram, don’t be rude.”

“But seonbae.”

“Aram.”

When said did, the girl apologized to him unwillingly before going back. As soon as the girl left, the chubby boy shrunk his shoulders and just sighed shakily. He looked stiff to the point that he was worried for him.

“You okay?”

“Eh? Ah, yes. I’m not used to doing things like that. I tried acting heavy for once, but it sure is hard.”

“You have it hard.”

Heewon subconsciously ended up encouraging the chubby boy. He knew what it felt like to be annoyed by a younger girl. The chubby boy faintly smiled.

“But why is she acting like that? I just don’t get it.”

“Uhm, the thing is... we are from Woosung Engineering High.”

“Ah.”

“We participated in the Gyeonggi regional preliminaries for the summer competition. Though, we didn’t see each other since it was on a different day.”

“Ah, I see.”

Now that he thought about it, he remembered that an engineering high school got the silver prize in the summer. So that turned out to be Woosung Engineering High.

“That girl is a little angry because we failed to go to the nationals thanks to Hwasoo High. Of course, I’m not saying that it’s because of Hwasoo High. We didn’t advance because we were lacking.”

The boy scratched the back of his head while laughing.

“Uhm, sorry about that,” Heewon apologized.

Even he would be angry if the results were bad when he prepared a lot. Of course, he was confused as to whether he should be apologizing or not, but he felt that it was the right choice when he remembered the girl that glared at him. For some reason, he felt really powerless in front of her.

“It’s not Hwasoo High’s fault. In fact, I should be the one apologizing.”

“No, no. You said that you weren’t able to advance because of us.”

“I said that’s not it.”

“Just let me apologize. Also, tell her I apologized.”

He would probably get an upset stomach if he kept eating while she stared at him like that. Since he paid a lot of money to eat, he wanted to enjoy it as much as possible.

Heewon stood there without saying anything for a while before nodding his head while picking up the plate he put the meat on. The chubby boy smiled and nodded back.

Everything seemed to be going well. But then,

“What are you doing?”

Heewon inwardly screamed when he saw his junior walking towards the salad bar. There was one in his school as well - a scary girl that didn't lose out to that girl named Aram.

“Yeonji, it's nothing.”

“What do you mean it's nothing? What happened? Who are they to say something to you? I saw from the table that some girl was glaring at you. I know that our Heewon-seonbae has a ditzy side to him, but that doesn't mean any random person can look down on him like that, you know?”

“Yeonji, it's a misunderstanding. Also, ditzy, you say...”

“You stay quiet, seonbae!”

“Uh, okay. I'll stay quiet.”

Heewon took a step back and signalled the chubby boy to run. However, unlike his immense physical strength, his personality seemed to be on the weaker side as he looked at Yeonji without moving.

“Did our seonbae do something wrong?”

“No, of course not! We were the one in the wrong.”

“Then why did you surround him and bully him?”

“So, the thing is...”

The chubby boy waved his arm in the air and tried to explain. Heewon realized that it was time to show his authority as her senior just like what he saw a couple of moments ago.

“Kang Yeonji!” He said in a strong voice and blocked her way.

However,

“What!”

“...Nothing. I'm just saying you should go easy. You know what I mean, right?”

“Geez, seonbae! It's because you're like that that those guys looked down on us in the theater last time.”

“That happened months ago though, why are you bringing it up now....”

“So I can't?”

“No, you can.”

Kang Yeonji. Her nickname was bulldog. Of course, saying that word in front of her required some big courage. Even Inho, who was adept at handling others, had to relent in front of Yeonji.

Heewon subconsciously put his hands on his lower stomach. When he looked next to him, he saw that the chubby boy was doing the same. He signalled to ask why, but being pressured by Yeonji’s spirit, the boy just kept staring at Yeonji.

“What are you doing?”

A violent wave in the front, and a heavy storm in the back. That was how Heewon felt right now. The girl named Aram had returned.

A battle between a dragon and a tiger. There seemed to be no other expression that fit this situation.

“I think we should stop them.”

“Yeah.”

“Then you try.”

“Me? I can’t do it.”

“If I do it now, I think I might get shoulder-thrown. Aram’s good at Judo.”

“Ah. Actually, Yeonji is good at Taekwondo as well.”

“It seems like that girl’s name is Yeonji. What a feminine name.”

“Aram sounds cute as well, but why are they....”

Maybe this was what it felt like to suffer the same sickness? Heewon felt a sense of kinship in a strange way and talked to the boy rather randomly.

The two girls, who were glaring at each other while twitching their lips, eventually bared their fangs and were about to go at each other.

“Yeonji, stop.”

Just then, a savior appeared. The only one that could calm the bulldog Yeonji down. Heewon sighed in relief when he saw Haewon. With the appearance of his brother, Yeonji twitched her lips but held it in.

And a mediator appeared on the other side as well.

“Jeon Aram.”

Even though he just called out her name just once, the girl that had scary eyes groaned before turning around. The boy that calmed down the girl that was as aggressive as Yeonji had a rather desolate-looking impression. The chubby boy called him Maru. That seemed to be his name.

“You can’t do that in a place you are supposed to be eating.”

“Let’s eat in peace, alright?”

Hearing the two boys nag them, the two girls made a sour expression and replied 'yes'.

Heewon sighed. The chubby boy next to him was also sighing in relief.

#### **Chapter 484**

"I saw you on TV! I knew I saw you somewhere before."

"Your scene in The Witness was awesome."

"The beggar from Apgu is also you, right?"

Maru nodded instead of replying. The amount of attention on him was rather overwhelming.

After they restrained the strong-willed girls, they apologized to each other and were about to go back to their tables when the other party asked them if they were in the acting club. When Daemyung replied yes, the people at Hwasoo High visibly brightened up and asked if they could have a talk. They ended up moving to the same table as Hwasoo High, and after a brief introduction, they talked about various things.

The boy named Inho would ask what they did to prepare and practice for their plays, and Daemyung would respond in kind. Since they had the common background known as acting, they became close in a flash. It was then that Bangjoo blurted out that his seonbae was on TV.

"Have you seen a lot of celebrities?"

"I didn't play that many characters so I haven't seen many celebrities."

"Do you have any that you're close to?"

"No."

Since he wanted to escape being the center of attention, he made his answers as short as possible. After asking a few questions, the people at Hwasoo High seemed to have lost interest and talked about other people.

"Sorry about before. Yeonji's the type to easily get agitated."

The one at the corner of the table spoke. His name was Lee Haewon. Apparently, he was the younger brother of Heewon, who wasn't participating in the conversation as he was eating aggressively.

"That goes for us as well. Aram doesn't exactly have a good personality either."

"I thought they were fighting so I ran over quickly."

"Me too. I heard that the girl named Yeonji is good at Taekwondo?"

"Yes. She participates in demonstrations and things like that all the time."

"There might have been big trouble if a fight broke out. One side is good at Taekwondo while the other side is good at Judo. Imagine getting hit by them while trying to stop them."

"You tell me."

Haewon asked if he wanted Sprite. Maru extended his cup out.

"I saw you in Daehak-ro, hyung."

"Me?"

"The street performance."

"Oh, the street performance."

"You aren't doing them these days. It must be because it attracted too much attention, right?"

"Things started going in the wrong direction."

"Looks like a lot of people tried to use it to their advantage?"

"Probably."

"It's such a pity. It was good too. I watched performances like that in small theaters, but that was the first time I saw one done with so many people in the streets. I hoped it could last a long time, but I guess that wasn't so easy."

"We aren't entirely done yet. We might do it as a guerilla play later. Though, I can't say for sure since I'm not the one making the decisions."

He tossed a spoon to Dowook who asked for a bottle opener. After looking at him with a sour expression, Dowook pushed in the spoon between the bottle and the cap before pulling it upwards. Along with a pop sound, the cap flew into the sky. The people around clapped for him and started putting their empty cups in front of him.

"Are these all the members of your club?"

"Yeah. This is it."

"Oh, a small number of elites I guess."

"We became small due to an unfortunate event. Well, not that I'm saying we aren't elites. You guys have over twenty, right?"

"Yes. But I don't belong to the acting club though."

"Really?"

"I only helped out a little since my brother's in the club, but they thankfully called me to their get-together."

"It's not a little. You almost single-handedly paint the stage background. Also, your job was much prettier than the others too," Heewon commented before focusing on eating again.

"Looks like your brother was enemies with meat in his previous life."

"He is quite a glutton. Though, he doesn't eat that much."

As soon as Haewon said those words, Heewon put down his chopsticks and started looking at the ceiling in a daze. Haewon smiled faintly.

“He’s like that now, but he’ll probably pick his chopsticks up again saying it’s such a waste by the time we’re about to leave.”

Haewon poured some Sprite for Heewon. He was like a mom that was looking out for her son. After standing up from his seat, Haewon walked around the table picking up any pieces of food that fell on the floor, and put them on an empty plate before bringing the plate to the kitchen. He only came back after putting food on an empty plate, and meat on the empty grill. The people of Hwasoo High seemed to be used to his actions as they didn’t act weirdly at all.

“You look after them a lot.”

“It’s a habit of mine. Personally, I think it’s a bothersome character. I should just let them be, but I can’t do it.”

“You’re the type of guy who would be treated well by good people but make a loss otherwise.”

“The latter makes up the majority though,” Haewon twitched his nose as he spoke.

“Right. You keep coming here because you have to look after Heewon. Why don’t you just switch to the acting club?”

Hearing Hwasoo High’s students say those words, Haewon waved his hand and said that he would think about it. That seemed like an even firmer refusal than saying he didn’t want to.

“Everyone seems to want you there. Why aren’t you doing it? From what I hear, you seemed to like plays too.”

“Hobbies are only fun while they’re still hobbies. Once I start putting time and effort into it, I would feel more pity than joy, so I’m putting some distance. I’m satisfied with visual satisfaction.”

Maru nodded before drinking a sip from his cup.

“Also, I have something else I want to do.”

“Really?”

Haewon, who made a happy expression, suddenly changed and coughed awkwardly.

“I talked about something useless, right? I usually don’t talk about such things.”

“You can keep going. It’s not like I have anyone to talk to either.”

Maru pointed at everyone else. Somehow, they had gotten to the point where they were talking about how Daemyung and Jiyeon were going out, and thanks to that, the table had burned up with stories about love. They were disputing over whether to accept or ban relationships within the club, and the discussion was quite heated.

“You don’t have any walls between seniors and juniors.”

“That was how it was like when Inho-seonbae first created the acting club. He said that he didn’t want any special treatment just because he was born a year early. That’s why everyone’s close. We treat each other like siblings. Isn’t it like that for Woosung High as well?”

“Well, I guess....”

Maru pointed at Aram, who was chatting loudly. She was slapping Daemyung's arms while giggling.

“I guess it’s similar.”

“It is. Rather than that, continue what you were talking about earlier. We should talk to each other as outsiders. Who else can we talk to?”

Haewon nodded.

“I want to support my big brother. That’s my dream.”

“Support him?”

“Yes.”

“How exactly?”

“It’s a rather small dream, but I want to help him become an actor. My brother, while I don’t know about anything else, is really good at acting. Although he often forgets his stuff and is often late to appointments because he’s a sleepy-head, his acting is really the best.”

Supporting his brother, huh. It was a rather peculiar dream. Usually, such words were said by the parents: I want to support my son’s studies; I want to help my daughter’s dream come true. It was definitely not normal for a younger brother to want to look after his elder sibling.

“That’s your dream?”

“Yes.”

“Usually, aren’t dreams more related to you? Like for example, wanting to enter a big company, or wanting to become a civil servant or something.”

“Those are some realistic dreams.”

“Aren’t all dreams like that?”

“I guess they are. But that goes for me as well. Helping my brother out is the way I could raise my own worth. Hmm, actually, my dream was to become a civil servant until last year. Stable employment and a decent wage. Considering various benefits and pensions, I thought there was nothing better than it. But I changed my mind after seeing his acting. My brother doesn’t seem to have any thoughts on continuing down that path right now, but I am sure of it. He needs to do acting.”

“Haewon, you should eat. Why are you eating so little?”

“You can eat a lot. I had plenty already.”

“Hey, when else would we come to a place like this? We need to get our money’s worth.”

“Alright.”

A rather immature-looking elder brother and a rather strong-minded younger brother. They were an interesting duo.

Maru tried asking,

“What are you going to do if he doesn’t want to do it?”

“I’ll try persuading him.”

“Is he that good at acting?”

“Yes. I don’t like saying I’m sure of something, but I can say that in regards to his acting skills. Also, it’s not like he’s entirely unwilling. It’s just that he doesn’t have the confidence yet. Everyone around him is telling him he should try at least. With the right opportunity, he’ll prove his own worth.”

“Heewon has it good. He has a younger brother who has so much faith in him.”

Hearing that, Haewon shook his head.

“I’m the one who should be thankful. I get to help out a genius from the side.”

“Oh, a genius, you say.”

“Yes. My brother is a genius.”

At that moment, Heewon stood up from his seat with a sad face. It seemed that he spilled his drink as his pants were wet.

“Ah, a genius,” said Maru as he faintly smiled.

“...I think he’s a genius when it comes to acting,” Haewon said while shrugging.

Meanwhile, Heewon and Inho disappeared for a moment to the back of the kitchen before coming back. Heewon had changed pants.

Maru drank a sip of water before looking at Heewon. Heewon was the one that broke the win streak that Myunghwa High had for the best actor award. This meant that while they lost as a group, he won individually. Maru wondered how he did his acting. His curiosity was piqued since Haewon so confidently said that he was a genius.

“Well, then. We’ll do that, okay?” Inho said to Daemyung who sat opposite him.

His voice was pretty loud, gathering attention.

“Alright. Let’s see when we get the time.”

“Good. We are the ones learning here, so tell us when you’re okay with it. It’ll be a good experience to interact between acting clubs.”

“Alright, but I don’t think we can do it at my school.”

“Why?”



“Our practice room is small. We are borrowing a classroom to do it.”

“What about your clubroom?”

“We had one, but not anymore.”

“Really? Doesn’t your school give you a clubroom? Woosung Engineering High’s acting club is pretty famous, isn’t it? I heard that they wiped the floor with all the acting competitions when it was first created.”

“There were some events. But we do have a container outside the school building, so we can store our costumes and props there. Other than the fact that we don’t have a big space to practice in, we don’t have any difficulties. Though... that is the biggest problem. Where do you do your practice?”

“Us? The main hall. It’s usually used for indoor gym class, but we are able to use it freely in the afternoon ever since we got the 2nd place prize. There’s a huge banner for us as well.”

I’m envious - Daemyung commented with a bitter smile.

“Then you should come over to our school. It takes an hour by train, so it’s not that far.”

“That’s true.”

“Please come around. I want to watch how a good school practices.”

“You guys did better than us, though. There shouldn’t be a lot to learn from us.”

Things led to one another, and they started talking about practicing together, and they seemed to have come to an agreement. Maru thought that it wasn’t a bad idea since they could motivate each other. Moreover, since he would get to watch Heewon’s acting, he really wanted to go there.

“Since we’re at it, why don’t we do it today? It’s four right now, and we’ll be there by five. If we do it until 9, then there are around four hours, so we should be able to do two runs each. The play should be less than an hour after all,” Inho said. Daemyung looked at the faces of the club members before looking at Maru. Everyone looked at Maru as well.

“How is it, everyone? Are you okay on time?”

As soon as Maru asked, everyone nodded. They all seemed to want to go. Although they didn’t compete directly, the outcome was that Hwasoo High won the competition, while Woosung High lost. The club members must be looking at Hwasoo High as though they were the challengers.

“Daemyung, why don’t we try visiting?”

“Should we?”

As soon as he said those words, Inho stood up from his seat.

“Let’s go right now. We ate plenty, didn’t we?”

The people of Hwasoo High all stood up. Just one person, Heewon, was looking at the grill with a confused expression.

Inho smiled and dragged him away. Their juniors grabbed Heewon by the arm.

“Let’s go as well.”

Maru stood up after wiping his mouth with a tissue.

## **Chapter 485**

“I think I’m going to go home late. You can eat dinner by yourself.”

But what about the bungeo-ppang? - Maru lightly ignored his sister’s words before hanging up. Bada had started to move a lot less ever since the weather became cold. During the summer, she was almost never in the house during the day, but right now, she was practically hibernating at home.

“Hey.”

Maru slapped Dowook’s back. Dowook looked at him.

“You should call Bada out and play together.”

“Are you teasing me right now? I’ll only be able to do it if I have the time to.”

“I guess that’s true.”

“But why? Did she say something?”

“She’s really edgy these days. Why does she come to me to nag about how you don’t call her frequently?”

“I have it hard too. I have to be on the phone for nearly an hour after midnight. My dad is already suspicious of me because the phone bill is pretty high.”

“Sorry about that, should I compensate for some?”

“Who said it’s a money problem? The problem is that dad keeps...”

Asking me if I have a girlfriend - Dowook added as he sighed.

“Why don’t you just reveal it to him?”

“I can reveal it to dad, for sure. But once dad finds out, my sister will find out as well. I don’t think I can cope with that.”

“I guess things will become a little tiring once Soojin-noona finds out since she dotes on her brother so much.”

“A little, you say?”

Even though there was no wind blowing, Dowook was shaking.

“Do you know what my wish is these days?”

“What is it?”

“It’s for my sister to get married. She’ll leave the house if she does.”

“Is it that bad?”

“It feels way too awkward now that she’s acting too close to me. It’s good that we resolved our misunderstanding and became close, but it’s honestly hard to cope with her coming to my room and chatting with me for an hour.”

“You should just try to understand your sister’s love for you.”

“Goddammit. Why don’t you take some of it?”

“I have to apologize, I have an owner already.”

Dowook panted in frustration as he started walking again.

“We’re almost there. The school’s right around the corner.”

Inho said those words after riding an hour by train - to Yatap station - and walking for another ten minutes. They walked deep into the residential area and turned right at the end. The school was there. Hwasoo Highschool. There was also another school in the distance. It was probably a middle school or elementary school.

From the school gate, the school building looked very clean and had a clear color. It seemed that it either underwent maintenance recently or was a newly built school.

“There’s Yoojin-unni’s school, and there’s this one. Why is our school the only one that looks shabby?”

“That’s because it’s an engineering high school.”

Aram went in as she twitched her lips.

There were quite a lot of people in the school field, and it seemed that a local soccer club had come out on an activity.

“That’s the hall.”

There was a dome-shaped building where Inho was pointing. Just like the main building, it didn’t look like it had been long since it was built. They pushed open the glass door before going in. Although there was a staircase to the upper floor, there was a sign that said no entry. It seemed that it wasn’t used normally.

“Wow,” exclaimed Jiyeon, who was the first to enter the hall.

Maru, who entered afterwards, also nodded his head as he looked around at the facility. The floor was elastic, which made him think it was urethane flooring. There was a platform 1 meter tall at the front, and on top of that was the national flag. He subconsciously imagined a principal’s speech, even though he had never seen that person before for this school.

“We do our practice here, and we keep our props over there. Since you’re here, wanna look around?”

Inho opened the door to the left of the hall. Behind the door was quite spacious. On the left end, there was gymnastics equipment like parallel bars and a gymnastics vault, and on the right were hangers with clothes, as well as some wooden boards that seemed to be part of a set.

“This is so spacious. I think it’s wide enough to fit five of our containers here.”

Bangjoo opened his arms wide to measure the distance.

“How many costumes do you have at Woosung High?”

“We don’t have that many. We had to throw them away.”

“Oh, I see.”

Inho smiled awkwardly and stopped asking. Daemyung said something about an unfortunate event back at the restaurant, so he seemed to have realized that it was a sensitive topic.

“I think we should exercise to digest what we ate, how about it?”

Inho switched the topic and pointed at the platform.

“Should we?”

Daemyung agreed and walked outside. Maru closed the zipper he opened when he entered the hall. He felt like the cold air reduced his body temperature a lot.

“There are heaters, but we can’t use them as we wish.”

There were large heaters placed throughout the hall, but they weren’t able to use them due to the electricity costs.

“Should we jog for a bit then?” Daemyung asked first.

Inho nodded before having his members stand in a line.

“Let’s stand with them.”

Behind Hwasoo High, who stood in two lines, Woosung High followed. Inho started jogging lightly. As the hall was pretty large, it took minutes to run a whole lap. They ran about three laps like that.

“I think that should be enough,” said Inho as he stopped.

The people of Hwasoo High seemed satisfied.

“Why?” Daemyung asked.

“Why? Because I think that was enough of a warm up.”

“Oh, I see.”

When Daemyung took a step back with a nod, Inho asked this time.

“How many laps do you do then?”

“Us? We usually run about ten laps around the school field before practice. At first, it was pretty hard, but we got used to it after doing it for a while.”

“Oh, ten laps?”

Inho looked back at his club members and spoke,

“Let’s go jogging in the school field.”

\* \* \*

“No, but how....”

Heewon panted and put his arms on his knees. He ran long enough to the point that he didn’t feel the cold anymore. He was sweating hard. He raised his head and looked at the others. Everyone was panting heavily.

“You guys are good!”

“Do your best!”

The men from the local soccer club shouted as they grilled some meat on the side. Heewon looked at the people of Woosung High’s acting club who ran their last lap as he heard those words.

“I think I finally warmed up.”

Even the feeble-looking Jiyeon didn’t run out of breath. Woosung High looked like they just did some light stretches at most.

“You guys are good at running.”

“We do it every day.”

“I guess we should take note of that.”

Inho, who seemed to be confident in his stamina, seemed to like that intensity of running. Heewon wanted to shake his head vigorously and tell him not to speak nonsense, but he didn’t since he didn’t have any energy.

“Hyung. It feels good to run.”

“I’m exhausted. Give me a piggyback.”

“Hyung. Try taking a deep breath. It feels really refreshing.”

Heewon wondered why there was such a contrast in stamina even though they were brothers. He took a deep breath as he looked at Haewon, who was smiling brightly. He immediately coughed. Forget refreshing, he felt as though his throat was being frozen.

“Now let’s go back to the hall and do some stretches,” Daemyung said.

Faint screams could be heard from Hwasoo High’s party.

“Sounds good!”

Inho was the only one excited. Haewon wished for someone to hold back that guy filled with vitality. Heewon walked back into the hall with drooping shoulders.

“How do you do your stretches? We just add some moves to the national exercise routine.”

“We do stretches according to what our former instructor told us. She always said that an actor must have complete control over their body. It’s a bit hard, but we keep doing it.”

The rather chubby Daemyung sat down on the floor before splitting his legs. It wasn’t a perfect leg split, but considering his body shape, it was shocking. Heewon could hear the girls murmuring - how is that possible?

He took it a step further and leaned forward. He was very flexible despite how he looked. But it wasn’t just Daemyung that practiced like that. Everyone at Woosung High split their legs and leaned forward. Aram and Bangjoo, who were said to be sporty, were almost able to touch their chests on the ground.

“Let’s try as well.”

Inho shouted energetically.

“Try that?”

“Well, yeah.”

“I don’t think I can do it, though.”

“At first, you won’t, but you will be able to if you keep trying.”

Urged by Inho, the club members sat against the wall. Heewon really didn’t want to do this. Leg splits of all things. He looked around and split his legs just to the point it wouldn’t hurt. At that moment, Haewon sat in front of him with a suspicious smile.

“What?”

“You know what. Hyung, I’ll pull you forward.”

“No. I’ll do it by myself. I can do it alone.”

“I’ll help you.”

He couldn’t find his brother’s personality of keeping his words more detestable than today. Heewon groaned and split his legs.

“You might get injured if you force yourselves, so take it slow,” Daemyung explained as he walked around.

Heewon looked at Daemyung with eyes full of resentment.

“D-do your best.”

Daemyung ran away and walked to the next person. Like that, Heewon wrestled with his own legs for around ten minutes until he fell down when he heard someone say that’s enough. His crotch was hurting. It seemed that everyone else seemed to be suffering the same as they were groaning.

“Your way of practice is definitely different from ours, huh.”

“I heard that it’s important for an actor to train their bodies as well.”

“I can’t refute that. What else?”

Inho seemed full of the desire to learn. Heewon raised his hand while feeling his hair stand on end. He thought that he might have to continue these torture-like stretches if he let Inho do what he wanted to.

“Shouldn’t we start rehearsing? Quite a lot of time has passed.”

“Oh, it’s that late already.”

“Right? It’s late. Physical training is good, but we should do acting as well.”

“Whoa, what’s up with you? I never thought you’d say those words, Heewon.”

“H-haha.”

Heewon smiled awkwardly and looked into the distance.

“Then should we show each other what we’re preparing? We’ll start. Oh, we are taking an approach where we freely comment on each other’s acting. I hope you too can tell us if there’s anything you find awkward or anything you think there’s a better way to do. We never get any feedback from people other than us.”

Inho clapped and cleaned up. The club members that went on stage stood at the center of the platform, while the staff members walked to the side.

“What about them?” Maru asked as he pointed at the people sitting on the right.

“They’re staff members,” Inho said.

Hearing the word ‘staff’, the people at Woosung High looked at them with envy. It seemed that they didn’t have any staff members since they didn’t have many members in the first place.

“Then we’ll start. The title of our play is ‘Ready, action’, and the main story is about the conflicts happening in high school acting clubs. I hope you have fun watching, and tell us a lot of things at the end.”

\* \* \*

“You want me to play the main character?”

“Yes, you do it.”

“But didn’t we decide that Yoonjoo is the one playing it?”

“You suit it much better than she does. Anyway, I told you about it, so practice.”

“Seonbae-nim! Seonbae-nim!”

Maru stroked his chin as he watched Hwasoo High’s acting. This was the scene where there was discord occurring in the once-harmonious acting club due to problems regarding casting. This was probably the moment where the dramatic tension was being heightened.

“They’re good,” Maru said to Daemyung who stood next to him.

Daemyung replied ‘true’.

It was quite impressive that they weren't feeling shy about going on the stage. Despite the fact that the stage was prepared rather suddenly and they were being watched by people other than their own members, Hwasoo High's acting club was showing a smooth progression of the play.

This proved one thing: a lot of practice. While their skills as individuals might be lacking, there were no big holes in their acting. It would probably receive high scores from the judges who were scoring by criteria.

Maru turned around to the staff this time. They were writing things down while following the acting of the people on stage. The ones that didn't have any writing equipment in their hands were making small props. The fact that there was a group of people to give feedback to them, and the fact that they had divided up the tasks perfectly was quite surprising when considering that the club was rather new.

He heard that the club president was Heewon, but from the atmosphere, Inho seemed to be the one giving directions. He managed to bring a bunch of high school students together like this in such a short time. The word leader really suited him.

"I don't find any shortcomings," Bangjoo said.

That was the main point. There were no shortcomings. There weren't any trivial mistakes that caused the flow to be broken. The play made a smooth curve upwards. It was pleasing to watch.

And also,

"He definitely is eye-catching."

Dowook looked at a certain place - it was the place where Heewon was standing

## **Chapter 486**

"We should do this together. Only when we do this together does any of this have meaning. Let's make up. We promised we'd make a good play together, didn't we?"

Heewon, who tried to mediate with a worried face, made an embarrassed smile as he stood in the center. His flustered hand movements stopped and his voice became a little lower.

"You guys were on good terms just before, weren't you? Yoonjoo, don't you remember? You were so happy when we first made that stage. We had to stay at school until 11 at night, but we had fun back then. Haejin, you said you were tired, but you were the most enthusiastic out of all of us."

"Do you think I'm the same now?"

"Right. Back then, we decided roles based on skill, but now the one that's closest to the club presidents gets to go on stage, no? Making the stage? It's fun, I can say that. But the reason it's fun is because it's the stage I'll be on. I'm not in the acting club just to make the background."

The two girls commented with Heewon in the middle. After glancing at the two girls, Heewon gave an exhausted smile.

"Like I said, if we talk to the club president..."



“Forget it. You’re close to the club president, aren’t you? We’re all in this together, but why does someone get to go on stage while someone better has to watch from below? I won’t accept this.”

The girl to the left turned around before leaving. Heewon hurriedly followed her before looking outside the stage with vain eyes.

“You should stop there as well. It’s because you keep listening to her that the atmosphere and the club is awful. Why did you have to bring up what the club president said we should keep a secret? Did you really want to be the good guy?”

The girl on the right also glared at Heewon before leaving. After looking both ways alternately, Heewon sat down on the chair in the middle. He covered his face with both of his hands before shouting and standing up. He kicked the chair he was sitting on before stomping on the ground.

“Then what do you suppose I do? Just what the heck am I supposed to do?”

The boy that was working towards the harmony of the club ended up letting go of everything. Heewon showed the moment when the boy’s effort to mediate the situation while being sworn at by his peers turn to dust. Like a patient with paranoia, he walked around the stage with an uneasy expression and then suddenly stopped. He looked up at the ceiling and said,

“I quit.”

That line, mixed with his vain laugh, showed what the future of the acting club would be like. Heewon, who faintly gazed at Woosung High’s side while standing diagonally towards the audience seats, nodded his head before going off stage.

After that, another actor came up on stage, but Maru looked at Heewon, who had lost energy and sat down on the spot in the back.

Maru began to understand what ‘one leading everyone else’ meant. The actors other than Heewon focused on reducing their mistakes as much as possible so that the audience’s absorption in the play wasn’t reduced. The play they went with also seemed like the characters other than Heewon’s didn’t have that many fluctuations in their emotions. When the other club members created the stage for him, Heewon would free himself on top of it.

Heewon appeared every time there was a conflict, and when the story reached the climax, they created the play so that all attention was on Heewon. He was perfectly the main character, and the rest made up the stage that propped him up. This delicate balance was probably the reason they were able to get the prize.

If the acting club had 2nd years and 3rd years, there might have been some students who had a variety of experiences, but Hwasoo High’s acting club was only created this year. There was one student that poked out above everyone else, and the acting club decided to maximize their performance with the resources they had.

Maru didn’t know whether this play was something they created by themselves or an existing one they had modified, but whoever chose this play and chose this layout really had good senses.

‘But everything’s only possible because he’s here.’

No matter how great the stage was, if there was no main character to stand on it, it would only be an empty stage.

Heewon possessed immense energy. He was eye-catching even when he was portrayed as a kind senior at the beginning of the play. The energy he gave off caught everyone's attention despite the fact that no conflicts between the characters had occurred yet.

To an actor, 'energy' was a combination of many different things. Appearances, breathing, walking form, speech, minute movements, or even the direction of their gaze. What seemed like completely irrelevant things individually might heavily influence the 'energy' of the actor. Energy was such a complicated criteria to judge, so it was hard to describe with words.

It was the so-called 'you know when you see it'-thing. That was probably the most suitable description for the word 'energy'.

Heewon was still panting even though he left the stage. The actors waiting around him did not say a word to him. Even the actors who were talking about the next scene did not say a word to him.

The scene then changed, and Heewon appeared again. It seemed as though he maintained the emotions he harbored before he left the stage all throughout his break. As soon as he came up, he continued his angry acting without a gap in the emotions.

As the play reached the later parts, everyone else's acting was buried beneath Heewon's acting. Although some awkward parts could be seen when it came to his vocalization, breathing, as well as minute movements, he was gaining complete control over the stage with his energy alone.

Although he didn't have delicate techniques or some other things, Heewon's act had something that attracted the audience's gaze, just like a singer who could move the hearts of the listeners.

"That's right. I was an idiot, and I was the bad guy."

At the last part of the play, Heewon, who was struggling between the two split sides of the acting club, was eventually abandoned by both sides and had to leave in solitude. The remaining club members regained their harmony, and Heewon's empty spot was soon forgotten. The play ended with a successful practice run.

Maru applauded. Everyone else did the same. Having finished their acting, Hwasoo High stood in a line and took a bow together. Their curtain call was clean as well.

"That's it for now. I want to talk about our acting after we see yours. Is that alright with you?"

"That sounds good."

Daemyung stood up. Maru also stood up and dusted his hands. Daemyung, who stood at the center, briefly explained the play.

"The performance we're about to do is a play titled 'I know that person'. A man came to a mental hospital because of a mistake, and the story is about his episode at the hospital. There's an element of satire in it as well."

After exchanging gazes with Daemyung, the club members got into their positions.

“Then, we’ll start.”

\* \* \*

“Everyone’s good. Especially Daemyung.”

“Right.”

Heewon nodded his head as he heard Inho’s words. He wasn’t able to focus during the beginning since he was unable to calm down his agitated feelings. He was on edge, so he couldn’t keep watching the play in front of him. It took about five minutes for him to calm down, and he started focusing on the play since then.

Woosung High’s play was one that made people laugh. According to Inho, it was multiple times harder to make someone laugh than cry. He also added that he could feel the confidence in their acting skills from the fact that they chose this play.

‘Is that right?’

He didn’t really understand but Heewon nodded anyway. If he made a confused expression, Inho would probably continue explaining while using some complicated words. Since it was obvious that he wouldn’t be able to understand a word of his, Heewon just nodded and pretended to have understood. Listening to Inho’s passionate explanations was hard labor in itself.

“I can definitely hear them better.”

“Their pronunciation seems better than ours too.”

Heewon could hear his juniors whispering behind him. Maybe it was suitable to describe it as the ‘ring’ of their voices. Woosung High’s people’s voices had some weight to them and they spread across the whole place. While the 1st years felt more like them, Daemyung was definitely different.

Heewon looked around him before yawning. Actually, he didn’t like watching plays. He always thought that his younger brother was amazing for going all the way to Daehak-ro to watch plays. It must be a lot easier to go to the nearby cinema to watch a movie, yet he went all the way there to watch a play. Of course, he didn’t hate it either. To be precise, he didn’t have any interest at all.

Acting was fun. He was able to forget himself when he became the character in the play. Such a sensation was really wondrous, and he wanted to continue tasting it once he tasted it. That was the reason he continued acting, but he didn’t want to dig into the technical part of acting and study about plays.

‘It’s plenty fun even without that.’

Heewon was satisfied with where he was. He didn’t feel the need to do anymore.

That was why he didn’t feel anything even when he looked at Woosung High’s play in front of him. There were definitely parts they were better than him at. Their movements were cleaner, and it was much easier to see what they were trying to express.

But, so what?

Them being good had nothing to do with him. There was no way he could find their play fun since it was based on the assumption that they were trying to learn something when he had zero desire to learn. He just laughed a couple of times at the funny parts, and then went back into a daze, laughed again, then yawned.

“Hyung. You should focus. Especially Maru-hyung. He even came out on TV, so there must be something you can learn from him.”

“I am concentrating.”

“But your eyes look tired though.”

“N-no, of course not.”

Heewon twisted his body left and right as he was nagged by his brother. He didn't know what his younger brother was thinking, but he had gained a dramatic interest in acting recently. Someone's acting was good, some work was good, try watching this. His brother was probably trying to help since he said he was in the acting club, but it couldn't be more tiring. He couldn't entirely ignore his efforts, so he did reply to him that he would look into it, but he had never actually done so. He was running out of time just studying for tests and conquering dungeons with his friends.

He clenched his teeth and looked at Maru. Actually, Maru had been coming up on stage every now and then: as the doctor at the hospital, as the cleaner, as the person moving beds. He was also acting as two or three passersby. He seemed to have five roles.

“I guess it must be hard with a small number of people.”

“Yeah.”

“Also, I'm looking at Maru a lot, but I don't really spot anything different about him.”

Hearing those words, his brother nodded his head with a confused expression.

“That's strange. He was really good when I saw him in *The Witness*.”

“Maybe he's not feeling well today.”

Heewon pulled his legs inwards as he watched the play.

Everyone was good. He had nothing more to comment other than that as the play ran towards the end. Woosung High showed a clean performance without any bad points. There were times when the first years wavered, but at those times, Maru covered for them so smoothly that it didn't feel like a mistake.

Heewon observed Maru for the first time when he was off-stage. He kept watching the stage, but then watched Maru when he was reminded by his brother. Outside the stage, Maru was moving his hands slowly where the first years could see. Heewon realized what his hand gestures meant when he looked at the stage.

Aram, whose talking speed was a little too fast, slowed down when she saw Maru's hand. Heewon looked at Maru nodding with a warm smile on his face. He felt good as though he was being complimented.

Heewon had a look at Maru in more detail. When he did, he could clearly feel the atmosphere of the stage change when Maru went on. The play felt like it was more filled. He was reminded of when his class played soccer with another class. There was a guy that was incredibly good at filling the gap on the field, and his existence decided what the match felt like as a whole. He was reminded of that guy when he looked at Maru.

He was the pivot at the center of everything. If the first years on stage felt like they were relying on Daemyung, Daemyung seemed to be relying on him.

When he kept watching, he spotted something else. It was that Maru's acting was really simple. He didn't mean that it was dry because Maru was bad at acting, but it felt as though Maru killed his acting completely. He was helping out everyone else so that they had more confidence and could be more natural as the background element of the play.

"I think he can do more though," Heewon subconsciously blurted out.

Maru definitely had the power to pop out. He probably had the skills to conquer the stage as well. There was only one reason he didn't: he didn't need to. If the background popped, the color of the actors would decrease in comparison. That was why he chose to be colorless. He pressed all the colors into the center and quietly supported them from the bottom.

It was something that couldn't be seen when looking at the whole picture, but something that could be spotted when looking at him. Maru was just that dissolved into the play.

Heewon sighed and looked at Maru.

"Do you find that fun?"

He muttered that question to himself.

## **Chapter 487**

"Heewon's acting has energy. He's eye-catching no matter where he's standing on the stage. This is definitely an advantage. However, since you attract more attention, I think there's a need for you to be clearer in your movements. Your expression of emotion looks good, but once you get agitated, your actions become hurried and you move so quickly that it's harder for the audience to catch up. Other than that, I don't have anything to tell you. It was good."

After saying those words, Maru looked next to him and asked his club members if they had anything to add. Everyone shook their heads.

"Heewon, hear that? You should slow down a little."

"I can't do that as I wish."

He sighed disinterestedly and looked away.

"Then I guess that's about done. Let's see, the time is..."

Inho took out his phone to check the time. The others also looked at their watches or their phones. It was 8 p.m. Maru thought that it was pretty late.

"I guess we should turn off the lights. I told the teachers that we'd be using it until eight. If you guys don't have anything else to do, I think we should wrap things up here."

Inho's question was directed at Daemyung. Daemyung nodded his head as he stood up.

"We don't have anything else."

"Alright, then let's clean up."

Under Inho's instructions, the first years of Hwasoo High started putting away the chairs and mattresses. Woosung High just watched them from the side. As they didn't take out a lot of things, it didn't take a lot of time to put them back.

They all left together after getting their bags. The people from the local soccer club couldn't be seen anymore on the school field.

The lights between the school field and the school building turned on. Someone that looked like the security guard stared at them from the main entrance before going inside.

"Thanks for telling us so many things today."

"Don't thank us. We learned a lot too."

"Why don't we meet up from time to time like this and practice together?"

"Sounds good."

Inho and Daemyung walked at the front. It seemed that the two club presidents liked today's practice.

'Ah, right. This guy was the president.'

Maru looked at Heewon, who was walking with his arms crossed. He kept saying that it was cold. When his brother Haewon took off his coat for him, he wore it once before returning it.

"It'll be even more troublesome if you catch a cold."

After hearing Heewon's words, the students of Hwasoo High laughed and agreed with him.

"He's right, Haewon. Heewon won't be able to do anything if you're sick."

"Heewon-seonbae would probably come to school without eating breakfast. No, I wonder if he would be able to wake up in the first place."

"Don't worry about your brother and worry about yourself first. Only when you're healthy will Heewon be able to live normally."

Heewon grumbled, asking if he was a kid or something, but the people around him just laughed without listening to him. In the end, he agreed with them and started laughing together.

"Uhm, Maru-hyung," Haewon said.

"What is it?"

"Can I ask you a question?" Haewon looked hesitant.

From his expression, it didn't look like he had a simple question. Maru walked away from the main group. Haewon naturally followed.

"What is it?"

"What do you need to do to become an actor?"

"You're talking about Heewon, right?"

"Yes."

"Why don't you think about it after asking for his opinion first?"

"My brother... probably won't care. Although he finds everything bothersome, he is the type to do it when it matters. Also, it's somewhat weird for me to say this, but he doesn't have anything he wants to do yet. All he's passionate about is playing games at home, I think."

"That sounds ordinary. Isn't everyone like that?"

"I guess that's true."

Haewon laughed while scratching his head.

"My brother doesn't like starting something himself. This club and playing games at home are the same as well. He only does it since his friends around him told him to. I'm not saying it's a bad thing. He didn't stray onto a wrong path after all."

"And?"

"I told you right? My brother's acting is somewhat special. Oh, how was it?"

"It was good. It definitely isn't easy for a beginner to show so much emotion like that. I think that his expressivity is really good, too. Oh, not that I'm in a position to judge anyone. Personally, I thought he was really good."

Haewon nodded his head.

"I talked to him before, but apparently, he feels emotions as colors. I didn't really understand since it was such an abstract concept, but when I look at his acting, I can feel that something's different about him. I told you about it, right? I like watching plays. He might be lacking in the technical aspect compared to people actually acting professionally in small theaters, but I feel like he isn't losing when it comes to the feeling. No, I feel like he's superior."

"You sound confident."

Maru saw Haewon being flustered and taking a step back. His face turned red.

"Sorry. I said something strange, didn't I? I know that the entertainment industry isn't something that you can stive in with confidence alone. I was just all excited by myself and...."

"I didn't say it with a bad meaning, so you don't have to panic so much. I just thought that you really care about your brother."

There shouldn't be that many younger brothers that were so seriously worried about their elder sibling's future. While Maru felt that he was rather awesome, at the same time, he found it weird.

Maru gestured for him to come closer. Haewon carefully approached him.

"I think we strayed off for a bit. So, in the end, you're saying that Heewon's interested in working as an actor, right?"

"Hm, rather than explaining, I'll just show you."

Haewon called out to Heewon. Heewon left the group and asked what was up.

"Hyung."

"Uhm, yeah?"

"I'm serious about this. Think about this carefully before replying."

"Wh-what's this about?"

He flinched and looked at Haewon and Maru alternately.

"Hyung. I want you to become a doctor."

"A doctor? What is this about so suddenly?"

"Hyung, I know you're smart. You have good grades too. You told me that you'll become a doctor and look after me in the future."

"D-did I, now?"

"So, how about it? Becoming a doctor, that is."

"Even if you tell me that so suddenly...."

After twitching his lips, Heewon fell into thought for a moment before replying.

"Alright, then. I'll try. But isn't becoming a doctor really hard?"

"You can do it."

Heewon closed his eyes for a moment and took a deep breath before saying 'alright' in a small voice. Maru laughed when he saw that. Haewon just shrugged.

"Lee Heewon," Maru called Heewon.

"What?"

"Are you seriously going to try to become a doctor if your brother tells you to?"

"It's not like there's something I really want to do. I never went wrong listening to his words. I'll have to do something to make a living. A doctor doesn't sound so bad."

"Where's that confidence coming from? Can just anyone become a doctor?"



“I’m quite good at studying.”

“Quite good, you say....”

Saying that, Maru looked at the banner hung at the front of the school. He didn’t see it when he was walking towards the hall. The content was about a list of names that went to certain universities, but those universities weren’t really ordinary.

There were at least five of the top universities in the country, the National Police University, the National University of Transportation as well as various prestigious medical schools and law schools. Next to those education facilities was a list of student names.

Maru pointed at the banner.

“Oh, that? That’s the list of students that passed the examination tests for those universities last year. They hung that up for two months before the CSAT. Apparently, it’s for motivation. Once we get this year’s, they’ll probably renew it with this year’s entrants,” Haewon explained.

If any of Woosung Engineering High’s students got into any of those universities, there would probably be a party. Perhaps that person might get called out by the principal himself and be introduced as the person that made Woosung High shine. Yet here, there were two digits worth of students that passed the exams to such universities.

“Do you always send that many to those universities?”

“Hwasoo High is quite well-known in the area for its high advancement rate into higher education. I barely made it here as well. I had to study quite a lot to go to the same school as my brother.”

Maru looked at Haewon, who smiled in embarrassment, before looking at Heewon.

“You guys... are really good at studying.”

“Just a bit.”

“I guess I do decently.”

Maru palmed his head.

“Fine, become a doctor. And forgive me for laughing at you just a moment ago.”

“No, Maru-hyung. My brother is more suited to become an actor.”

Heewon interrupted, asking what it was about.

“Actor?”

“Hyung, you said that you find acting fun, right?”

“It is, I guess.”

“I never saw you say that something is fun with a bright smile like that before. I want you to strive for a dream that you like.”

“Wh-what about a doctor then?”

“To become a doctor, you would have to study really hard. I guess becoming an actor is the same, but acting is fun, isn’t it? How about it? Between a doctor and an actor, which would you rather be?”

“Uhm, thinking about it like that, I’d rather be an actor.”

“Then you’re going to become an actor, right?”

“Fine then. I’ll become one.”

When Haewon raised his hands and cheered, Heewon followed.

To Maru’s eyes, they looked like a dolphin and its trainer. He understood what Haewon was trying to say.

“His future career has been changed in just a minute.”

“That’s also one of his good points.”

“Hey, what are you two on about, you called me all the way here.”

Heewon, who was listening to their conversation, made a sour expression. Maru turned around to look at Heewon.

“Your brother wants you to become an actor. Are you really going to do it?”

“I’ll try. It’s not like there’s anything else I want to do anyway.”

“I’m not sure if you’re cool about things or if you’re just a simpleton.”

In any case, they were definitely an interesting pair of brothers.

“If you want to become an actor, you should look into acting schools first. The easiest way is to find an opportunity for an audition through those academies. If you’re tall enough and good-looking, you can look into street casting, but Heewon’s not that good.”

“I think so too,” Haewon agreed.

“You’re quite rational about it. I thought you’d find everything about your brother good.”

“I’m able to discern that much.”

“Hey, what the hell are you guys on about?”

Heewon muttered from the side, but the two lightly ignored him. Heewon felt that he was unnecessary and just pouted.

“There’s also the method of going to places that are looking for high school student background actors, and then catching the leader’s eyes to become a minor actor, but I don’t recommend this method. You’ll just be used as a background actor after all. There won’t be an opportunity to display your skills.”

“Then the most realistic method is to find and enter an acting school?”

“That’s right. Knocking on the doors of an agency is also a good way, but I heard that being good-looking is really important for child actors. Though, that goes for adults as well.”

“Thanks for telling me this. I’ll talk about it with my brother.”

Heewon smiled as though he was done with the matter. Maru tilted his head and asked,

“That’s it?”

“Yes.”

“Really? I thought you’d try to get me to introduce someone to you.”

Heewon gave an awkward smile.

“I’m not so shameless to ask you for that much. That was still very helpful. I’ll try to make something out of it after talking to my brother about it.”

Shame, huh. Maru really liked that word. So, he decided to give them one more act of kindness.

“I’ll recommend you an academy. There’s an academy called Film in Gangnam. When I looked last time, they were recruiting for a special class. You have to do various menial chores in compensation for not paying tuition, but you can try your hand there. Of course, just going doesn’t mean that you’ll get in for sure. They’ll probably do a test. If you pass, you’ll land yourself a pretty good opportunity.”

Hearing those words, Haewon bowed to him. Maru wrote him the academy’s number. He wasn’t planning to directly connect them to Miso. That was outside of his abilities. Introducing them to a place they could grab an opportunity was the best he could do.

Haewon returned to the group, and just as Heewon was about to follow suit, he stopped and turned around.

“Hey.”

His face was filled with curiosity.

“What?”

“Can I ask you one thing?”

“You brothers sure have a lot of questions. What is it?”

“That stage. Did you find it fun?”

“Fun?”

“Yeah. For me, I stand on the stage because I find acting fun. But all you’re doing is the extra roles. I also feel like you’re holding yourself back even though you can do better.”

“You could tell?” Maru asked in surprise.

Heewon just replied ‘somewhat’.

“Maybe your brother is right after all. Maybe you really do have the talent. Well, to answer your question, it’s not that fun.”

“Then why do you do it? There’s no reason to do it if it’s not fun, is there?”

Maru pointed at Haewon who was walking ahead.

“What about my brother?”

“When your brother told you to become a doctor, you said you would try, right?”

“Yeah.”

“That’s not something fun. Then why did you say you’d do it?”

“Because that’s not something I should find fun in. Being a doctor is about earning money. I have to look after my brother, no matter what. It doesn’t matter whether that’s fun or not.”

“This has been on my mind before, but what about your parents?”

“They should be doing well somewhere.”

There was faint rage burning on Heewon’s face as he said those words. Maru nodded once.

“It’s just as you said. I’m the same. It doesn’t matter whether it’s fun or not. This work will be the thing that will feed my family.”

Heewon looked as though he had understood a little.

Maru added,

“Also, I’m saying that it’s not as fun as when I’m playing the main character, not that the play is not fun at all. The stage is not something one person can create alone after all. Someone will have to become the floor, and if doing it myself is the most efficient way to do it, I just do it. There’s no fun in the acting itself, but there’s the fun of completing the whole play.”

“The fun of completing the play, huh. Hm, I don’t like that because it sounds too bothersome.”

“I can understand that too.”

“Also, can I ask one more thing?”

Maru said ‘sure’.

“Do actors have to wake up early in the morning?”

Hearing that question, Maru laughed and shook his head.

## **Chapter 488**

“Casting director? There’s only one person in the country who can be considered a proper one.”

“Who’s that?”

“Lee Junmin.”

Producer Park Hoon said that as he flipped through the profiles that the managers gave him. The person sitting next to him said that he might have heard of that person.

“Give me that.”

“You want to make someone who came here to rest, do work?”

“I’m working though. Unlike a certain someone, I’m not a freelancer.”

He received the file that his friend gave him. Phoenix. He had never heard of that agency before. He flipped over the pages and checked the faces of the young actors. Most of them did not have any prior experience, and their self-introduction slot was completely empty as well. He closed the file since he didn’t find any faces he liked.

“I heard you were starting a drama. I guess many people are asking you to pick their people right?”

“Picking one out is also labor.”

“Can I have a look as well?”

“Go ahead.”

Park Hoon handed his friend the file. After skimming through them, he brightened up and chose one.

“This one’s cute. Twenty years old huh.”

“Doesn’t fit the drama.”

“But look at that face.”

“Goddammit, forget it. Give it back.”

Park Hoon yawned and grabbed the files. He left the meeting room at the TV station and went to a nearby café to change things up a little, but he didn’t feel excited at all since there was work in his hands.

“I saw the news. You already picked all of the main cast?”

“We did. Only then can we contact advertisers.”

“Then it doesn’t matter what you do with the other roles, right?”

“Do you think I’m in a position to do that? If I want to pick a minor role, everyone I know comes to me with their business cards, telling me who and who’s good. It’s goddamn tiring.”

“You have it hard. You need to pick from these people?”

“Not necessarily. If I want to make a good drama, I do need a good face, so I do go through all of them, but usually, the ones I take a liking to come from introductions, not profiles like these. The ones with talent will all come to me either way, through their acting schools or managers. Batch profiles like these are usually those that just entered an agency so they’re just trying things out.”

“Why are there so many people that want to become actors in a small country like this?” His friend asked as he lifted a few profiles up.

Park Hoon drank the cooled coffee in one gulp and stood up with the files.

“You’re going?”

"I have to. There's an audition."

"You have it busy. And here I was thinking we might be able to have a meal together."

"You tell me. I'm tired too because I feel like I'm busy for no reason."

When Park Hoon went to the counter with the files in his arms, his friend stopped him.

"Get going. I'll pay for the coffee instead of food."

"Thanks. Let's have a drink together later."

He left the café and went into the TV station building, which was right across the street. He walked past the pillar with the big YBS logo on it, towards the security check.

"Producer Park, good work."

"Yes, hyung-nim."

He greeted his senior producer before taking the elevator to the 3rd floor.

"Hey, follow me."

He took the newest producer who was sitting in the meeting room to the 2nd floor public hall. People who seemed to be participants of the audition were walking around the corridor.

"My, producer Park."

Just before he entered the audition venue, a fatty with a beard blocked his way.

"Manager Kang. It's been a while."

"I'm a team leader now."

"Really? Congratulations."

He lightly shook hands with team leader Kang.

"Producer Park, are you on a diet? You've lost weight since the last time I saw you."

"It's because the work is hard. Rather than that, what brings you here?"

"Oh, the thing is, one of ours is in the audition this time, and she's incredibly good at acting."

"Well, I'm sure all of them are incredibly good."

"I'm telling you our kid is really good."

"I'll see for myself."

"I'm telling you just in case - and I mean just in case - you miss her by any chance. Here, take this. It must be tiring so you must take your vitamins."

Park Hoon handed the box of vitamin drinks that team leader Kang gave him to his junior producer.

“Team leader Kang. The one you recommended to me last time was no good though. Is Crystal bringing all the strange kids to me? I wonder if they’re looking down on me.”

“No way! Of course not. Three of our Crystal members became big thanks to you, producer Park. I’m only showing the capable ones to you first. The one back then was just nervous, and it will be different this time. She’s really good at acting and is pretty so please take a good look at her.”

“Fine, fine. So what’s her name?”

“She’s called Lee Joomin, and she’s the prettiest of the bunch today, so you’ll know when you see her.”

Why don’t we have a meal together later? - added team leader Kang before leaving with a slight nod.

“Junior, give me a bottle.”

He drank the vitamin drink that his junior producer gave him and went to the public hall. The staff members that were going through the equipment under the brightly lit stage recognized him and greeted him.

“Is everything ready?”

“Yes, it is.”

“Then let’s have a look.”

He sat down in the seat that was closest to the stage. In front of him was a monitor. There was a red light flashing on the camera that was installed for a test.

“Junior.”

“Yes.”

“You said you wanted to go to the entertainment department, right?”

“I also want to shoot dramas.”

“Yeah, yeah. It’s better to have big dreams when you’re still an assistant director. Anyway, watch closely. The drama will change according to how well you can pick out the good gems.”

“Yes.”

The junior producer took out some writing equipment, his eyes burning with passion.

“Please enter in order.”

The participants of the audition came up on stage with a number on their left chests. They all looked young. Since this was a youth drama, appearances were important as well. It would be troublesome if they looked too old.

He had a look at their profiles. The first line on the profiles wasn’t their names but the names of their agencies. If they didn’t belong to one, it was left blank. The big agencies were written in red, and the rest were written in green. There was also a blue checkmark(?) next to some names, and they were those that were given recommendations. These days, the number one dream for youths was apparently

not the president or a scientist, but celebrities or idols. In other words, just about anyone was trying to become a celebrity. It was no exception for the children of those higher up in the TV station, and there were many cases where they participated in auditions with those marks.

“Uhm, senior.”

“What?”

“What’s the blue checkmark for?”

“Oh, that? A letter of recommendation, I guess.”

The junior exclaimed before putting down the profile with the blue checkmark. Park Hoon laughed when the junior put it down carefully.

“Junior.”

“Yes?”

“You should choose the right side to stand on.”

“Ah, yes.”

“You must take into account academic, blood, and personal relations, okay?”

“...Yes.”

“You don’t seem to like it, huh.”

“N-not at all.”

Park Hoon smiled and looked in front of him. Young actors were standing in a line, looking at him with nervousness.

“Well, then. You must be ready. Since all of us are busy, I hope we can do this fast. Please show us everything you can within the allocated time. Even if you come crying to me later, we won’t be seeing each other again.”

“U-uhm.”

A girl with pretty big eyes raised her hand to ask.

“Speak.”

“Are we doing it together?”

“Then should I call you up one by one? One comes in, one goes out. Like that?”

“N-no.”

“Why are you stuttering so much? How are you going to do acting when you can’t express your own opinions properly?”

“I’m sorry.”



“Hm, Number four, Miss Yoo Minji?”

“Yes!”

“Don’t apologize so easily. Did you do something wrong?”

“No.”

Seeing the girl take a step back with a gulp, Park Hoon bitterly smiled.

“Well then. We’re going to start off from number one. Please show us two free skits that you’ve prepared for us, and as for the last one, you just have to do the one we give you. We aren’t going to have a look at your specialties, so you don’t need to be worried about that. If there’s something you want to show us no matter what, you may. However, no idol dances or singing. I’m sick and tired of that. Then let’s start from number one. Look at the camera when you act.”

The boy that came forward took a bow and revealed what his agency was before starting to act. Since it was a youth drama he was applying for, he prepared a student skit. Park Hoon crossed his legs and quietly watched his acting. After pretending to fight with an imaginary friend, the boy started acting as though he was eating food.

“Enough. Mr. Kim Doyoung.”

“Yes.”

“What did you eat just now?”

“What?”

“You were doing an eating act just now. What did you eat?”

“Uhm, it’s...”

“Okay, stop here. From now then, start acting as though you’re going against your teacher. And that teacher is someone you’re looking down on.”

“May I have a moment to think about it?”

“Go ahead. Don’t take too long though.”

After thinking about it, the boy started acting. He vigorously slapped away an imaginary hand and shouted into the air before stopping and then looking at him.

“Are you done?”

“Eh? Ah, yes.”

“Then thanks for your work.”

“Uhm... was that it?”

Park Hoon said as he slightly stretched his neck.

“Mr. Kim Doyoung. I don’t have anything to show you. No, I don’t need to show you anything. The one that needs to do their best to show me something is you. I told you before, right? Don’t come crying to me later. I’m someone that sees as much as you show me, Mr. Kim Doyoung. Well then, next.”

When Park Hoon waved his hand, the boy sighed before going back. His profile said that he belonged to an agency. Do agencies teach nothing these days? He clicked his tongue and was just about to call the next person when,

“You’re starting without me?”

A woman with short, blond hair sat down next to him. She was Heo Miri, the casting director.

“Miri, if you only came ahead of time...”

“That joke isn’t even funny you know? Rather than that, how was the first person?”

Park Hoon quietly replied to her that he was no good. Miri nodded.

“Why don’t we continue, director?”

“Sure. Let’s continue. I don’t dare disobey.”

“Why are you so sensitive today? Is it that day for you, director?”

“Gosh, even though you’re a woman...”

Park Hoon looked forward while thinking that she was a hard woman to deal with. The second actor seemed to have finished preparing and was looking his way.

“Please start with your free skits,” Park Hoon said with a low voice.

The second actor also prepared a high school student act. Talking with an imaginary friend, then fighting.

“Thanks for that.”

“Thank you.”

“But why’s your voice like that when you’re acting? It’s completely different from when you’re acting before.”

“I think I raised my voice a little because I was trying to express agitation.”

“Really? It didn’t sound that good though. Then try acting normally this time. Same as before, going against your teacher.”

After clearing his throat, the second actor started acting again. His line was okay, but his tone became weirder the more he acted.

“Mr. Park Youngsoo. There’s a problem with your vocalization.”

“I’ll try my best to fix it.”

“Of course you will. An actor that can’t find his own voice, of course you have to fix it. But that’s not something you should say at an audition, is it? You should have come after you fixed it.”

“Sorry.”

“Ah, gosh. Are you trying to make me the bad guy? If you didn’t commit a crime, please don’t apologize. It’s not good to hear. Become bolder. You’re an actor. Maybe you’re very shy, but an actor on stage can’t show that. Okay? If you’re here to work, you must advertise yourself as a fitting character. Who would want to use you when you advertise yourself as a shy person?”

Park Hoon laid back in his chair and looked at Miri. Miri was also shaking her head.

“Let’s become a bit bolder, okay? Well, then. Next.”

Park Hoon looked at the third person.

### **Chapter 489**

“No. It wasn’t us that did it.”

Park Hoon told the girl on the stage, who seemed to be dusting her shoulder, to stop.

“Uhm, Miss Han Yoonmi.”

“Yes!”

What a bright reply. He clicked his tongue and told her to stand still.

“Like this?”

“Yes. And try saying the line you just said again.”

“No. It wasn’t us that di...”

“Stop. Why are you shaking your shoulders like that? Are you trying to dance?” Park Hoon asked as he shook his own shoulders.

The girl couldn’t reply so she stayed quiet.

“I’m not sure how it might look from afar, but you look really frantic when you’re zoomed in on with the camera. Did you not act in front of a camera at your acting school? Have you never seen yourself on the monitor?”

“I have, but...”

“Then why are you like that?”

The girl hesitated with her clenched fist on her mouth before walking back without saying anything.

“Uhm, senior.”

The junior producer, who was watching from the side, pointed at the girl’s profile as he talked to him. There was a blue checkmark on it.

“Oh, looks like I wasn’t clear, huh. When I told you to stand on the right side, I meant that you shouldn’t be standing on the same side as someone like me.”

Park Hoon put a cross on the name ‘Han Yoonmi’ with a black marker. The junior looked at him with shock. The blue ‘recommendation’ mark. Park Hoon wasn’t swayed by such underhanded tactics. This always made him clash with the chief producer, but it didn’t really matter to him that much since the chief producer would stay quiet as long as he produced good results. This area was practically in the hands of advertisers anyway. It meant that the one that got good viewing rates was king.

“Don’t scold them so much. You’ll make them cry.”

“Are you here to play around? And also, that was at most a piece of sincere advice.”

“Like hell that was. Next,” said Miri as she looked at the stage.

This time, a girl stepped up with a fresh smile on her face. She looked to be in her early twenties. Park Hoon looked at the profile. She belonged to the agency Crystal. So this was the one that team leader Kang talked about?

“Hello! My name is Lee Joomin. Please take care of me.”

A clear voice entered his ears. Her voice received a pass. Park Hoon nodded and told her to start her free skit. She stood at the center of the stage and took a deep breath before smiling brightly. Her skit was her confessing to her friend that she had gotten a boyfriend. The romantic feelings of first love could be felt. Her second skit was a completely opposite one, she did a sad act this time. He didn’t like that she was trying to look pretty while crying, but her expression wasn’t that bad.

“She’s not bad,” Miri said.

Park Hoon also nodded.

“What do you think, junior?”

“Eh? I think she’s okay as well.”

“What part about her is okay?”

“Uhm....”

“Are you going to use her if it was up to you?”

“Yes. I think she would make the cast.”

“Why? Tell me the reason you’re thinking about right now.”

“Because she’s cute. I think a cheerful student might suit her.”

“Right. Keep practicing expressing your own thoughts in words. A producer’s plan begins with materializing abstract thoughts.”

He moved his eyes away from the nodding junior and looked at the girl in front of him.

“Miss Lee Joomin.”

“Yes.”

“There’s a character in the drama who is an aspiring singer. Can you try singing?”

“You said that an idol song was no good, right?”

“If you don’t know anything else, then you can try that one as well. The reason I said you can’t do it is because there are strange types of people who are fixated on that. How about it? You think you can do it?”

“I’ll sing just a little bit.”

The girl decided on a key without hesitation and started singing. As a decent performance was enough for the character, Park Hoon stopped her after a few lines.

“That was good.”

“Thank you.”

While the girl stepped back, Park Hoon talked with Miri.

“I’m thinking about choosing her if I don’t see anyone good after this.”

“I think she’s good as well. She looks cute too. She’s the type that would work well on students these days. As for acting, well, we’ll have to start shooting to find out for sure.”

“Then let’s do that.”

Park Hoon looked at the next person. He was around 175cm tall, and his build was pretty good. He was skinny but looked sturdy, so to speak.

“He’s from JA.”

“That’s Lee Junmin’s place, right?”

“Yes.”

Hm, Han Maru, huh. He felt like he had heard that name somewhere before.

“Next, please come forward and get ready.”

The boy came forward. He looked up at the lights on the ceiling before remarking,

“Can you see my face well?”

Hearing that, Park Hoon smiled and replied that they could.

This was the first time they received that question today. It was a question that an audition participant had to do, but the ones before him did not go through such a fundamental process. While they looked at the participants with their eyes, they also had to look at them through the camera. Although there was a mark on the center of the stage, the participants would have to adjust their positions according to their heights and builds. Finding out what they looked like on camera was the basics of an actor.

“Please do your two free skits.”

“Understood.”

His voice was on the lower side and was pleasant to listen to. The boy started acting. He moved around actively and talked about the pretty girl he saw yesterday. The way he was restless as he was babbling on looked really natural. When Park Hoon had a look at his profile, he saw that the boy was in his 2nd year of high school. Park Hoon asked after his first skit.

“Is your personality actually like that? Like being talkative and active?”

“I’m not like that at all. I prefer moving only when it’s necessary.”

“Alright. Then please show us your next one.”

The boy sat down on a chair this time. It was a rather still image, which was a contrast to the first skit. He was trying to show the wide range of his acting spectrum. He was someone who knew how to use his brain.

“I didn’t steal it.”

The boy clenched his fists in unease as he placed his hands on his pants. Park Hoon kept looking at the boy. If anyone asked him what the most difficult acting was, Park Hoon would reply that it was quietly talking about normal stuff. It wasn’t that an act with vigorous emotions was easy, but what discerned the truly skilled actors was their acting of normal, everyday life.

The boy neither shouted nor cried with a cringing face. He was just calmly claiming that he was wronged. Park Hoon rubbed the side of his head when he saw the calm acting. This was his habit when he concentrated.

“That’s it from me.”

The boy stood up from his seat. Park Hoon scratched the inside of his cheeks with his tongue and looked at Miri.

“He’s good.”

It wasn’t ‘he’s not bad’. The junior said that he was focused on the boy’s acting as well.

“What is the missing item?”

“I thought of it as a wallet.”

“What’s the teacher like in your act?”

“I modelled them after a high school teacher of mine. She’s the type to drag someone to the faculty office in haste.”

“Is the act you just did a portrayal of your actual self?”

“No, I thought about what a stereotypical shy person is like, and expressed such a character through acting.”

“The first character was an outgoing character?”

“Yes.”

“Good. Let us put in an order. Show us a person hopping around in joy.”

Park Hoon crossed his arms and waited. Just then, someone tapped him from behind. When he turned around, he saw a fellow producer. The junior producer stood up from his seat and took a bow.

“Sit down. I’m just visiting while I’m on my way to something else.”

“Are you here empty-handed? You should’ve brought us some coffee at least. For Miri and the junior.”

“I hadn’t thought of that.”

His fellow producer looked towards the front and said ‘oh’ in a rather surprised voice.

“That fellow.”

“Do you know him?”

“Are you getting old already? Didn’t I tell you that there was a good guy? Who was it again? Uh, Mari, Mara, Ah! Han Maru. It’s Han Maru, right?”

The moment he heard those words, Park Hoon remembered where he heard the name Han Maru before. He heard it from this fellow, who was the main producer of The Witness. Recently, the team that worked on The Witness was given holiday tickets to Jeju island. If they got over 50% viewing rates like the Wednesday-Thursday drama on RBS, they would’ve gotten tickets to Thailand at least, but since the drama was really unique and didn’t have a big fanbase, the viewing rates weren't that high.

“May I start?” The boy on the stage asked.

“Please begin.”

As soon as he said those words, the boy hopped on the spot as though he was a soccer player that scored a goal. He was smiling so brightly and was boasting so much that even Park Hoon ended up laughing. This boy perfectly understood his request and did not hold himself back. He liked the fact that the boy could exaggerate when he had to. If his act did not pop here, he would’ve just remembered the boy as someone who was good at bland acting.

“That suits him too, huh,” his fellow producer said behind him.

“Well done.”

“Thank you.”

Park Hoon took out the script for the first episode of New Semester. There was a character among the supporting actors who he needed a rather mature person for, and from the way the boy’s character so calmly told the teacher that she was wrong, he was reminded of that character.

“I think he might suit the Lee Chan character,” he tried saying to Miri.

Miri immediately looked at the boy and asked him to do a few poses.

“Uhm. Mr. Han Maru. Can you look at the camera with an expressionless expression?”

“Understood.”

Park Hoon turned his eyes to the camera screen. The boy on the screen had sharp eyes. His lips were stiff, and his gaze wasn't wavering. For a high school student, his eyes were pretty decent.

“Can you try saying this just like that? The line goes: ‘You don't want to do that’.”

After saying the words, the boy looked at the camera and uttered those words.

“Can you smile just a little there? Like you're a little shy about it.”

The boy quickly accepted the trivial requests.

Park Hoon nodded his head as he looked at the boy's gradual change in expression. He had a good feeling about this. Since the drama was a school drama, he needed characters that had student-like mindsets. One character was a student that had a calmness that did not lose out to a typical adult's. He seemed to suit the character that might invoke the catharsis of the students.

“That's enough. Thank you for your work,” said Park Hoon as he raised his hand.

“Let's pick this guy as well if we don't find anyone suitable after him.”

“I don't think there will be one though?” Miri smiled as she spoke.

Park Hoon did not deny that. There was no need to reject an already-proven resource. A fellow producer already used him once, didn't he?

“Also, apparently he learned acting from sir Yoon Moonjoong.”

That's really tempting - he thought to himself as he reminded himself of the words that his colleague left behind while sending him off. After that, he looked at the boy that was returning to the line. Han Maru, huh.

“Well, then. Next.”

Park Hoon called out the next person. The audition wasn't over yet. If someone caught his eyes, he might be able to turn that person into a ticket to success.

\* \* \*

“Oppa, you got a call.”

Bada picked up Maru's phone from the living room and knocked on his door but there was no response. When she opened the door, only an empty room greeted her.

“Is he out?”

Bada stared at the phone before picking it up.

“Hello? Ah, yes. It is. Yes, yes. Understood.”

As soon as she hung up, the front door opened and her brother came back. Bada stared at her brother with a dazed expression before exclaiming.



“Mr. Han Maru. You passed the audition, apparently.”

“There was a call?”

“Yeah.”

“That’s good. I thought I didn’t make it since there was no news.”

“Congratulations! My brother is popular now, huh.”

“Like hell I am.”

“Since you made it, why don’t we celebrate?”

“By doing what?”

“On a day like this, we should eat fried chicken.”

“What about the money?”

“Well, I don’t have any.”

“Haah...”

“I’m ordering one then, okay?”

Bada threw Maru’s phone at him.

“But what was that audition for? A play?”

“A drama.”

“A drama? What drama?”

“New Semester.”

“...New Semester? You mean the one on YBS? Like, for real?”

“Yeah.”

“My lord, my brother is doing super well. What are you? An extra? That can’t be right. There’s no way they’re holding an audition for an extra.”

“A supporting role, apparently.”

“Really? I guess we should congratulate doubly as much. I’m ordering two, okay?”

“You are really... fine, go ahead.”

“I’m not taking the opportunity to order it. I’m ordering them to congratulate you,” said Bada while grinning.

**Chapter 490**

-It was a new challenge for me. It definitely wasn't easy. I had to change my acting style after all. At first, I was not planning on accepting it. It was obvious that the shoot would be an arduous one. But then, I was persuaded. You are the only one who can do it - I was tempted by those words.

Maru looked at the elder on the screen as he took a sip of green tea.

A month had passed since the movie was released. It had maintained a small number of airing cinemas immediately after the release, but after a week, it strangely received a lot of attention and the number of airing cinemas increased explosively. Watching *Twilight Struggles* and then putting a review on the internet became a trend that spread around especially quickly among people in their 20s. The post that Bada showed him was one of those.

*Twilight Struggles* spread around the entire country through B-movie theaters, and there was a *Twilight Struggles* craze for a while.

Maru checked the internet and blogs from time to time and found out that many people were outraged at the state of reality after watching the movie. The media started talking about *Twilight Struggles* in their articles as well. When he looked at the strange timing of various articles that seemed to fan the flames, Maru thought that all this was Junmin's strategy.

-You played the warm-hearted Han Sang-deok during the beginning of *Apgu*. Are you returning to the acting scene properly?

-I'm not sure yet. Nothing is set in stone. However, I do have the desire to try out good pieces of work while I still have energy left.

When the reporter asked him to say some words of blessing for the new year, the elder smiled and wished that everyone could earn a lot of money in the new year.

After the interview ended, Maru switched the channel. Ever since Byungchan told him to watch TV as a duty, he had been sparing an hour a day to watch TV. Usually, he watched dramas, but if there was nothing to watch, he watched the news about the entertainment industry. He deeply agreed with Byungchan in that he should know what his industry was like.

"Hello?" Maru said as he picked up his phone.

-Maru, it's me.

"Yes, Byungchan-hyung."

-You haven't forgotten about tomorrow right? The get-together.

"I haven't."

-I'll give you a ride tomorrow.

"You should take a break since it's Saturday. I looked it up. It's only the minimum taxi fare from the train station."

-It's fine. You care about me all the time, so I should at least do this much. Rather than that, this is your first supporting role, huh. Congratulations.

“Thank you.”

-I hope you gain a lot of popularity and earn a lot of money.

“I hope so too. Oh, right, what happened to the movie audition you told me about last time?”

-That? I haven’t heard anything back for two weeks. Looks like it was no good. And here, I was confident about it too.

“Then you should challenge it again.”

-You aren’t even consoling me?

“Would that change the outcome? I’m willing to drink with you if that’s what you want.”

-Right, consolation is no good. It’s not like this is the first or second time. I found a place that’s looking for the main character in an indie movie, so I’m going to try my hand there.

“Good luck with that. There will be good results.”

-I sure hope so. Oh, right. I’m going to call you when I’m going to pick you up tomorrow so don’t turn your phone off.

“Okay.”

-Alright, good night.

Maru put his phone down and looked at the calendar in the living room. It was the 23rd of December. There wasn’t long left until Christmas and the winter holidays. Oh, and the acting competition as well.

He turned off the TV that was talking to itself and went back to his room.

\* \* \*

“Director.”

Park Hoon looked at the woman that walked towards him wearing heels. He was wondering who it was, and she turned out to be Kim Suyeon.

“This is a coincidence. I never thought I’d see you here. Are you a regular here?”

Suyeon pointed at the pork rind restaurant behind her. Park Hoon nodded.

“Oh my, I didn’t know that. I should become a regular here in the future.”

“Whatever.”

Park Hoon poked his junior who was blinking his eyes in a daze next to him.

“What are you doing? Go inside and get the order in.”

“Ah, yes.”

The junior walked backwards while staring at Suyeon until the end before going into the store. Suyeon smiled at the junior PD with a wave of her hand.

“He’s the assistant director, right? He looks cute.”

“Don’t touch such a newbie. He’s a good guy.”

“Sheesh director. People might misunderstand,” said Suyeon with a wink.

Park Hoon picked his nose with his pinky and spoke,

“Looks like you have something to say to me. If it’s something important, you should leave it for the get-together tomorrow.”

“I just wanted to say thanks. Do you have a cold?” Suyeon asked as she handed him some tissues.

Park Hoon blew his nose as strongly as possible. When he tried to give Suyeon back the tissue, she paled in fright and took a few steps back.

“It’s not that dirty.”

“Geez, there you go again.”

“But what are you thanking me for?”

“For Han Maru.”

“Han Maru? What about that guy?”

“You’re feigning ignorance? I called you last time about him. I told you to look at him in a good light. Didn’t you pick him because of that?”

The moment he heard those words, Park Hoon said ‘aha’ and snapped his fingers.

“When you called me last time and said something about a lobby?”

“Yes.”

“Sorry. I was pooping back then so I didn’t hear you properly. I had horrible constipation so I was kinda out of myself.”

“...Ah, okay. Constipation, huh.”

Suyeon made a sour face before switching to a smile again.

“But how do you know Han Maru?”

“He’s in the same company as me.”

“Ah, you’re from JA?”

“Now that’s going too far. I told you about it when I greeted you last time.”

“Sorry about that. My memory is really not that good. Just leaving behind the necessary information in my head is almost everything I’m capable of.”

“Then I guess I’m not an important person to you, director.”

“Who said that? Of course I need you. That’s why I picked you as the teacher-in-training, didn’t I? So please do your best in acting, and just acting.”

“Yes, yes, sure.”

Suyeon was about to go inside the store as she said those words when Park Hoon discovered the junior producer looking at him with glee on his face.

“Where do you think you are going?”

“What else would I do in a restaurant? I’m going to eat.”

“With who?”

“With you, director. The assistant director is there as well.”

“Geez. I don’t want to have a stomach ache because I’m eating with a celebrity.”

“I’ll just eat obediently in the corner. Why don’t we get to know each other more? We’re going to be shooting together after all.”

Park Hoon sighed and nodded. Suyeon thanked him as she opened the door.

“Don’t say anything strange in front of that guy. He hasn’t been tainted yet.”

“Am I some bacteria or something?”

“I’m not sure about bacteria, but you sure are dangerous, that’s for sure.”

“Fine. It’s not like I’m expecting anything from you anyway. I don’t have the energy to waste on an opponent that I can’t win over. Oh, then why did you pick Maru?”

“Because he’s good, duh. You’re in the same company and you don’t even know the skills of your own member?”

“I do. I just tried my hand out just in case. Dang, I guess I did that for nothing. I was planning to show off to him a little.”

Park Hoon looked at Suyeon who walked ahead of him. She was probably shaking her butt on purpose. The junior producer yielded his seat to her with a big grin on his face. He decided to tell him later to wake up.

“Excuse me, we need an additional glass here.”

Park Hoon sniffed as he walked to the table.

\* \* \*

“It’ll be winter break soon once Christmas is over. Ah, I hope winter holidays come quickly,” Aram said as she looked outside the window.

Maru checked the time on his watch before standing up.

“I’m going to leave first.”

“Where are you going, seonbae?”

“To work.”

“Work?”

He had already told Daemyung about this beforehand, so there was no need for additional explanation. He ran away from Aram who persistently asked him what it was about before leaving.

“Hyung, I’m here.”

-Okay. Wait a minute. I’m almost there.

While he waited in front of the school, he saw a familiar car approach from a distance. It was the car that Byungchan always drove.

“It’s cold, get in quickly,” Byungchan said as he opened the window.

Maru got in the passenger seat. The car was very dry to the point that his nose felt dry minutes after he got in because the heater was on.

“Did I turn it up too high? I’ll open the window a little.”

The car departed with the windows slightly open.

“I heard that it’s going to start snowing tomorrow.”

“Wow, I guess we might get a White Christmas this year.”

“Do you have anyone you’re dating?”

“Me? Do you think I have one? I’m always waiting and need to leave at a moment’s notice. I’ll leave the romance for when my pockets are deep enough.”

“I guess this year’s Christmas will be a cold one for you.”

“You just had to poke me where it hurts the moment we met. Are you boasting to me about your girlfriend?”

“You noticed?”

Byungchan turned the wheel with a laugh.

“Usually, drama teams do a get-together like this once they finish casting. It’s just to get to know each other. There should be barely anyone around your age. While it’s a youth drama, most of the actors should be in their early twenties.”

“Looks like I’ll have to go around greeting everyone. I hope my throat survives.”

“Do your best. That’s the cheapest form of self-PR. Ah, you know that Miss Suyeon is playing the teacher-in-training role, right?”

“Yes, I do.”

“Now that makes me envious. You get to act together in a drama with Miss Kim Suyeon when I’ve never seen her before despite belonging to the same company.”

“Do you want her autograph?”

“Forget it.”

The car entered Seoul and stopped in front of a sushi restaurant. Maru asked Byungchan,

“Hyung, you aren’t going to wait here, right?”

“I’m going to drink with someone I know. I used to work with him as a manager, and he told me that he got fired recently. I should insult some high people with him.”

“What a tough world we live in, huh.”

“You tell me. That guy was really well known for being earnest, and he got fired all of a sudden. My heart fell when I heard that.”

“Our president isn’t someone who would fire people without reason so don’t worry about that.”

“Yes. That’s true. But instead, I’d get pressure as soon as I don’t produce any results.”

“He’s a picky one after all. I’ll get going then.”

“Call me once it ends.”

“I thought you were going to drink though?”

“Oh, I’m not drinking. I have to drive after all.”

“You should drink. I can just take the taxi home.”

“No, no, I can’t do that. Call me once it’s over, okay?”

Maru nodded and got off. After watching the car make a U-turn and disappear into the distance, he approached the restaurant. The 1st floor was noisy with customers, and when he looked at the staircase leading to the 2nd floor, he saw a sign that said ‘reserved’.

“Uhm, I heard that the get-together for New Semester is here.”

When he asked a nearby employee, he was told to go to the 2nd floor. Maru nodded and climbed up. The appointment was at 7, and it was 6 right now. When he went up, the first thing he saw was a separate room with a long table that had drinks on it.

A few people were sitting at a nearby table, and they glanced at Maru before starting to chat by themselves. Maru smiled and approached that table.

“Hello, my name is Han Maru. I’m a new actor.”

“Ah, yes,” one man stood up and replied to him.

“I thought you were in the wrong place. My name is Lee Jinho. I’m a manager at Hansung Agency.”

“I’m manager Lee Minwoon.”

"I'm manager Hwang Jeongmin."

"So you were managers. May I join you?"

"Ah, yes, well."

Maru sat down and spoke,

"You can drop the honorifics with me. I'm a lot younger than you all after all. Were you eating?"

"We were just eating a light meal since we came here early."

The manager laughed.

"But why are you here so early? The appointment should be seven."

"I was planning to greet everyone and talk to some people. Oh, you can continue eating."

The managers looked at him for a while before eating with smiles on their faces. Maru sighed as he looked at them. He knew how hard their lives were.

"I'll bring you some drinks."

Maru picked up a bottle of coke and a beer from the separate room before coming back out again. The managers coughed awkwardly.

"It's not that noticeable. If they say something, I'll just tell them I drank it. Here, I'll pour you a drink. Drinking beer with rice is always good."

The managers looked at each other before receiving beer from Maru with grins on their faces. At that moment, two more people came up the stairs.

"Over here, Kim-hyung!"

"Hey hey, sit down here."

It seemed as though both of them were managers. Maru looked at the two new people before sitting down. A small 'who?' could be heard.

"He's an actor apparently. Han Maru, right?"

"Yes, you should receive a glass from me as well. You must be thirsty," said Maru as he picked up the beer bottle.