

Once Again 511

Chapter 511

“Why won’t you do your work properly!”

Maru turned his head around when he heard producer Park Hoon shout. He saw the assistant director, Kim Minjoong, standing stiffly. He wondered what the guy did wrong this time as he sipped on some coffee and switched locations. Park Hoon didn’t shout at the actors, but he didn’t want to be present when someone was being scolded. That would make things awkward.

“What’s up today?” Seong Dongho approached him and asked.

“Something probably happened,” Maru replied lightly.

Whenever Park Hoon raised his voice, it was always the assistant director, Kim Minjoong, being scolded. He wasn’t doing that out of malice, since the two were on pretty good terms usually, as seen by how they acted after the shoot. The two looked like two brothers, where the younger brother followed the older one, despite him being quite a lot older and very difficult.

“He should treat him better. But hey, what are you drinking?”

“Coffee.”

Maru pointed at the vending machine before giving Dongho a 100 won coin. Dongho walked towards the vending machine by the right entrance.

“It’s so cold.”

Joomin came up to him this time, with her arms crossed.

“It’s still pretty chilly, isn’t it?”

“It was quite warm yesterday, but I guess we’re back to winter today.”

“That’s just how March is usually. Why don’t you drink coffee as well? I think there’s still some time until the shoot begins.”

“Should I?”

“Do you want a coin?”

“I’ll gladly take it.”

Taking the coin from him, Joomin walked towards the vending machine. After seeing her greet Dongho and talk to him, Maru turned his head around. It was now the third month since the shoot for the drama ‘New Semester’ had begun. Thanks to his early efforts, his relationships with the other child actors weren’t that bad. He didn’t have any trouble greeting them or making jokes. He didn’t want a close friendship-kind of relationship, so he was completely happy how things were now.

7 a.m. He was now used to coming to this middle school every Sunday. He got used to the looks of the corridor, the classroom, and even the faculty office, as well as the scenery outside.

“Bring the crane over here! The rails should be starting here and ending here.”

The assistant director said that the shoot would begin at 7:30, but from the way things were now, it seemed like it was going to start around 8. Maru bit on the cup of coffee that he finished as he rolled his feet. The wind was pretty chilly, so he would lose body heat pretty quickly if he stood still.

“Hi.”

“I think this place is colder than the others.”

Kang Giwoo, Park Jichan, and Ahn Yeseul came. All three of them were wearing padded coats that reached their knees. Maru waved at the three instead of greeting them.

“Where’s Okseon?” Yeseul asked.

Maru just shrugged. Currently, the child actors were split into two factions. The main characters and the supporting characters. Okseon was classified into the latter, but she did not hang out with anyone. She walked around where the actors waited when the shoot wasn’t happening, and would only gather round when she was called by the assistant director.

“Don’t you think she’s too detached from all of us?” Yeseul asked.

Jichan agreed while Giwoo tried to switch the topic by saying that anything can happen.

Maru did not join their conversation. The coffee cup in his mouth helped out at a time like this.

During the pre-shoot get-together, Maru saw Yeseul as a very cautious girl. A month into the shoot, she exchanged smiles with the others but clearly kept her distance. But now, she seemed to have differentiated enemies from allies perfectly and did not hesitate when she talked. Okseon was her main target. She sneakily said words that would exclude Okseon from the group. Maru could see that she was someone who would become the leader if a faction formed among the girls.

“Okseon doesn’t hang out with you guys either, does she?”

“There are people who are more comfortable being alone.”

Maru made up an excuse since she was so tenacious with that question. It was an answer that stood up for Okseon yet did not go against what Yeseul said, so there should be no complaints.

“I should plan an event or something. Let’s hold a get-together party by ourselves,” said Jichan.

Giwoo agreed, saying that it was a good idea. Giwoo was someone who never disagreed with anyone when he talked to them. He was a smart kid. Giwoo faintly smiled when he met eyes with Maru. Maru smiled back. Two crocodiles had something in common.

Jichan seemed to feel better and talked about when they should gather in a loud voice. At that time, Dongho and Joomin came back from the vending machine.

“We haven’t met outside even once during these three months. Why don’t we meet up and eat something together as fellow actors?”

“That sounds good. Let’s hold one if we have the time.”

Maru made an escape route early on. It tired him out just by thinking that he would have to laugh and talk to people he met through work. It might be different if Dongho and Joomin were the only people, but eating with the other three would be very annoying for him. There was no trouble getting along with them during shoots, so there was no reason to make some time to meet them either.

He suddenly remembered Junmin's words that he drew the line too clearly, but laughing and chatting with kids as a forty-five year old adult without any alcohol was actually quite painful for him.

"Director Park! When are we starting?"

Hwang Joonghoon, who played the role of the teacher, peeked out of the first floor classroom and shouted. That was the place where the adult actors waited. There was a warm heater and tea there, and everyone classified as actors could go inside and rest, but the new actors were all waiting outside. That was because it was much better to talk with their peers in the cold rather than staying awkwardly with the great seniors in warmth.

"Please wait a little more."

"Hey, you told me we were starting early today. That's why I drove my car so early in the morning."

"Senior Hwang. This isn't the first time. Please let me go this time."

Park Hoon made a soft smile which made him look nothing like the angry man he was in front of the assistant director. Joonghoon made a prankful smile before closing the window. It didn't look like he was serious when he said those words.

"Let's get things done quickly! Also, Sanghoon-hyung, about that key light...."

Behind the shouting Park Hoon, the crane was moving up and down. On top of it was the camera director. He kept rubbing his hands as though he was cold.

"Hoon, let's start already. I'm freezing."

"Seniors! Just wait a little more. The sun needs to rise a little more."

The two people's voices resonated loudly.

Maru would walk between the staff members from time to time, and the opinion they had of Park Hoon didn't seem to be bad. No, it was on the good side. He was a little picky when it came to choosing a good picture, but everything else about him was decent. That was what he got from summing up their opinions.

"We're starting the rehearsal!"

The assistant director shouted. The classroom windows opened and the adult actors all peeked out.

Maru took off his coat and moved in front of the producer. The scenes taken in the school field were mostly centered around the students. Although New Semester was supposed to have a different story every episode, the 8th episode broke that trend by being a continuation of the 7th episode. The title was 'Prank and Apology'.

In episode 7, Dongho played a light prank on the teacher-in-training, Suyeon. He asked a rather offensive, or perhaps childish question - when was her first kiss. As Dongho always played jokes like that on the female teachers, the other kids in the class didn't think much of it, but Suyeon, the teacher-in-training, would look severely hurt by his words. The 7th episode centered around Suyeon, with Dongho giving off the bad image, and Maru would be portrayed as the onlooker, slowly turning into the character that urged Dongho to do it.

In the 8th episode, what was supposed to be a small prank actually made Suyeon cry, startling Dongho and Maru and making them feel responsible. They would get the help of the others in the class to find out about the reason and apologizing in the end.

"So her boyfriend passed away."

"So pitiful."

"What's so pitiful? She's just a fictional character."

The kids talked about it as they looked at the script for the 8th episode in front of the camera. Suyeon, who played the role of Park Chaeyeon, the one kids pitied just now, was smiling from ear to ear while peeking out of the classroom. Thinking about how she would immediately start crying even if she looked like she was smiling right now, Maru thought that actors were incredible people, once again.

"I'm going to take a full shot of Maru and Dongho walking out together. You see the camera director on the crane, right? Walk below it slowly. The others should follow while chatting."

They started the rehearsal after listening to Park Hoon's instructions. Maru walked with Dongho towards the point right underneath the crane. His lines were about how to play a prank on the teacher-in-training.

"Okay, let's go just like that."

After Park Hoon called out to the camera director once and talked to him about a few things, he walked towards the monitor again. The assistant director's stand-by sign appeared again.

"Ready, cue!"

The season in the drama was March just like reality. Maru shrugged his shoulders a little. There was no need to act like it was cold. It was actually cold, so he just needed to show it.

"Lee Chan. You saw how teacher Chaeyeon was at a loss for words yesterday in embarrassment, right?"

Dongho laughed. Dongho had adjusted quite a lot to fit the role of Dongwook during the past three months.

"Really now?"

Maru said that without a care. However, he kept giving him glances, nuancing that he wasn't entirely disinterested. He followed the instructions on the script quite closely.

"Cut! Let's follow after that."

The camera director climbed down from the crane and grabbed the camera placed on the rail. Maru heard that he was going to get a bust shot. His hands should be more free here. After getting the start sign, he started moving again.

Dongho spoke first.

"I told you. She was really cute."

"What are you planning to do now?"

"I'm thinking about it. I think we might be able to see her cry if I push her a little more."

"You're really going to make her cry?"

"You think? Duh. Also, does it even make sense that teachers can't take a little joke like that? Teacher Chaeyeon should understand. Isn't this what memories are about?"

Then cut again. The camera director, holding an ENG camera, stood behind Dongho.

Park Hoon did not comment about their acting method just like what he said on the first day. If he really didn't like a cut, he would look at the monitor and talk to them, but most of the time, he did not give them specific directions so that the actors could set a direction for themselves.

Maru ignored the lens behind Dongho's shoulders and looked at Dongho. In dramas, looking directly at the lens did not occur except in some extremely special cases.

Cue - he heard Park Hoon's voice and started speaking,

"I guess it is."

"And that's where you come in. Don't you have anything good? You were awesome during our first year. You completely fooled the homeroom teacher on April Fools. I think you need to be the one to come up with a scenario since you're good at it."

"A scenario? Well, it's not like I don't have one....."

Not interested yet interested - the directions written on the script by the writer always required him to express two conflicting emotions at once. Maru had to look in the mirror several times in order to create his current expression. He faintly curled up his lips on one end, while his gaze was directed at the school. He also slightly pulled his chin inwards, with his upper and lower teeth slightly apart. He practiced to the point that his facial muscles started aching so that he could express that conflicting emotion.

"Cut, okay. Let's move."

Maru looked at Dongho while loosening the tension in his face. Dongho was blinking in a daze as he looked at producer Park Hoon.

"That's it?"

"I think it is."

One take, and an immediate okay. Usually, they would take another shot even if there was no NG to take different approaches, but there was none of that this time.

“Good. That was very good.”

Maru heard Park Hoon say those words as he looked their way. Maru shrugged and looked at Dongho. Dongho was grinning as he clenched his fist.

‘That was very good’ - he felt good since he contributed to finishing the shoot early. He moved inside the school with Dongho, who was now able to hang his arm around Maru’s shoulders with ease.

“I guess they’re shooting senior Suyeon now,” said Yeseul as she tip-toed.

The camera was moving towards the faculty office. The adult actors and background actors that were waiting also moved into the faculty office. According to the order on the script, Dongho and Maru would continue talking about their scheme in their class on the 2nd floor, but they couldn’t move around the equipment too much, so it seemed that they were going to start with shooting the lower floor scenes.

The director already had his plans so it should be fine even if they didn’t shoot in order.

“Rather than that, this writer is just... geez.”

Maru clicked his tongue and opened the script to his lines.

‘Feeling slight pity and heartbroken yet not bursting out in anger.’

He knew that different writers had different writing styles, but this writer was very abstract. There was a series of emotional expressions that he would never understand without getting deeply into it, and every one of them gave him a headache.

Dongho and Joomin, who sat next to him, were also staring at the script with their mouths shut. The emotional detail was increasing with the episode. Maybe that was what made this person a big-time writer. He now missed the scripts for ‘Youth Generation’ that clearly stated ‘sad’, ‘laughing’, ‘angry’, and simple things like that.

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“It’s such a pity though. It’s such a pity though. It’s such, a pity though.”

The words became a little awkward when he took a breath midway through the line. The ‘with a bit of pause’ written on the script probably didn’t refer to that. Pause. It was a rather peculiar word. It was a very clear word, but there was an element of abstractness to it as well. He had to physically stop speaking, look at the opponent, and draw out the emotion in that short burst of silence. Facial expressions, speech tones, bodily actions - Maru flipped through the script and kept looking at the flow of emotions that the writer wrote in the script to see whether he missed anything, or if he got confused with the emotions of another character. Even after he checked several times, he still felt something was off as soon as he flipped the page.

“Let’s do that once again. Lights, don’t cast any shadows on our actors’ faces.”

Maru took his eyes off the script and looked at the camera. Suyeon was talking to the kids in the corridor. She was smiling as though nothing happened, but the face she had when she turned around and looked at the camera was colored with unspeakable sadness.

“Cutttt!”

Producer Park Hoon emphasized the t in cut. At first, Maru wondered why he did that, but now he knew that that signified. Park Hoon would shout like that whenever he got a take that was very much to his liking. He was standing up with satisfaction right now as well.

“Bring more of that emotion out. This time, make an expression that expresses more of a current pain rather one from sadness in the past.”

“I think that was pretty good though,” Suyeon said as she pouted.

“It was good, yes, but let’s do that one more time. Senior, please shoot from the right this time.”

“You’re having fun.”

The camera director cracked his neck sideways as he said those words.

“Please. Also, hold the boom mic as close as possible.”

Park Hoon did not give instructions to the child actors, but he asked for a lot from the adult directors. He even gave directions to Hwang Joonghoon, who he called ‘sir’. Of course, with respect.

The camera started rolling again.

Maru closed his ears and focused on the script again. The reason the director doesn’t give out directions for the child actors was probably because of efficiency. Pros, such as Suyeon over there, would listen to what the director wanted and produce results that matched. The director might or might not like that result, but Suyeon would provide him with a result that was close to what the director wanted.

Park Hoon requested another take from Suyeon, and despite the fact that Suyeon showed a splendid act, he had her do the same scene with a different set of emotions this time.

That wasn’t easy. There were no lines involved here, and the only things that could change were the facial muscles and the movement of the eyes. Suyeon would have to use those limited resources and combine them differently to express two different types of sadness.

That was what a pro was about.

Park Hoon told the child actors ‘you are pros’ as well, but Maru understood the meaning of that ‘pro’ was something different from what he considered pros. To Park Hoon, the child actors were probably ‘pros’ in the sense that they were paid for their provided labor. If the child actors were able to prove that they were able to show different colors of their acting whenever the director requested them to, the director would probably give out instructions to them as well.

‘You can’t call yourself a pro if you can’t listen to the requests of your client.’

He muttered his lines several times to engrave them in his mind. Just then, Suyeon’s scene ended. It was 2 p.m. Everyone here knew that they had to shoot as much as possible on the weekend when the school was empty in order to decrease their workload during the weekdays, so the walking speed of not only the staff but also the actors was quite quick when they switched locations.

“We’ll move to the corridor of the 2nd floor now!”

There should be around 30 minutes of free time for the equipment to be set up so they entered the classroom. The staff did not care what an actor did when they didn't have a scene to take. They just had to be in front of the camera when the shoot occurred. Jichan and Yeseul were probably waiting inside vans with heaters. He didn't know where Okseon was.

Giwoo and Dongho were going over their lines together since their scene was right after the upcoming one. After their scene would be the classroom scene. Maru would become busy starting then.

"Your eyes might pop out, you know?"

Suyeon was standing in front of him with a bright smile. She was wearing a thick padded coat.

"Can I ask you a question?"

"Oh, my. What's gotten into you? Asking questions like that."

"I'll take that as a yes so have a look at this part."

Maru pointed at one part of the script. Eyes red due to being agitated - that expressed Lee Chan's state of emotions.

"Does eyes red mean that I actually have to have bloodshot eyes?"

"That depends on the interpretation of the actor. Also on the director's instructions. While there are people who really tense their eyes and make their eyes bloodshot, there are also people that interpret it as an emotional thing and just start glaring. Fundamentally, actors are supposed to act based on the script, but there are things that are left up to interpretation."

"What would you do, senior?"

"Me? I like following the script. If I was the one doing this, I would either keep my eyes open for a long time without blinking or perhaps rub my eyes. That makes them look a little redder, you know? You can discern it through the camera if the camera has its focus on you. That's how I would do it. It's an interpretation that sticks to the basics."

"Sticks to the basics, huh."

He nodded. Suyeon told him good luck before walking past him. After watching her walk with the make-up artist for a while, he moved to the 2nd floor.

Interpretation of the script. When he shot Youth Generation, he didn't hear much. He was only a minor character, did not have many scenes, and above all, the shoot was on a tight schedule, so he got an okay sign quickly most of the time.

In Twilight Struggles, he clung to that single line again and again before attending the shoot and finished the cut in one go. He did not even have the time to listen to what the director's intentions were.

As for the movie he shot with director Park Joongjin, there was no room for 'his interpretation'. Joongjin already had a near-perfect picture in his head, and actors were just tools to complete that image for him. On the last day of the shoot, he changed his acting on his own accord and caught Joongjin's eyes, but that wasn't an act that came about through plenty of talk with the director.

He thought that he rarely had any interactions with the directors about the interpretations of the script. Well, all he played were some minor roles or passing-by roles, so the directors probably neither had the time nor the reason to look at him deeply.

Was this right? Maru underlined the line on the script with a pen as he thought about that. There was no 'answer' when it came to acting. If there was a systemized answer just like mathematics, who would watch dramas and movies? It would be the same no matter who appeared in it.

Precisely because there wasn't a correct answer, acting possessed infinite possibilities. That also made it hard. He chose a path that he thought was the best among the numerous split paths, but other people might see it as the worst. This was his first time as a supporting character. Maru felt very complex. He sighed in relief when he got an okay in one go, but looking at Suyeon who changed up her acting upon the director's instructions, he inwardly felt like he could do better.

Could he have shown the director a different kind of acting when he said that they should do another take? The relief of having finished his scene and the regret of being excluded from more possibilities kept clashing inside him.

"Maru, can you help me with practice? I just can't get my lines right," Joomin approached him and asked.

Maru nodded. He couldn't keep clinging on to a problem he couldn't produce an answer to forever. He would naturally arrive at an answer as long as he kept working with producer Park Hoon, so it was much better for him to focus on working together with his colleagues right now.

"Should I start from here?"

"Yeah, it's this part."

"I wonder if Seri hates me?"

That was Yeseul's line. There was no need for him to say the lines in a feminine way, so he just read it out clearly to practice his pronunciation. Joomin followed up with her line. Just like that, they exchanged a few lines.

"This line. I really can't get used to saying this one."

-(To Yeseul, grabbing her hand, wanting her to rely on her a little more) I'm on your side, so tell me whenever something happens. I'll listen to you. We are friends, aren't we? We'll be best friends forever.

That was the line Joomin had to say. Maru reached out. Joomin looked at him.

"Wouldn't it be better if you say the line while acting a bit?"

"Should I?"

Joomin grabbed his hand with both of her hands and said her line. The line wasn't that long and did not contain any difficult words either, but she kept screwing up. When she did manage to say her words properly, even Maru could tell that it was way too dry.

"It's no good, right?"

Joomin let go of his hand. Maru replied yes. Rather than shooting over and over again, it would be much better to listen to some bitter words and fix it right here.

“What do you think is the problem?”

“I’m not sure. I can only tell you the theoretical stuff.”

“Tell me. My head is completely blank right now.”

“First, I think the most important problem is whether you actually like Yeseul or not. Or perhaps there’s a word that you find hard to pronounce.”

“It’s not about pronunciation. There’s nothing difficult since it’s spoken normally. So I guess it’s an emotional thing after all?”

“Did something happen between you and her, and not the character Yeseul?”

Maru pointed at Yeseul, who was coming up to the 2nd floor with Jichan. Joomin shook her head.

“It’s just like usual. Greeting her and talking to her like usual.”

After thinking about something for a while, Joomin told him to help her out once again. She also told him to see if anything changed about her. Maru observed her expressions carefully as he repeated the same lines. It did sound much better than before.

“I think that just now was a lot better.”

“Is that how I should do it?”

“You don’t like it?”

“I was trying to change up my acting a little. I monitored the 2nd episode, but it looked a little too bland. That’s why I tried to be conscious of my expressions a little and I think that’s the problem.”

Joomin pouted before loosening her cheeks and sighing.

“My manager-oppa told me that I’m not eye-catching. I’m doing my best since I’m a supporting character, so I felt like I was losing strength when I heard him.”

Just how many actors did not want to gain recognition for their acting skills? Joomin even said that her dream was to become successful and famous. To her, being ‘not eye-catching’ must be a serious problem.

“Do you want to try asking the director?” asked Maru.

Joomin made a difficult expression. During the past 3 months, the director never talked to a child actor one-on-one in regards to acting. It wasn’t an easy thing to approach producer Park Hoon, who had made his intentions clear regarding acting philosophy. Even Maru was watching his words in fear that he might be hated, but now he felt the need to become bolder. There was a possibility of him swearing at Maru if he went by himself, so he felt that it would be better to go with Joomin, who would share that burden with him. He actually wanted to bring others in this as well.

He approached Jichan and Yeseul carefully. He asked the two whether they had anything to ask the director about acting, but the two shook their heads. Those two were being cautious about it as well.

In the end, the two walked to the director with Maru at the front. He had lost a bit of his confidence in interpreting the script. If he kept forging ahead without knowing what to do like this, he might start doing the wrong things, so he thought that he should ask questions now, even if it meant the director snapping out at him.

“Is it really okay for us to talk to him first?”

“I’m not sure either.”

Although producer Park Hoon called them ‘little dreamers’ in an endearing way, the sense of distance was quite considerable. That was probably because the way he snapped at them on the first day was engraved into their minds. Maru decided that he should approach him anyway, taking consolation from the fact that the director was actually quite close to the adult actors usually. If he was told ‘you’re cocky’ or ‘you can’t even interpret it by yourself?’ or something like that, he would make a foolish smile and quickly step back. At most, he would get the ‘silly kid’ treatment and things would end there.

After the corridor scene ended, Maru walked up to producer Park Hoon, who told the staff to move the equipment. Park Hoon, who was talking to the scripter, turned around to stare at Maru.

“Director.”

“Yeah, what is it?”

“There’s something I want to ask you about regarding the interpretation of the script and about acting, is that okay with you?”

The more adult you were, the weaker you became in front of power. Maru found the man in front of him really hard to deal with. He could act friendly towards Junmin since Junmin expressed his goodwill so openly, but meeting a superior he didn’t have a good relationship with made him gulp subconsciously.

After pausing for a while, producer Park Hoon spoke,

“That took you long enough.”

He sounded as though he had been waiting for this moment.

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He was at a loss for words for a moment due to the positive reply he got.

“Say it if you have anything to say. We need to get the next shot going.”

“YES.”

After exchanging gazes with Joomin, he opened the script in front of the director.

“About this part.”

-Feeling slight pity and heartbroken yet not bursting out in anger.

After seeing Park Hoon's eyes move according to the text, he continued speaking.

"I think it's telling me to express conflicting emotions, but I wonder what you're expecting as a director when it says 'heartbroken yet not sad'."

"Writer Lee Hanmi likes lines like that. She always writes based on the principle that humans are never simple, are wicked at heart, and that they don't even know that. That's why you need to look at the context before and after that line when you get complex directions like that. Sometimes, it helps to talk about it with the actor you're saying that line to."

"This scene is about Lee Chan's internal struggles, so I didn't have anyone suitable to ask. Looking at the narration, the lines before, and the lines after it, he seems to be regretting urging Dongwook to play that prank, but he also looks like he doesn't like how a teacher-in-training burst into tears with just that. Heartbroken probably stems from regret, and the anger part sounds like he's a little flabbergasted that the teacher-in-training is so immature...."

"If you interpreted it that way, I think it's good. If you can express your character's emotions in words, it shows that you haven't looked at it lightly. The problem then comes down to whether you can accept that interpretation or not, right?"

Maru nodded. He had a look at the context and figured out most of the emotions that his current character should have, but he doubted whether that was the writer's intention or not. That doubt immediately led to his distrust of his own interpretations. If he could accept it himself, he could just push forward with that, but this time around, he didn't have that confidence.

"What's the Lee Chan that you're playing like in your understanding?"

"Lee Chan is a smart kid. That's why he doesn't do things that might get him into trouble. The fact that he had Dongwook do the prank is also to watch from behind the scenes after all. He also has a bit of pride in the perfect pranks that he plans. His character background does say that he inwardly rejoices when his classmates talk about the pranks he planned during his first year. That doesn't mean that he's twisted at heart though. He just thinks that doing something himself is being childish."

"And what's the current situation like?"

"Since the teacher-in-training burst into tears, the kids in the class started to look for someone to blame, and their arrows were turning towards Dongwook. Lee Chan feels a bit of pity that his prank didn't go well, sorry towards Dongwook who gets the blame instead of him, and lastly, feels angry towards the teacher-in-training. All of these combined should be making him incredibly irritated right now. That's what I think."

"You can see it that way, but he might be angry not at the teacher-in-training, but at himself. Like you said, Lee Chan is someone who is confident in his smarts. He had planned a perfect prank, but that was ruined, so this is a possibility as well."

"That's true. Then which one's correct?"

"Try both."

"What?"

“Let’s try both of them out. There is no correct answer. What the writer wants is already in the script. It’s the actor’s job to interpret that and show it to the camera. You might have a better grasp on his personality if you knew how Lee Chan would act after this, but as you know, the script isn’t out yet. Only the writer knows how Lee Chan would act in the ninth, tenth, and eleventh episodes. That’s why it’s important to keep researching what the writer wants, but at the same time, creating a character based on your own understanding. As for me, my job is to watch your acting in the editing room and choose the better one. We’re still in the early stages. We aren’t sure if there will be episodes in the future with Lee Chan as the main. So for now, show me everything you can.”

The assistant director came and said that everything was ready.

“Wait a bit. I’ll go up after I talk to these two.”

“Yes. I’ll go up first then.”

“Alright.”

Park Hoon looked at Maru.

“Anything else?”

It was time for the shoot, yet the director was sparing his time for them. There was no need to ask the foolish question of ‘don’t you have to go?’. He spoke since he was allowed to.

“I guess this might concern your personal preferences, but how do you suppose I express the line ‘red eyes’? Do you think I should actually rub my eyes and make them look red, or just express my agitation, or perhaps sadness, in actions only?”

“There aren’t any actors that like artificial things. Nor are there any that like what seems ‘normal’, and ‘common’. Actors definitely have the desire to show their ‘acting’. This should apply to you as well. That’s why they show some agreed-upon things when expressing certain emotions according to their experience, but I don’t like things like that. If you did this part and your eyes naturally became red, I’m okay with that. If you put up a pretense when you act just to show that your eyes are red when they aren’t, then that’s a no-no. However, this is up to your acting skills as well. If you rub your eyes to make them red and manage to persuade me through the monitor that you are truly agitated, then that’s of course okay. Making ‘common’ things look ‘uncommon’, and ‘artificial’ things look ‘natural’ is what acting is about after all. Of course, this acting philosophy is something different for every actor, so don’t take that too seriously.”

Anything else? - Park Hoon asked.

Maru replied that there was no more. He resolved most of his questions thanks to the answers he just heard. He might get new questions in the next episode, but he didn’t have any for now.

“Then next, Joomin. What do you want to talk about?”

Maru took a step back and looked at Park Hoon and Joomin. The two started a long conversation once again. When Park Hoon’s walkie-talkie asked him when they were going to resume the shoot, Park Hoon said ‘ten minutes’ before focusing on Joomin again.

Considering the time he spent with Maru, it meant that the shoot was delayed by about 15 minutes. Actually, he didn't think that he would have such an in-depth conversation. He thought that the director would briefly explain what he was looking for if he asked a question. However, that wasn't the case. He replied to a question with a question, and that led to a short discussion. It wasn't 'what you're thinking is wrong' but 'what I think is this'. It was quite unexpected to see the director like that.

He might have just come up with a misunderstanding himself. Maru looked at producer Park Hoon nodding as he listened to Joomin. Directors were authoritative. They did not forgive those that challenged their authority - maybe he had consolidated that misconception in his mind.

Of course, not every director would be like Park Hoon. There should be a lot of directors who, like Park Joongjin, thought that an actor's interpretation was not important.

The acting method might change according to the director. Maru thought that he should ask more questions in the future. Park Hoon was not the 'caring mother' character. However, he would even delay the shoot to listen to him when he asked something. He did not look down on younger actors and did not scold people for not knowing something. A companion - that was the word that came to Maru's mind when he looked at Park Hoon. He was someone that could be relied upon on this rocky journey that was the drama.

"Thank you."

Joomin turned around after thanking him. Only then did Park Hoon stand up and move. Maru looked at Joomin, who had an excited face, and asked.

"What'd he say?"

"He didn't tell me to do anything specific, but I feel like I'm much more clear-headed now. He told me not to fear NGs. If I don't make a mistake, someone else will."

"Haha, that's true."

"It's good to change up the expressions, but he told me that it would be reckless to try to do that during the shoot. He told me to bring only the verified expressions."

"Looks like you have a lot of practice to do if you want to do the acting you are satisfied with."

"Right. Looks like I'll be staying in front of the mirror for a long time now. Also, in the same line of thought, can you practice with me until the scene? I want to return to how I was doing things before."

"Let's call Dongho as well. He'll be waiting for a while once the next scene is over."

"Sounds good."

Maru closed the script and walked towards the staircase.

* * *

Okseon, who was reading the script at the end of the corridor, yawned slightly and closed the script. She decided to take a short break.

Since almost everything was shot on the weekend, the waiting time was pretty long. Shoot, then wait, shoot then wait. It was an endless repetition of that.

He looks energetic as always - Okseon thought as she looked at Giwoo, who was quite eye-catching among the actors gathered there. During the early days, Giwoo would put on a rather eerie smile from time to time, but these days, he acted very politely to the point that it made her wonder if what she saw was wrong. Perhaps thanks to that, the adults were very attentive to Giwoo as well. Giwoo acted kindly towards all adult actors, especially to the eldest, Hwang Joonghoon, going as far as to call him 'father'. Just until three months ago, all of them found the adult actors hard to deal with, but thanks to Giwoo, it was a lot better now. Of course, none of them were as close to the adults as Giwoo was though.

"Okseon, want to practice together?" Joomin came to her and asked.

Okseon shook her head. She was taking a break just after a round of practice, so she didn't want to go back immediately. Joomin made a disappointed expression before smiling and nodding. This unni didn't change either. She looked after the others a lot. She felt thankful that she cared for her, but joining a group to share something and act together was honestly too much of a hassle for her. It was much easier for her to stay away.

Joomin, Maru, and Dongho. Those three were practicing in a corner today as well. Whenever she heard something during her waiting time, it was usually those three practicing together. Once the camera started rolling, they would leave the building so that they didn't interrupt the shoot. During lunchtime, some loud noises could be heard as well, and it was mostly Maru or Dongho doing vocal practice. The staff members seemed to have gotten used to that as well, some even saying that they didn't feel like they were having lunch if they didn't hear that. Those two worked quite hard. While she respected their passion, she really did not want to join them. She had to take a break when she needed to.

"Why do you look like you're being bullied? Let's go."

Jichan talked to her. Okseon shook her head without a word as she always did. Jichan used some unpleasant words from time to time, but that wasn't out of malice. It was just that he was stupid. Dongho was also similar one time, but he was very calm these days. This guy was probably using some 'rough' words to look cool, but he would probably find it embarrassing later on in life.

Please have lunch - It was now lunch, just at 3 in the afternoon. Some actors left the school to get food, but Okseon received the lunchbox.

"You're going to eat by yourself again, aren't you?"

Yeseul glimpsed at her before jeering at her. Okseon didn't reply and just received a lunch box before going somewhere quiet. While she wanted 'quiet', she was just sitting on the opposite end of the other kids. She wanted to get an empty classroom to herself, but she wasn't allowed to enter classrooms other than the ones she was permitted to.

The adult actors probably went to the restaurant in front of the school, while the staff members ate on the floor below. From some time onwards, it became the norm for only the child actors to remain behind in this classroom, and at this point, it felt natural.

In this classroom where laughs could be heard every now and then, Okseon observed Maru and Giwoo closely.

Observing people - that was something Okseon did for fun, and for studying. She didn't want to join the others and talk to them, but watching them from afar was quite fun. If she joined them, she would be pushed around here and there, but watching them from outside allowed her to indirectly experience the things happening among them without being influenced.

The reason she observed Maru recently was nothing special, it was because of his acting. How could he look so natural? Maru did not become stiff just because he was in front of the camera, and looked relaxed whenever she saw him. The fact that his real personality was similar to Lee Chan should have helped him a lot with that, but there seemed to be a special way he practiced other than that as well.

Similarly, the reason she observed Giwoo was because his acting became more and more similar to Maru's. Last time, she even heard the director say that his character became Lee Chan-like. Giwoo immediately changed up his acting, but Okseon could still feel that Giwoo was giving off similar vibes to Maru. It wasn't just his acting, but his hand gestures, his tone when laughing, his speech, and even his trivial habits. Of course, they weren't eye-catching. Only Okseon, who thought of herself as really developed when it came to observing people, found out after watching him for a long time.

Was it a coincidence?

Okseon ate a spoonful of rice before observing the two. Giwoo was scratching his eyebrows just like Maru.

Chapter 514

A loved one passed away. He could sympathize with that. If it was in reality, he would've calmly listened to that person. If necessary, he might have bought some alcoholic drinks as well.

But how would Lee Chan act?

"I didn't know that you went through such a thing."

Maru lowered his gaze and breathed slowly through his nose. He was flustered, sorry, and felt sympathetic. He wouldn't have carried out such a prank if he knew that the teacher-in-training's lover had passed away. He was unlucky this time.

"Sorry, teacher. I'm really sorry."

Dongho lowered his head and apologized. A rather sad smile appeared on Suyeon's face, who stood with her back against the vending machine.

"No. I'm sorry. I made you panic didn't I? Because I cried. It was all in the past, and I should've kept better control over my emotions as an adult, but I wasn't able to."

Maru raised his head as he heard those words. Actually, it was the teacher-in-training that made it a big deal. Had she not cried back there, Dongho wouldn't be blamed by the other kids in class. Of course, Maru wouldn't be blamed either.

Right now, an apology was wrapping things up nicely, but things had gotten too noisy despite it being just a prank. He felt sorry, yes, but the teacher-in-training didn't do well either.

When he raised his head, he saw Suyeon who had teary eyes. She was acting like that again. Maru was about to frown, but then instead sighed and apologized once again. He didn't want to scratch open a scabbed wound. He wanted to finish things up quickly, go home and study.

He bowed to the teacher-in-training one last time, feeling stuffy, before turning around. Dongho had remained behind. The moment he glanced back and left through the door, the director's cut could be heard

Phew. He shook his head and scattered the annoyance and apologetic feelings remaining inside his heart.

Lee Chan was someone who already thought that he did not need guidance or protection. The reason that he didn't cooperate with the teachers, and targeted them for his pranks was probably to get acknowledgment from the adults. Maru interpreted the character, Lee Chan, based on the writer's intentions. From how the director gave him an okay sign for a few shoots without saying anything, it seemed that he found this character pretty good.

"That character is really like you, down to your cockiness. Tell me honestly. You weren't acting, were you?" said Suyeon as she walked past him after the two-shot with Dongho.

Maru looked at her as she left towards the director after winking at him in a daze when,

"Ah, it's finished," said Dongho with an exhausted expression.

"Thanks for your work."

"That's the 8th episode over. I felt good since I got a lot of scenes, but I guess I won't be able to anymore."

"True."

"But once this goes live, I think people might start saying that Lee Chan is too cocky."

"I hope to get that at least. That's much better than not being talked about at all."

"That's true. I want to hear the word 'touched'. I want the final version to be so good that the people watching it would cry. Then, I would become popular and people would start recognizing me. Oh, what do I do if people recognize me and ask me for an autograph?"

"Delusion is free."

"Don't feel so sad even if I become big first."

After saying meaningless words to one another for a while, Dongho went into the classroom saying that he felt cold. The skies had turned yellow. It would soon turn purple and night would arrive. Everything would be finished after just one night scene, so he had to wait it out just a little longer.

From what he heard, Yeseul and Giwoo were going to shoot late into the night. Yeseul had been waiting from midday until now just because of a single scene where she appeared briefly and said a single line.

Since the schedule prioritized the busy adult actors first, the waiting time of the comparatively free child actors was quite long.

He had to raise his value. An actor's life was one where the body would become more comfortable the more valuable they were. There was even a drama that was delayed by a whole year in order to get a top star in their ranks, so in this field, the price of an actor was equivalent to power.

"The sun's setting! Let's get things done quickly!"

The time and the general environment were written on the script by the writer. There were cases where the director would change the script if the environmental variables didn't fit, but most of the time, the director would respect the writer's notes. Although there were occasionally some cases where new writers would be swayed by the director because they didn't have any voice, writer Lee Hanmi, who wrote this drama, was one of the well-known writers in the industry, so it would be incredibly difficult to change the situation.

The reason Park Hoon told the staff to hurry was probably because of the next scene. That scene required the sky to be 'sunset'.

Maru clasped his hands and blew warm air into them. His frozen hands warmed up a little. He really envied Jichan and Joomin, who were able to go home after that scene just now. He wanted to quickly go home and take a warm shower.

He watched the staff members move to the central staircase with the equipment for a while before going into the classroom.

That wasn't a good combo - Maru thought as he looked at Yeseul, who was sitting in the front of the class, and Okseon, who was sitting at the back alternately, before walking towards the middle. That was because the heater was in the middle. Yeseul brightened up and walked towards the heater.

"Isn't it cold out there? It'll be April soon, isn't it way too cold?"

"That's just how Spring is. But we're really fortunate that there's a heater here. I wouldn't know what it would be like without it."

Right - Yeseul agreed before closing her mouth. The way she rolled her eyes indicated that she was looking for a topic of conversation. It would be great if she could just stay quiet if she didn't have anything to say.

However, Yeseul broke his hopes very quickly.

"I always get shoots at night on days like this. It would be okay if I could shoot everything at once, but I have to come early since I always have a scene during the day too. It's so tiring."

"You can't help it since we're shooting everything on Sunday. You're also one of the main characters."

The words 'main character' were magical words that made Yeseul smile. Maru used those words from time to time, and so far, it was still valid. He could have a nice quiet rest just by making an annoying girl smile, so those words were very precious to him.

While Yeseul rolled the words 'main character' in her mouth, Maru opened his hands wide and got some warmth from the heater. He started feeling sleepy. After he yawned and looked at the heater for a while, he remembered Dongho, who said that he would return to the classroom first.

"Where's Dongho?"

"He came in then left again. Maybe he went to the bathroom?"

Yeseul tilted her head. Tilting her head - she was doing that on purpose. She was expressing 'I am cute' with all of her body, and Maru could only smile awkwardly at that.

'He ran.'

Even Dongho, who was at the most daring age, seemed scared of the cold energy flowing between these two girls. He took out his phone and sent a text message: Dongho, where are you?

-I came out to find you, where are you? Oh, don't go into the classroom. Only Yeseul and Okseon are there. Dang, that was stifling.

He left a message telling him to come to the classroom before putting his phone inside his pocket. Okseon was reading a book at the back. During the three months of shooting, they occasionally held afterparties, and Okseon participated in every one of them. From the way she acted, however, she looked like she would never show up to any of them, but she unexpectedly had a high participation rate.

'Though, it doesn't change the fact that she's quiet.'

He brought a chair and sat in front of the heater. He didn't plan to talk to a girl who wanted to stay alone. He wasn't here to play around, so if there weren't any bad effects on the shoot, he didn't care about individual personalities.

Though, that didn't mean that everyone thought like him.

"Okseon, you should come here as well," said Yeseul.

Maru sighed a little. She maintained a cold war-like state all this while and yet she talked to her with a friendly smile all of a sudden. Maru felt embarrassed since what she was trying to do was blatantly obvious.

"I'm okay."

I'm okay, no, you don't need to mind me - Okseon said those words all the time.

"But it's cold over there. You should come here and warm up a little."

"You don't need to mind me."

"You really should. Did I do something wrong?"

"No, nothing like that happened."

Maru heard this same conversation repeat over and over again during the past three months. Yeseul made a pitiful expression before looking at Maru and telling him in a small voice.

“Okseon seems to hate me. I did something wrong, right?”

How scary. She looked like she might as well be a politician. As long as she came up with a better situational context, she would be able to get a golden badge immediately.

Maru did not reply. It would be much easier for him if he snapped out and told her to stop being childish, but he might become a target of her ‘politics’ instead of Okseon if he did so. He didn’t plan to side with Okseon either, so it would be much better for him to stay quiet so that he neither scored nor lost points from her. ‘Turning a blind eye’ - that expression didn’t exist for no reason.

After hesitating for a while, Yeseul was about to say something more when Dongho opened the door and came into the classroom. He came at the perfect time. Maru pointed at an empty chair and told him to sit. Dongho sat down next to him while looking at the two girls.

“I’m going to the bathroom for a bit.”

The sacrificial lamb had arrived, so it was time for him to leave. Dongho, who was chosen as the sacrifice, widened his eyes in questioning light, but Maru lightly ignored him.

Maru looked at Yeseul, who started talking to Dongho as he closed the door. “Do your best, Amen,” he said quietly.

“Amen?”

When he turned around he saw Giwoo. Maru shrugged. After taking a peek inside, Giwoo smiled as though he understood everything.

“Want some coffee?” he offered.

There was no reason to refuse since he was being treated. Looking at the staff members climbing up the stairs, they stood in front of the vending machine. Giwoo gave him a coffee cup.

“Remember what the director said during the day?” said Giwoo when Maru emptied about half of the coffee.

Maru didn’t know what he was talking about so he quietly stared at him.

“He said that my character is a bit similar to Lee Chan.”

“Oh, that.”

He remembered now. Maru looked at Giwoo as he took a sip. Giwoo scratched his hair with an apologetic expression.

“I thought you might have misunderstood.”

“Misunderstood?”

“Overlapping characters - that’s not really a good thing, right? It’s my mistake, so I want to apologize before there’s any misunderstanding. I wasn’t trying to imitate you or anything. Things happened and I expressed myself in a similar way to you, so I thought that might be on your mind.”

“If it’s something like that, you don’t need to mind.”

He waved his hand sideways in the air. He did not like adding hand gestures like that, but he made a special exception for the kid in front of him. Giwoo's lips twitched for a moment. Maybe he couldn't control his expression because the answer was unexpected? Maru crumpled up his cup and threw it in the trash.

"I imitate people a lot of the time too. Isn't everyone like that?"

"I guess that's true, but still."

"Originality stems from numerous imitations. That's what all the popular people say. The director said that we give off a similar feel, but didn't say that it was wrong. Did he?"

"That's true."

"Then I guess there's no problem."

Maru patted Giwoo on the shoulder before turning around. Those eyes just now, they were overflowing with hostility. The fact that there was no speech bubble above his head meant that he wasn't thinking about Maru, so maybe he was angry at the situation itself? He had no interest in what Giwoo wanted, or what he was scheming. Maru didn't think that badly of shedding crocodile tears to get everyone's sympathy.

Who in the world showed what they were thinking in their heart entirely? Wasn't life about wearing a mask or two all the time? Walking around bare-faced would only get the madman treatment or worse.

Imitating his acting? Sure, he could do that all he wanted to. It wasn't like there was copyright on acting or something, and in the first place, the acting that Maru was showing was something he learned from someone else.

It was completely fine if Giwoo wanted to take it for himself.

He would be stealing and learning from someone else even if Giwoo tried to imitate him.

Life was about being just one step ahead of other people. Walking miles ahead like those geniuses would most of the time, make that person sick. A small bird had its own way of flying. Just one step. It would suffice as long as he could gain recognition from just that one step.

But maybe it would be good to say a word or two in order to prevent any bad events from happening.

Maru turned around and spoke,

"If it's a toy you're looking for, you should start looking into something else. I'm not an interesting toy."

Toy - that word broke all of Giwoo's pretenses. So he was indeed related to the guy that mercilessly stomped on the background actor's hand, huh. Just finding that out meant that Maru had gained a lot from this conversation.

Maru winked at the crocodile that no longer shed tears and turned around. A speech bubble appeared above his head, but he didn't bother reading it. He knew what it said without having to look at it.

Chapter 515

Haha, Giwoo stroked his hair upwards and laughed for a while before calming down his breathing.

“I see, so that’s how it is, huh.”

He punched the vending machine with his left hand. The more he thought about it, the more interesting it was. Giwoo smacked the vending machine until he felt pain from his left hand. A low thud could be heard.

“It hurts.”

His hand was scraped by the vending machine and was bleeding. Giwoo brought the wound to his mouth and licked it before taking out a handkerchief from his pocket to wipe it off. The vending machine was a little crumpled, but it wasn’t noticeable since it looked old. Giwoo threw the bloodstained handkerchief into the trash next to the vending machine. He had to calm himself down. Giwoo smiled and entered the building. He went straight across the corridor to the central entrance, where he saw Hwang Joonghoon coming out of the classroom.

“Father, did you finish your shoot?”

“Yes, it just ended.”

“Thank you for your work.”

“That wasn’t anything much. Are you shooting late into the night?”

“Yes. I’ll probably go home while looking at the moon today.”

“You’re working even harder than me, huh. But it’s better to be busy. There are many people who can’t work despite wanting to.”

“That’s why I always come to this school with an appreciative mind. Oh, it is really cold outside. Are you going to go like that? Don’t you walk home?”

“It wasn’t that cold though.”

“It’s even colder than it was in the morning. Wait a bit.”

Giwoo smiled and ran to the classroom on the 2nd floor. He opened the door and went inside to find the others sitting next to the heater. He met eyes with Maru for a brief moment, but they didn’t exchange words. From the look of things, it didn’t seem like he talked about unnecessary things to them.

So he knew his place - Giwoo thought that as he picked up his scarf before running down to the first floor again. He gave the scarf to Hwang Joonghoon who waited for him at the door.

“Put this on.”

“You don’t have to do this.”

“We can’t have you catching a cold. It will ruin our shooting schedule.”

“So you aren’t worried about me, but the shoot, huh?”

“Was it obvious?”

Hwang Joonghoon smiled in satisfaction before waving his hand. Giwoo bowed and saw him out. He felt eyes looking at him from behind. They belonged to the actors and the staff members. Giwoo then walked up the stairs again with a calm expression. He had to leave as soon as possible if he showed a good side. If he lingered around, the image of the 'good kid' he had acted until now would lose power. Even the people that didn't look at him in a good light three months ago, now looked at him like it was natural. Putting up pretenses worked on people if repeated for a long time.

Giwoo opened his phone and opened his contacts list. He found the name Lee Uljin among the names and sent him a text.

-Don't call me in the future. And delete my number as well.

The club lost a member, but he didn't feel that bad about it. Uljin was a kid with potential, but he did a poor job at keeping it a secret. He lacked caution during Apgu and Maru ended up finding out. Thanks to that, Giwoo was receiving suspicion as well. No, those eyes looked like he was convinced, not suspicious.

Giwoo erased the name Lee Uljin from his contacts list. He also sent out a notification to the club members that knew Uljin. That he wouldn't care if they meet that guy on a personal basis, but they shouldn't talk about the club.

-Giwoo. I succeeded. The toy you talked about last time. I finally broke it.

Giwoo smiled when he saw the text message. He felt excited when he thought back to the pleasure he felt when he broke his first toy. Congratulations - Giwoo sent back.

-What do I do now?

The excitement could be felt from those words. Giwoo understood that guy. However, he couldn't be hasty here. The most important rule of this 'game' was that it had to be secretive.

-Take a break for now. And keep a close eye on the toy, so that things won't go bad. If a problem occurs because of the toy, that's just absurd.

-Take a break? That's a little unfortunate but okay. This game is too fun. I want to find a new toy quickly.

-The longer the wait, the greater the joy. For now, look out around you. Things might get out of hand.

-Okay.

Giwoo put his phone inside his pocket. Since this was an obedient kid, there shouldn't be a problem.

'I should try calling him once the shoot ends.'

Texts were limited. He wanted to hear about how the toy was broken, and what that moment was like in a lively voice. From what he heard last time, the toy was a son of the assistant manager at a cooperating company. Did he break that guy mentally? Or break an arm or something just like he wanted?

Personally, he liked breaking the mind rather than the body. Breaking the body would leave obvious signs, but the mind wasn't like that. Looking at a person who gave up on everything with an empty gaze was frighteningly fun.

Father said that he had to understand the opponent truly. He wholly agreed with those words. Only when he sympathized could he enjoy that despair.

‘Now that I think about it, I didn’t find any new toys recently since I was busy.’

The manager he fired recently ended too blandly and he didn’t get the full fun out of it. It would be great if he started weeping, or going mad, even.

Giwoo thanked the fact that he was born in this world whenever he saw an adult wailing like a little child and begging him. He would feel touched when he looked at them praying for that slightest ray of hope. That was because the more desperate they were, the more exciting they looked when their hopes were smashed.

He really appreciated the person that told him about this game. He was indebted to that person. If the opportunity arose, Giwoo would pay him back in full.

Of course, through a game.

“This place is the warmest, huh,” said Giwoo as he opened the classroom door; looking at the people that may potentially become his toys.

* * *

He heard the name ‘Lee Chan’ to death, but after episode 3 aired, his classmates calmed down a little. They would pester him to introduce them to Yeseul or Joomin from time to time, but when he called them and tried to give them the phone, all of them would shake their heads and refuse to take the call. These high school boys were very shy.

Unlike his classmates, who had quietened down somewhat, people from other departments and classes came around to visit, but they didn’t actually talk to him. They only looked at him from afar before leaving. Maru understood what it felt like to be a monkey at a zoo.

“Do you have a shoot today?”

As soon as end-of-the-day HR finished, Daemyung came in through the back door. Maru shook his head. He usually shot around four days every week, but if the Saturday and Sunday shoots went well, there would be no weekday shoots. The three main characters, though, Yeseul, Giwoo, and Jichan of course had shoots on weekdays.

“Then can you help me out today?”

“Who am I to refuse? But I’m on cleaning duty today so I’ll go up after that.”

“Okay.”

Maru changed into shorts and went to the bathroom. Thanks to bad luck with draws, he had to wash the bathroom for three consecutive weeks. He grabbed his classmates who played around with the cleaning brushes and assigned them their areas and then finished the cleaning quickly.

“Hey, Han Maru. Let’s go get some tteokbokki. This bro will treat you.”

“I have to go up today.”

“It’s the acting club again?”

“Yeah.”

“Acting at school and outside the school. You might become a ghost of acting at this rate. But anyway, good luck with that.”

After sending his classmates off, he took his bag and went to the 4th floor.

The acting club managed to reclaim their original clubroom which they lost last year. The constellation research club used this room last year, but they were discovered drinking soju inside the clubroom, so the club was disbanded this year. As luck would have it, the acting club got this space again.

He looked at the sign that said ‘acting club’ before opening the door. There was no one inside. There were only bags. He thought that the room was quite small since just placing the bags filled up the whole room, but also thought that it was better than nothing as he closed the door.

He moved to the 5th floor. The large hall was still being used by the baseball club, which didn’t make it past the preliminaries for two years in every competition they participated in. Due to that, there were talks about how the funding for the baseball club might stop if they didn’t produce any results this year either.

Maru remembered back to when he went to meet the principal and the head director with Taesik. Taesik used his name, saying that it was an opportunity to raise the school’s name value through him, while he sat there smiling without doing anything since he couldn’t just leave. Thanks to that, the acting club received permission to use the hall for their practice when the baseball club wasn’t using it.

That was good.

Last year, when there were only six of them, it was possible to practice in the classroom. However, this year....

Maru slowly opened the door to the hall. What he first saw were the exercise machines located in one corner, and then the kids that were lined up next to them.

“GREETINGS, SEONBAE!”

He heard loud voices. It had been two weeks since Maru received this kind of greeting from his juniors, but he couldn’t get used to it no matter how hard he tried.

“Seonbae, you’re here.”

Aram, who was teaching the first year students some exercises, came up to him. Maru looked at the first year students who could be seen over her shoulders. Thirty-two. That was a big number. That was more than five times that of last year. Even the large hall looked small now.

“Looks like you don’t have a shoot today, huh.”

“I don’t. Also, can you stop them from greeting me like that?”

“They’re imitating Bangjoo, so don’t come to me about it.”

So that guy was the source of this huh. Maru scratched his eyebrows and walked inside. Numerous pairs of eyes looked at him. He really couldn't get used to this.

"Where's everyone else?" he asked as he sat down in a corner.

"Bangjoo and Jiyeon went to buy some kimbap. Dowook-seonbae said he had something to do today and left early, while Daemyung-seonbae came, but went to the container."

"Why did he go there all of a sudden?"

"I'm not sure. Teacher Taesik came by and said something to him, and after listening to him, he was really startled and went to the container."

What could be happening? Maru nodded for now and pointed at the first year students.

"Do what you were doing before. Don't mind me."

"How about you teach them?"

"It's not good for someone who rarely shows up to give them instructions. You do it."

"Alright."

The thirty-two people, standing in a circle, were following Aram's actions. He thought that things might be different this year as he looked at the kids.

Just then, the door abruptly opened. The moment he saw the face of the person that rushed through the door, Maru understood the reason why Daemyung went to the container. He fled. Maru was sure of it.

"Wow! That's a lot!"

Coming in with a cheerful shout, the one that appeared wearing a blue jersey was Miso.

Maru lowered his head and walked towards the door as carefully as possible while sticking close to the wall.

When the wide open doors were just in front of him, a voice made him stiff.

"Maru, where are you going? We should do some workouts."

Maru made an awkward smile as he looked at Miso, who was twitching her finger, beckoning him to come obediently.

"Aren't you busy?"

"I'm on vacation."

"Why don't you rest if you're on vacation? There's not long until your wedding."

"This is a vacation for me. Wow, I felt like things went to hell after leaving this club to that girl Suyeon. Blue Sky really needs to be managed by this big sister."

Miso seemed happy as though she was a fish that found water.

Maru took out his phone, desperately hoping that there was a schedule he missed. However, there was no way he missed something like that. Just then, he saw Daemyung, who was peeking over from the central staircase.

Maru made the vilest grin he had ever made and pointed his finger. Daemyung shook his head before getting ready to run.

“Senior. The club president is right there.”

Nope, you aren’t getting away by yourself - Maru pointed at Daemyung. Miso twitched her eyebrows and spoke,

“Mister chubby over there, come here while this noona is still in a good mood. Or should we start off with twenty laps after all this time?”

Daemyung, standing at the tip of the staircase, came back in large strides.

“You’ve arrived.”

“I have. But why did you try to run away? You almost made me sad.”

“I-it’s not like that. I had something to check in the container.”

“Check what?”

“S-some clothes.”

“Then I guess I misunderstood. Daemyung, come here quickly. You missed me a lot, didn’t you?”

“Eh? Ah, yes. O-of course. I missed you.”

Maru coughed before speaking,

“Uhm, senior. I have a shoot today, so I need to get going.”

“Han Maru. Have you forgotten that we belong to the same company?”

“Don’t tell me you checked?”

“I asked Mr. Byungchan about it already. I was actually planning to come yesterday, but delayed it to today when I heard that you wouldn’t be available. The first greetings should be done when everyone’s around, don’t you think?”

What a meticulous woman. Maru gave up and stood next to Miso. Miso, standing between Maru and Daemyung, hung her arms around both of them.

“Hello everyone. I’m Yang Miso. I’m a really calm and kind woman. I look the part, don’t I?”

The first year students, who didn’t know what was in store for them, just seemed to think that she was an interesting person and nodded while laughing. Maru stroked down his face and sighed.

“Well then. Let’s get started, shall we? Let’s go outside.”

Miso dragged Maru and Daemyung by their collars. Maru started walking with the mindset of a cow that was being dragged to the slaughterhouse.

"A light ten laps. Let's have a look at your stamina," said Miso like it was something light.

Chapter 516

That should have been rather sudden for them. Seeing his juniors panting as they ran past him, Maru sighed in pity. These people would've never imagined such a future when they managed to pass the application test and came to the acting club's clubroom for the first time.

"If you can't run, then come over here. Don't push yourself and fall flat. If you do, it'll be even more difficult later," said Miso to the students running around the school field. Some were running at leisure, some were panting, but still holding out, some were clearly pushing themselves, and some just sat down on the ground, panting. Miso was probably looking at each and every one of them, and wondering what she should do to make them suffer.

"I did hear about it, but there really is a lot."

"I think you're going to decrease that number though."

"If they can't endure this much, they might as well leave. Acting is not playing around, you know?"

"Uhm, this is a school club. You need to give them hopes and dreams, and then let them experience the fun activities after school, and you know, things like that."

"My motto in life is that the harder you work, the sweeter the fruit will taste. Hey, over there! Don't push yourself and come here!"

Miso shouted at the girl walking on the other side of the school field. The girl clenched her teeth and looked at Miso before starting to run again.

"I like that girl."

"Sure you do."

"Are you on your period or something? Why do you have so many complaints today?"

"Why don't you have a look at their eyes first and ask me again?"

Maru looked at his juniors, who were sitting down on a platform to his left, panting heavily. They were looking his way, and they all looked like they wanted an explanation. Why do we need to run? Why do we need to be so exhausted? What's the point of this?

"I haven't had any dinner but I already feel uncomfortable."

"That's what being a senior is about."

"Uhm, before you came here, seonbae-nim, I mean, noo-nim, it was all fun and good."

"But you were going to do the physical exercises anyway."

“Of course, if it was up to me, I would’ve done something similar. However, the club president is Daemyung right now. He should’ve had his own plans, but you had to come and ruin it for him without any warning, so everyone’s glaring at us.”

Until just a moment ago, it was more of a ‘let’s have some food and talk about it later’, but Miso appeared out of nowhere and had them start running. By now, the kimbap that Jiyeon and Bangjoo bought should have turned cold in the hall on the 5th floor.

“But you look like you’re having fun for some reason.”

There was a big grin on Miso’s face as she looked at the kids.

“Me? That shouldn’t be. There’s no way I’m having fun when my cute juniors are having a hard time?”

“Then why am I seeing a big grin on your face?”

Maru lifted the tips of his lips upwards with his index and middle finger. Miso’s expression turned sour.

“Fine. I’m having them run to vent some stress. Why, what are you going to do about it?”

“Did something happen again?”

“Don’t ask me, ask that certain teacher who teaches history at this school. I... urgh. I’m not talking about it.”

“Is it marriage problems?”

“Are you going to consult me?”

“No. I heard that there are three types of problems that you shouldn’t get involved with in this world, and one of them is marriage problems of people in their thirties.”

“What are the other two?”

“What do you expect? One is the marriage problems of people in their twenties and the other, people in their forties. This concerns the marriage of someone in their thirties and someone in their forties, so I of course shouldn’t get involved in it.”

Tsk - Miso clicked her tongue.

Maru looked at the two boys running past him and asked.

“Wasn’t everything going well?”

“I thought you weren’t getting involved.”

“I’m just listening. It’s less frustrating if you know why you’re being treated badly. What went wrong?”

“Things were going well. We managed to book the wedding hall, we greeted each other’s parents, and both of our parents have taken a great liking to each other, to the point that they’re going travelling together too.”

“That sounds great then.”

“Yes. The problem is that their travel overlaps with our honeymoon.”

Maru chuckled and looked at Miso. What kind of nonsense was that? He could laugh if the joke was moderately funny, but he couldn't since it was way too nonsensical. Miso, who was supposed to deny that and continue onto the next part, looked in front of her with a sullen expression.

“Really?”

He asked just in case. Miso nodded without a word.

Maru blinked several times.

“Seriously?”

“Do you think I would be joking around with you because I'm free?”

“You're going on a honeymoon with your parents?”

“Not with our parents, they'll fly over on the 2nd day, but that's pretty much the same thing.”

“No way.”

“It is what it is. My mom and mother-in-law got along so well together. I told you about this before, right? About how my dad left us with a big debt. My mother-in-law heard that story and started crying while grabbing my mom's hands. Then, it turned into something about how she never went travelling with her sole daughter, and somehow our honeymoon got involved.”

Miso brushed her hair to the side.

“Fine, going travelling with mom is good and all. If I think about it, I only gave her money and did not actually fulfill my filial piety properly. The mother and the daughter holding hands, walking around various places, talking about things they didn't talk about until now. I mean, that's a little cheesy, but I'm fine with it. But why does it have to be on the second day of our honeymoon, dammit!”

Hey, if you're gonna run, run, and if you aren't, come here! - Miso shouted at the boy barely walking past the soccer goal post. An innocent junior groaned as he walked towards the platform.

“Don't vent on a kid.”

“Yes. I guess I shouldn't. I should rip apart that man's collar.”

“Sounds like teacher Taesik agreed to go together, huh.”

“Yup. So clearly too. Maybe he was trying to be considerate of my mom, but there's only one honeymoon in your entire life. Does it even make sense?”

“Hm...”

Maru decided not to say anything here. As someone who had experience marrying someone, Taesik would probably hear these words for the next fifty years: you like my mom more than you like me, don't you? Just thinking about it made him shudder in fear and his stomach ache. He knew that the words of a bride-to-be were superior to the court law, but it seemed like Taesik had made a huge mistake.

It wasn't that he didn't understand him emotionally, but what about the stability of his marriage? Shouldn't that come before the emotional thing?

"Is it set in stone?"

"Pretty much."

"Why don't you tell your parents that they should look into another date for travelling after the honeymoon?"

"You know my personality. I'm quite docile, but I say it when I need to say something. As soon as I heard that, I was going to say something, but...."

"But?"

"Mom really liked it. I never saw her smile like that before in my entire life. I just couldn't say anything. In that situation, the man who calls himself my husband said that it would be great if they could go together."

Miso sighed and scratched her head.

"I guess you felt both thankful and hateful."

"That's how it is. But can I get angry at my mom? Or at my in-laws for that matter?"

"So the only person you can pick on is your husband?"

"He's so dead. I'm going to make him suffer at home."

"Go easy on him. He'll go bald if you give him too much stress."

"That's not good."

"Anyway, so you don't actually hate the fact that you're going together, huh?"

"I don't hate it. My father-in-law really dotes on me. It's just, this is a once-in-a-lifetime thing, so it's such a pity."

"Then I guess you can only adjust the date you meet up. I think it'll be better if you meet like three days later."

"Yeah."

"Good luck with that. Also, husbands that care about their in-laws are better. Rather than fighting over how much money to give them later, it's much better to have a good relationship."

Miso stared at him. Maru slowly averted his gaze.

Hey, if you're going to walk, just come here - he slightly understood why Miso shouted at the kids.

"Your drama seems to be doing well."

"You're changing the topic so suddenly?"

"What good is talking about a matter I can't solve? I should just vent my anger at home."

Miso sniffed.

“Doesn’t Suyeon, that girl act condescending or anything?”

“She treats me well. Unlike a certain someone.”

“Why are you narrowing your eyes while looking at me when you say that?”

“Oh, no. It’s a misunderstanding. I didn’t do anything like that.”

“Look at me properly before I poke your eyes out.”

“I’m scared because you sound like you’ll actually do it. Hmm, we actually don’t talk much during the shoot. At most, we just briefly talk when we walk past each other.”

“I thought she’d pester you.”

“She’s someone who maintains a meticulous image making at the scene. She’s not that reckless.”

“Oh, so you’re taking her side?”

“Why does it come to that? I’m just saying that she’s someone who looks after herself a lot more than you think.”

“Looks after herself huh. And yet she goes around doing that.”

“It’s up to her to do whatever she wants with her life.”

“As long as it doesn’t cause harm?”

“Yes.”

“If I think about it, I think you two actually have a lot in common.”

“Now that, I want to retort.”

“I guess I went a bit too far?”

The juniors started returning to the platform after finishing the remaining four laps. Thirteen people lasted until the end. 8 were boys, and 5 were girls. This was a distance that even boys had a hard time finishing, so it seemed like the new recruits this year had good basic stamina.

“The fixed schedules are on Saturdays and Sundays, right?” Miso asked.

“Yes.”

“The schedule isn’t that heavy, is it?”

“Of course not. It’s not like I have a lot of scenes.”

Maru looked at Miso through the corner of his eyes. The flow of the conversation was somehow suspicious.

“I see, I see.”

“What’s this about?”

“Someone wanted an actor.”

“An actor?”

“It’s nothing grand. They’re high school kids, and they’re looking into participating in the Seoul Youth Film Festival.”

“Ah, I see.”

“Wanna do it?”

“I’m not sure.”

“I think you should though.”

“Why?”

“Because it’s an opportunity for you to participate in the production of a movie on equal footing as the director. They might be awkward, but it’ll help you gain experience in that regard. I heard you don’t have any plans to participate in club activities either.”

Maru nodded.

“Try various things out while you still can. Once you gain popularity and gain a price for your acting, it’ll be much harder for you to do anything proactively.”

“I guess that’s true. Which school are they from?”

“What do you think? It’s this school, duh.”

Miso crossed her arms and pointed at the school building.

“You mean our school?”

“Yeah. Don’t you know that there’s a film production club?”

“There are so many clubs at the school, there’s no way I know all of them.”

“That club was founded around the same time as Blue Sky. Well, they didn’t produce any concrete results like we did though.”

“You’re quite knowledgeable.”

“I am. We were quite close in my days. I still contact a few of them from time to time. The director of the indie movie that Geunsoo shot as his first piece is from Woosung High. Of course, he belonged to the film production club.”

“Then how come you’re the one telling that to me? You shouldn’t have any connections to the current film production club.”

“It’s an acquaintance of an acquaintance’s request. A friend of mine came to the school recently to look around the film production club and found a junior who was filled with enthusiasm. He told me that he

couldn't ignore someone like that and told me about it. I also didn't think that it was a bad idea, so that's why I'm talking to you about it. Oh, I heard that the film production club went to your class to see you."

"Me?"

"They didn't talk to you, they just looked at you for a while before going back."

"Ah, them, huh."

He remembered how people from other departments made a visit and just looked at him without saying anything before leaving. It seemed that they were mixed in that crowd.

"If you aren't busy, I think you should definitely do it."

He didn't have any schedule from Mondays to Thursdays, while Fridays were different every time according to how the shoot progressed on the weekends. Maru was worried that he might start getting some other schedules starting January, but the industry wasn't so easy and did not allow a kid that just started appeared on TV to get more screen time. Thanks to that, he was spending a leisurely school life, but he did find the days he did nothing to be quite a pity.

"I can decide after I meet them in person, right?"

"Of course. The lead character can't make a decision without even knowing the director. Those guys seemed to like you quite a bit, so they'll probably start shooting immediately as soon as you give them the okay."

"Do you know what it's about as well?"

"All I know is that the topic can be anything. The details should be in the head of that little director."

Miso took out her phone.

"I'll give you their phone numbers."

"You know their phone numbers as well?"

"It's my principle to support someone fully if I decide to help. I got them quite early on."

"Looks like you were really free ever since the movie with director Joongjin finished."

"Yeah. I took a break from teaching at the academy because of the wedding. I don't have any work either. I was rolling around at home all day, so I was feeling a bit itchy. That's why I accepted when my darling asked if I could take care of the acting club again."

"Ah, darling, huh."

"Yeah, my darling."

Miso winked. Maru couldn't bear to look at her expression. After shuddering once, he asked,

"What's this person's name?"

"Oh her? Kang Sora."

“Kang Sora? It’s a girl?”

“Yeah. You like that?”

“Not bad, I guess.”

“Should I tell your girlfriend what you just said?”

“You don’t know her number though.”

Maru saved the number that Miso told him. With the name, Kang Sora.

Chapter 517

“How are the expressions of our juniors?”

Break time. He bought a chocolate drink from the vending machine in the cafeteria and handed it over to Daemyung. Daemyung thanked him before receiving the cup.

“Half of them are puzzled, while the other half actually look like they like it?”

“There are a lot of perverts this year, huh.”

“When Miso-seonbae introduced herself, they liked it. They felt like they were actually doing something worthwhile. I feel heavy now. It’s too much pressure for me if they’re too passionate.”

“Someone who belongs to a huge agency is saying that she would teach them, so even the ones that didn’t like that exercise would like her. That’s just how the world works, isn’t it? If you do something and you aren’t capable, people would call you a madman, but if you are capable and you do something weird, people would call you an eccentric.”

“Right, right.”

Maru patted Daemyung’s back loudly.

“Rather than that, do your best here. I’m going to escape this hellhole.”

“Don’t leave me alone.”

“It will be fine. Senior Miso will always be at your side. Passionate juniors and an even more passionate senior Miso. Someone like me shouldn’t be there, of course.”

“...You look happy just because it doesn’t concern you, huh.”

“That’s why you shouldn’t take up positions without thinking. Club president Park Daemyung, I hope you have a hard time.”

Since Miso was practically on leave at this point, she should come to the clubroom every single day. They now had as many members as the days Woosung High swept the prizes, and there were also people who seemed passionate, so Miso should be able to teach them well.

“My bones won’t last.”

Maru shook his head in resignation. There was no middle ground in Miso's training. If someone could do it, she would push them to the end, and if they couldn't, Miso wouldn't have them doing something in the first place. The ones that Miso had dibs on after that 10 lap exercise would probably suffer quite a bit. Whether they still liked Miso for being a proper instructor at that time was a mystery.

"What were you talking about before?" asked Daemyung.

"She asked me if I want to help out in an indie movie."

"She's shooting a movie?"

"No."

Maru briefly explained what he talked about with Miso.

"Oh, the film production club."

"You know them?"

"I only know that such a club exists. The classroom opposite of the applied music clubroom on the 5th floor is the film production club."

Maru didn't even know where they were since he never had any interest in any other clubs. Opposite of the applied music club meant that it was at the far right of the corridor. Both the 4th floor acting club's classroom and the 5th floor hall were just a few steps away from the central staircase, so he never walked to the end of the 5th floor even once.

"Are you going to do it?" asked Daemyung as he grabbed the cup with both of his hands.

Maru replied that he was thinking about it.

"I'll try meeting them for now. It's not like I don't have any interest in shooting a movie with a 6mm film camera."

"I agree with Miso that you should do it if you have the time. I mean, it'll contribute to your experience. It's not like you plan to show up at the acting club regularly, right? If you want to use the remainder of your time in a useful way, I think participating in that is a good idea."

Maru could feel that Daemyung's advice came from his heart. Maru nodded his head. Like what Miso said, there was a time for everything. How many opportunities would he have in the future where he got to shoot a movie with someone around his age? This was an opportunity to learn what directors looked at. There might not be any expertise, but it should be very original and creative. If he lucked out and got a prize in the competition, that would add another line to his career, so he thought positively of it.

"You are going to come to the acting club from time to time, right?"

"I will. But tell me the days senior Miso will come beforehand."

"Why?"

"I'm not going if she's there."

Daemyung laughed. After Daemyung finished the chocolate drink, they returned to the 5th floor hall. Miso was sitting in the middle of the hall, while the thirty-two first year students were standing in a line in front of her. The second year students were standing off to one side.

“A play doesn’t happen with just the actors. We need people that can support the actors. That’s what the staff do. Staff members have to take care of everything except acting on stage. Of course, that doesn’t mean that the actors will do nothing. We’re just deciding on roles so that we can distribute work better.”

So it began.

Maru leaned against a wall in one corner of the hall and looked at the first year students. Not all of them could stand on stage. It might be possible if they did a military drama or something, but that was a bit of a stretch for a high school play. Unless they wrote a play themselves, they would have to alter an existing one, and for a play written for young people, there were barely any that had more than ten characters. Even if they compromised and put fifteen on the stage, the other half wouldn’t get to stand on stage and would have to become part of the backstage staff. Usually, there would be some people that like helping out behind the scenes, but when they selected these thirty-two applicants from the fifty-plus applicants, most of them said that they wanted to be actors.

There was a commotion among the first year students. It was natural since they just found out what being a staff was about. Miso watched the first year students without saying anything for quite a while. A minute passed like that.

“Anyone want to volunteer to become a staff?”

Not even one of them raised their hand.

Miso made a satisfied smile. Maru, on the other hand, sighed. Everyone here should know by now that they would have to be split regardless. In the end, there was only one method. There will be another test.

“The staff will have more free time. You’ll be allowed to not attend club activities if something comes up. For example, it’s like this: Woosung High doesn’t have self-study periods after school. There’s no need to come to school on the weekends either. That will allow you to make some appointments with your friends and go on a trip or something. Or, you can visit the noraebang after school or something. Anyone here who doesn’t want to become close to their classmates?”

No one raised their hand. How many people would want to be excluded by the social circles in their class? Maru looked at Miso, who was practically leading them by the nose, and thought that she really was a bad woman.

Hearing that, the first year students’ expressions turned sour.

“Are there really times when we stay at school late into the night?”

“It’s not that there ‘are’ times when we stay into the night, it’s that you *will* be spending time here until late into the night most of the time. Of course, that only applies to the actors. As for the staff members, you can easily leave just like I said before. Are some of your classmates enticing you to go playing around after school? Just tell me about it. If you’re a staff member, I’ll gladly tell you to go enjoy your

time. But actors are different. I will not allow you to skip unless it's something major. This is my promise to you. I will not skip teaching you guys unless something major happens to me. School ends at five, and the actors will be staying behind until 10. Cram school? I'll tell you beforehand, but You. Can't. Go. If you want to go to cram school and eventually go to college, don't think about becoming actors. You'll just be an inconvenience to everyone else."

Maru whistled silently and looked at Daemyung, who stood next to him.

"She's got complete control over them."

"I'm worried that none of them will apply to become actors at this rate."

"Then you would just have to shoot a monodrama by yourself. You have no choice."

Hearing Miso's words, the expressions of the first year students turned worse and worse. While they heard that 'it might be hard', most of them underestimated how hard it could be, so Miso's words should come as a shock to them.

"Also, I don't swear at the staff members. But I will be very picky with the actors. 'Damn' will be the lightest form of swearing I'll use. Of course, some of you might not understand why this is so heavy when it's just a school club. If you thought that for even a brief moment, apply to become a staff. That will be better for both of us. If you say you want to become an actor and pull out later, I will really kill you."

Miso looked quite scary when she tensed her eyes. The first year students who experienced Miso for the first time today should be feeling incredibly complex right now. They were imagining a glorious scene where they stood on stage under the spotlight, but Miso was telling them that they would suffer a lot if they wanted to go up there, so it wasn't that surprising.

Miso said that she would give them five minutes to think about it.

Maru asked Miso, who walked towards him.

"What are you going to do if all of them say that they want to become actors?"

"Then I'll take everyone with me. In just a few days, I'll see who's good. If I have them try acting, I'll find an answer soon enough. Why? You wanna do it too?"

"My waist is still hurting from the exercises you had me do at the academy. I'll just be a staff member. Or at most a passerby 1."

"You might not be able to show up frequently, but you should show them some acting when you do."

"There's a splendid instructor here, so there's no need for me to, is there?"

"The shock is bigger when someone around their age shows them a completely new level of acting. I heard that you guys didn't even make it to the finals this time."

"You just had to poke where it hurts so suddenly."

While Maru casually talked about it, Daemyung shrunk his shoulders, feeling rather depressed.

“How long are you going to give the grand prize trophy to Myunghwa High? You should get it back soon. This year will be the year I get my reputation back.”

“Don’t kill them. You’ll get into trouble.”

“I will push them just enough that they won’t die. Just enough.”

Miso made an evil smile. That was close - Maru patted Daemyung on the back since he would have to spend time with Miso in the future as well.

“Tell Dowook that he should be prepared to die,” Maru said with a smile.

Daemyung nodded powerlessly.

“Well then, you made your decisions, right?”

Miso asked everyone after five minutes. The first year students all nodded.

“Then those of you that want to become staff, come to this side.”

Miso pointed towards her right, and not even one of the first year students budged. Maru saw a smile appearing on Miso’s face. That wasn’t a smile of satisfaction. That was a smile of competitive spirit.

“Good! From now on, all thirty-two of you will stay behind until ten. Of course, I don’t plan to do that forever. Once we decide on a play that you are going to do, we are going to hold an audition immediately. You guys know what an audition is, right?”

“Yes!”

“There’s a limited number of roles, and there are many people who want to do them. We can only solve that through competition. Is there anyone here who wants to become an actor or another kind of entertainer in the future?”

After hearing that question, around half of the students raised their hands, which was quite surprising. Maru didn’t know how many of them were serious, nor how many of them were just swept by the flow, but he still looked at them thinking that it was rather unexpected.

“I will promise you one thing. Putting your effort in is not enough. If there’s anyone who puts in their utmost effort and does everything competitively, and you manage to catch my eye, I will support you. Not just here at the club, but actually help you join an agency and start working.”

Hearing those words, everyone’s eyes changed. Maru clicked his tongue. If someone actually caught Miso’s eye, she would really give that person her full support. With Miso’s connections, finding an agency to join wouldn’t be impossible. Since Miso always kept true to her words, she might even go to the president to talk about it. Miso was fully capable of providing all sorts of opportunities as long as she liked that person.

That was how he started after all. Maru told the first years to really try their best. In the entertainment industry, skills were important, yes, but the right timing and connections were important as well. More exposure to the public meant becoming closer to them, and that was what being a popular celebrity was about. If any of them actually wished to take that path, doing their utmost best here wasn’t a bad idea.

“Well then, let’s start off with self-introductions, shall we?”

Miso stood up from her chair and placed it in front of the first years.

“So she’s doing that again,” Daemyung said in a small voice.

Maru remembered it as well.

“You’re the president, why don’t you show them an example?”

“I don’t want to do that. I think I’m traumatized.”

Meanwhile, Miso pointed at the chair and said that anyone can go and do their self-introduction. The first years all looked at each other and didn’t easily do so. Miso just watched them without a word. When some time passed, a boy who had gelled his hair to look cool, went up on the chair.

“Phew, hello everyone. I am....”

“Hey!”

As soon as he started speaking, Miso shouted. Startled, the boy climbed down from the chair quickly.

“You want to become an actor and your voice is that small? Do it again.”

Looks like that boy will be in for a bad time. Maru looked at the junior who stood on the chair with pity. Miso did not go easy just because he was the first. She did go easy in the sense that she just shouted at him since he didn’t know anything. If he kept shaking after that, then Miso would point at the school field and....

“Hey you, go run three laps around the field. I think you need to loosen up a little.”

... that would happen. Maru patted the shoulder of the boy who walked past him.

“She’ll swear at you if you run slowly.”

“Y-yes.”

The junior climbed down the stairs with quick steps.

Maru crossed his arms and looked at his juniors. They were probably feeling dazed right now. Miso wasn’t joking. Although they did say that club activities would be quite hard when they promoted themselves, it became reality when Miso came as the instructor. Maru said those words in order to make them slightly afraid, but at this point, what he had said became the truth.

“But they have good guts.”

Perhaps because there were a lot of people, or because Miso said that she would give her full support, but the eyes of the juniors as they looked at Miso did not waver at all. This was why rewards were necessary. The atmosphere changed when someone who belonged to a big company like JA said she would try her best to support that person. Kids knew how the world worked after all.

“Phew, so scary,” said Maru with a smile.

Chapter 518

The film production club had a simple schedule. First, they only gathered in their clubroom on Saturdays, when they held their club activities. They would enjoy the passionate music from the applied music club from the opposite side of the corridor and take out their food. On half-day Saturdays, when they only had classes in the morning, they would usually buy some snacks from the cafeteria, while on full days when they got to spend the entire day at the club, they would usually bring food from home. Some brought kimbap, while some brought side dishes, etc. The ten-or-so club members would take out some food and talk about dramas or entertainment shows they watched the night before, while the one that brought a movie would get ready to play the movie. After that, they would all watch the movie together.

After they finished watching a movie while eating the food they brought, they would exchange opinions about it for a while before resting and then watching another one. They usually finished all the food they brought during the first movie, so they would usually collect some money from everyone and buy some food from the supermarket in front of the school. Going to that supermarket as a group and getting food to eat was one of the joys of being a film production club member. Since they had a limited budget, they had to list the good things about the snack they wanted to buy if they wanted something, which was really fun. This rather cozy film production club was a group of students who shared that fun.

Until last year, that is.

“There’s a limit to what we can do when it comes to lighting. Renting equipment costs too much money. That’s why the time we shoot is important. We need to use natural lighting as much as possible. Also, I prefer warm colors like that of incandescent light bulbs over fluorescent tubes. So while we shoot at school I’m going to make some lighting out of incandescent bulbs.”

Kang Sora put a dot with the marker on top of the word ‘light’ which she wrote on the whiteboard. Koo Ando, the club president of the film production club, avoided her gaze and laughed awkwardly. Just where did she get that whiteboard? There was nothing like that in the clubroom before. Oh, wait, there was that white thing above the DVD display case, so maybe it was that?

“Seonbae-nim.”

“Yeah?”

“We should discuss our plans.”

“Uh, yeah. We should. Plans.”

Ando signalled the 2nd year students, but they avoided his gaze. Thinking that he couldn’t do anything about it, he started speaking,

“Uhm, Sora.”

“Yes?”

“You know, we, uh.”

“Yes.”

“While we are called the film production club... we never produced any film before. I told you about it, right? About how our club operates.”

"I know. You meet up, and eat some food while watching a movie before disbanding."

"Right, right. That's what we did as the film production club. Of course, while it might not sound right, it is our tradition and...."

"Seonbae-nim."

Sora placed her hands on the table. Ando became quiet. Sora was a girl with a small build, but she was scarier than an average teacher when she glared. It had been three weeks since he got to know her, but Ando couldn't get used to her. But it was better than when they first met. When Sora intruded in their club with the application form on the first day, Ando treated her as politely as possible.

"We are the film production club, right?"

"R, right."

"Then which of these is the right tradition? Making a movie? Or watching some movies and eating food before going home?"

"I guess the right tradition should be making a movie, but--"

He wanted to say some more, but Sora interrupted him midway.

"Yes! That's it! If we are supposed to be the film production club, we should produce something. Doesn't everyone else think that too?"

She turned her gaze to the other 2nd year students. Everyone was nodding their heads passionately. Ando sighed slightly. The comfort of the club was now at risk, but he couldn't do anything to stop her. He reminisced about the graduated former third year students. The bibimbap he ate with them... that was so nice.

"Uhm, Sora, why don't we talk while we eat something or...."

"No. We should limit the things we can eat inside the clubroom to light snacks and drinks. You aren't coming to the club to fool around."

But I am though - Ando barely held himself back from retorting. These words wouldn't work against a girl that was like a bulldozer.

"A graduate of our school came to us and said that he'll help. Not only that, he works in the movie industry. If we miss this opportunity, we'll definitely regret it."

I think only you'll regret it though - of course, he had to swallow these words as well. Ando sneakily reached out to the snacks placed on the center of the table. It wasn't that he was hungry or something, he just wanted to do something in order to avoid Sora's attention. When his hand arrived at the snacks, the snack tray moved away from him. Sora placed the tray on the floor like it was nothing.

Ando fidgeted before placing his fingers on his thighs.

Sora, who then wiped off the words on the whiteboard, took out her phone. It would really become bothersome at this rate - Ando signalled the other 2nd year students when Sora wasn't paying attention to him. The 2nd year students all nodded. If they thought about it, Sora was a new student who just

entered the school. If they showed her what being a senior is like, she should probably forget about the things she said just now.

‘Let’s regain our cozy clubroom and our kind club.’

Receiving the encouraging gazes from his juniors, Ando coughed once. Just then, Sora put her phone inside her pocket and looked at him.

“You know, Sora....”

“Seonbae-NIM!”

“Uh, yeah.”

Ando flinched since Sora’s voice was at least an octave higher than before. Sora, who had the dominant position in the conversation, continued to speak,

“I got a text from Han Maru-seonbae. He wants to see us.”

Han Maru. That was the guy in electrical. He heard that this person appeared in ‘New Semester’, but Ando did not have that much of an interest. If it was a girl, he might have made a visit to have a look, but there was no reason to make some time to go see a boy. It was much better to read a book or get some sleep if he had the time for that. However, ever since Sora came to the club, he was forced to go and see Maru several times. Sora slapped his back saying that they should know his face and his personality at least.

“I don’t think he’s that good at acting, but he should be much better than a complete newbie. I think it worked when I used flattering words and said that I want to work with him.”

Sora widened her eyes as though she had thought of something before telling everyone to gather round. Ando thought that this wasn’t right but still followed her words.

“I told that graduate from before that we are really looking at Han Maru-seonbae in a good light. That’s why we need to agree on some things now. When you see him, tell him that you really wanted to meet him at least once. Also, flatter him a little.”

“But I don’t really....”

Ando had to shut up after saying just that. Sora was glaring at him.

“Let’s act nicely, shall we? Let’s flatter someone who will become the main actor of our movie. I don’t really like it either, but rather than a completely clueless person, it will be much better to have an actor who shows up in dramas to act for us, don’t you think?”

“That’s true.”

“Anyway, once he comes, applaud for him and say that you’re a fan. The graduate should have told Han Maru-seonbae that we are waiting for him, so it would be weird if we acted salty, you know what I mean, right?”

Just as he was about to nod subconsciously, Ando felt a 2nd year junior poking his waist. Are you going to keep being dragged around by her like this? - That junior’s eyes were saying such.

That can't happen. Ando coughed dryly to get her attention again. The opponent was just a first year student anyway, and a girl to boot. If he frowned and told her to stop, she should obediently reply 'yes' and stop what she was doing. Once that happened, they would be able to gather every Saturday here and enjoy nice foods and movies just like he did for the past two years. Although they were called the film production club, who cared?

"Hey, Kang Sora."

He had to be strong here. It was finally time to get payback for his three weeks of agony. I am a man. Koo Ando. Someone who forged ahead strongly when I mean it.

"What is it?"

Sora grabbed the two ends of the table and leaned forward. Ando subconsciously made some distance.

"Do you know what the film production club does?"

"Making films, of course."

"That's not it."

"Then what does it do?"

"We, the film production club, was a club to watch movies for generations of seniors. We talk about various things while eating the food we wholeheartedly created, and exchange friendship, and also...."

"That's the movie watching club. As far as I know, there are two movie watching clubs at our school."

"Th-that's true, but--"

"Then in the first place, why are you still here in the film production club?"

"That's...."

"Don't tell me you're here because you just find fun in meeting up and chatting while watching a movie, right?"

She was right on the mark, but he didn't want to admit it. When she put it so blatantly, it sounded like the club had neither hopes nor dreams, no?

Ando looked back at his previous 2 years. He remembered the time he spent with his seniors, as well as his juniors next to him in order to retort to Sora's words. After watching the panorama of memories, Ando came to a conclusion.

'...I can't retort.'

A club that could meet up and fool around without many restrictions before disbanding again. That was the biggest merit of the film production club. What was really good was that even the teacher in charge didn't care.

"Seonbae, we are the film production club."

Sora's face was right in front of his nose. Ando clenched his eyes shut and nodded. The exclamations of the 2nd year juniors could be heard from next to him.

After seeing Sora, who turned around with a pleased smile on her face, Ando realized what kind of position he was in.

'We are just sheep.'

The film production club, who only knew how to munch on grass under the warm rays of the sun, realized that they couldn't win against the wolf. Ando turned his head around to look at his 2nd year juniors. They were all cute juniors that looked docile. He was impressed by their skills since all the food they brought was great, but now it would be hard to have a taste of those ever again.

Ando looked at his juniors with pity. The juniors were also looking at him with pity as well. Even though it was him who failed to secure their resting place, these people understood him and didn't hate him.

This warmth, this affection. Wasn't this the essence of the film production club?

Bam! - that sound startled not just Ando, but also his 2nd year juniors. Sora had slapped down on the whiteboard.

"Seonbae-nims! Let's create our best movie!"

Aah, he hated this.

Ando missed the graduates from last year.

* * *

"Is this the place?"

Maru knocked on the door as he saw the sign that said 'film production club' above the door. He had made an appointment to see them after classes on Monday. He got a 'the door's open', from the inside. It was a girl.

When he opened the door, he saw a boy sitting on the other side of the table. Next to him was a girl who had a devious smile on her face. Maru knew this girl.

"You know me, right?"

"I do. So you must be Kang Sora, right?"

"Yes. This is the club president of our film production club, Koo Ando. He's a third year just like you."

Koo Ando, Maru looked at Ando while muttering silently. He somehow looked like a hostage.

"Hi."

"Yeah, hi."

His voice didn't contain any power, and his eyes looked sad as well. What the heck is this? Maru turned around to look at Sora.

"I thought you'd join the acting club, but you're in an unexpected place."

She was the girl who asked him if he knew Ahn Sungjae when he made rounds in the first year classes for promotion. After that, she even came to the acting club and asked him about his acting skills. He thought that she'd enter the acting club after seeing her take the application form, but she couldn't be seen anywhere after that. He thought it was strange, so she was in a place like this.

"Uhm, you are Bada's brother, right?"

"You know my sister?"

"Yes, I do. We were in the same class in middle school."

"Ah, I see."

"Bada once brought Sungjae-oppa's autograph to class. That's why I asked you that. Bada kept saying that Sungjae-oppa and you know each other."

Maru shrugged before pulling a chair towards him.

"May I sit down?"

"Of course."

From the way things were going, it seemed that Bada got into a conflict with this girl while boasting about the autograph in class. So girls really got into fights for trivial stuff.

"So then, why did you want to meet me?"

He asked Ando. He thought that he'd get an answer soon, but Ando didn't say anything and just looked at Sora.

"Because we want to shoot a movie with you."

The reply came from Sora. Maru looked at Ando and Sora alternately. Ando scratched his head before saying that he had to go to the bathroom.

"What a strange atmosphere."

"That's because he's nervous. He's a fan of yours."

"A fan?"

"Yes, a fan."

She lied without batting an eyelid. Since it was blatantly obvious that it was a lie, Maru was rather flustered.

"Anyway, you are participating in our movie, right?"

"That was my intention, but-"

"Wow, then let's do it."

"But before that, I want to hear what it's about."

"Ah, what it's about, huh. That's important."

Sora had a confident smile on her face.

Chapter 519

“Please wait just a bit.”

Sora left the clubroom. She had apologized before leaving and gave him some snacks and drinks, so Maru thought that the treatment of guests was pretty decent here. He picked up a bite-sized cookie so that he wouldn't get crumbs all over the place, and ate it before drinking a bit of orange juice.

“What kind of movie are you guys looking to make?”

He had asked Ando, who sat opposite him. Ando, who was eating snacks just like him, made a complex expression after receiving that question.

“We haven't thought of anything specific yet.”

“You haven't?”

“We never intended to make one in the first place.”

Ando sighed as though he was grieving about his fate. A new student at the school was eager to work, while the club president was unmotivated. It seemed that there were a lot of circumstances behind this club.

“Then why did you want to see me if you don't plan to make one?”

Just as Ando was about to say something, the door opened again and Sora came back. She opened a thin notebook in front of Maru.

“This is the synopsis.”

When Sora returned, Ando just reached out for some snacks quietly again. Maru looked at the notes for now.

“I'm thinking 20 minutes.”

“Can I read it out loud? That lets me focus better.”

“Sure.”

Maru started reading from the first sentence.

“Minho is being bullied at school. He didn't know why he was being bullied. When he realized it he was already bullied. He was afraid of going to school every day, but the alarm that woke him up every morning pushed him to the school. Then one day, a transfer student came to the school. Since the transfer student was shy and had a small voice, he soon became a target.

Minho decided that he should help. It was because he understood the pain of being bullied more than anyone. He gathered up the courage to talk to him first. They ate lunch together and went home together. Eventually, Minho realized that he had made a friend. When he realized that he had a friend he could talk to no matter what the others did, Minho gained strength.

After that, Minho was no longer afraid of going to school. That was because he was able to endure all the bullying and teasing just by talking to the transfer student. Minho became brighter by the day. He started talking to a lot more people instead of just the transfer student. Just like how he didn't know when the bullying started, Minho didn't know when he had gotten a lot closer to everyone.

After some time, someone told him that he should stop hanging out with the transfer student, that a decent guy like him shouldn't hang out with a strange kid like that. The moment he heard those words, Minho somehow thought that the transfer student looked poor and stupid. He didn't even understand why he hung out with such a guy in the first place.

From that day onwards, Minho intentionally ignored the transfer student. He went further and started teasing and swearing at him. A week after that, the transfer student no longer talked to him, and a few days after that, the transfer student transferred to another school.

Minho no longer had any memories of the transfer student. What remained was only his own, joyful class."

Maru closed the notes. It wasn't possible to put a lot of content into a short story. In cases like this one, actors would have to absorb as much of what the director was trying to say in as short a time as possible. In that sense, this was good in the perspective that it focused on the emotional changes of just one character. Had she gone and put all sorts of characters in it despite it being a short skit, he would've closed it without even reading it.

"What do you think?"

"Is this supposed to be a satire on society?"

"Yes. Bullying is a social issue these days. There are even many different types and it has even been made into a documentary."

"Are you following the trend then?"

"There's that too, but I want to show that bullying doesn't happen because of some kind of intention or reason, and to show the abstractness of the victim and the bully. Lastly, I want to ask the audience if they are entitled to insult Minho for his actions."

Maru tapped on the table and thought about it. He was quietly going to stand up and leave if this turned out to be all talk and no action, but that girl was trying to make a movie with clear intentions. The synopsis which she had printed and pasted in the notebook, the notes at the bottom listing the characters, as well as the specific plot points she wrote herself on the next page. Although the specific plot points didn't seem to be completed yet, it was enough to see that she had some concrete plans.

"What do you think?"

Maru asked Ando, who sat in front of him. Ando looked rather dazed.

"I think it's good, unexpectedly."

"Sounds like this is the first time you've heard about it, am I right?"

"Yup. This is the first time."

Maru looked at Sora. She was smiling awkwardly. He pushed the note back over to her and spoke, "Before we talk about the details, I see that there's something you guys need to get resolved first. The club president over there doesn't seem to want to do anything at all, while the new student over here is burning up with passion. I hope you guys can decide on who I should be following."

If they had the clear intent and will to create and produce a work, Maru was willing to participate. Since there was no pressure on him with this, he would be able to exchange opinions freely and gain some experience from it. It wasn't a bad thing at all. However, the creators of the film were in conflict. This was something that had to be solved before the production started.

"We are going to create a movie. Right, seonbae-nim?"

Sora looked at Ando. Ando did not reply. Sora frowned before approaching Ando. Maru clearly saw Ando flinching.

"Uhm, Koo Ando, was it?"

"Yeah."

"Can I ask for your number?"

"My number? Why?"

"If you don't like it, should I call the girl next to you and tell her to hand the phone to you?"

"N-no, I'll tell you my number."

It seemed as though he was being completely dominated. Maru saved Ando's number on his phone.

"Well then, please get it sorted before you guys call me again."

"Seonbae-nim!"

He acknowledged Sora, who called out to him, with his eyes before closing the door.

* * *

"Kang Sora?"

Bada's eyes turned fiery when she heard that name. She couldn't understand why her brother was mentioning that name.

"From the looks of it, I guess you know her."

"I do, I really do. That cocky, really, really cocky girl."

"You're quite firm on that, huh."

"Of course. But how do you know her?"

"She goes to my school, apparently."

"Really? That's strange. From what I know, she's really good at studying."

“So you know that she’s good at studying.”

“Of course, we were in the same class. But how do you really know her? It’s not like you know the face of every single new student. Don’t tell me she joined the acting club?”

“She didn’t.”

“Then what?”

“She said she wants to create a movie, and asked me for help.”

“Ah, a movie.”

“You know anything about that?”

“She said from time to time that she wants to become a female director. She seems knowledgeable in that regard as well. Oh, do you know that she looked down on you? When you appeared in that drama briefly last time, she said that anyone can do it.”

“If it’s about background acting, then yes. Anyone can do it.”

Her brother nodded without denying it. He then put a tomato in his mouth like it was nothing. Bada really didn’t like that reaction.

“Anyone can do it?”

“Yeah. It’s more like a part time job.”

“Then what about that murderer character?”

“I was lucky. I was there for a part time job, and got to shoot through connections.”

“Ah, luck, huh. So what she said is right? Do you know how frustrated I was? And yet you say that she’s right? Huh? She’s right?”

Bada poked her brother’s leg with the backside of the fork. Her brother lifted his leg onto the sofa.

“Aren’t you upset? She looked down on you.”

“If you get upset by every little thing like that, you won’t be able to last in society.”

“Dammit.”

She was about to say more, but she didn’t. At times like these, he seemed a bit overly generous or something. Or maybe he was that idiotic.

“Did you cry back then because of her?”

“What do you mean?”

“You know, you told me that someone said that the autograph is fake. That was Sora, right?”

“Yeah, it was her. I feel really angry when I think about it even now.”

“But hey. Did you take that autograph to school and say something along the lines of ‘my brother got it cuz he’s close with Sungjae’ or something?”

Bada avoided her brother’s gaze. Actually, when her brother got her that autograph and the tickets, he told her not to boast about it. He also said that it would be incredibly difficult to get one again. However, Bada wanted to boast about it and said that her brother easily got his hands on the tickets and the autograph. It was that point that Sora had made her remark about.

“Did Kang Sora say that?”

“Yeah. She boldly asked if Ahn Sungjae and I know each other.”

“So, what did you tell her?”

“I said I don’t know him.”

“Why! You do know him. You even got him on the phone for me.”

“That’s enough to say that I ‘know’ him on a personal basis. Geez, you really don’t listen, do you? Is it TTO that you like? Or do you just want everyone around you to put you on a pedestal because you have something TTO-related?”

Her brother was making a really hateful face, but Bada couldn’t retort. It was her who did things that he told her specifically not to do after all. It was also true that she did boast about the autograph, so all the more reason she couldn’t say anything.

“Fine, it’s all my fault. I’m the bad one and I’m the one to be blamed. You satisfied now?”

When she pouted, her brother smiled awkwardly and loosened up his expression. Bada inwardly sighed in relief. She had a hard time getting adjusted to her brother since he had changed too much when he entered high school, but now she got used to handling him. When he was in middle school, he would shout at her first when something like this happened and he would even hit her, but right now, if she made a pitiful expression, her brother would loosen up first and forgive her. She inwardly laughed and looked at him.

“Are you going to do something to me?”

“No, Sora was in the bad.”

“You mean I was in the bad. Hmph.”

“Fine, fine. Here, eat this. I sprinkled some sugar on it, so it’s good.”

Her brother forked a slice of tomato and gave it to her. Bada barely held herself back from grinning from ear to ear and grabbed the hand in a delicate fashion. She was about to get a scolding, but thankfully, she managed to avoid it. Hooray. Bada thought that this was the moment and started speaking. She thought that there was a need to switch the topic at hand.

“But you told me something about Sora shooting a movie?”

“She wants to apply for the youth film festival.”

“She might be cocky, but she’s good when it comes to work. She was the class president too. Everyone didn’t want to do it, but she raised her hand and even volunteered for it.”

Bada chewed the tomato properly before swallowing it.

“So, are you going to do it?”

“I’m not sure about that yet.”

“Do you want to do it?”

“It’ll be a good experience, so yeah.”

“Don’t tell me you’re doing it because you’ve taken a liking to Sora. I’ll tell big sis immediately if that’s the case.”

“Why don’t you write a novel instead, huh.”

“Just saying. She’s not that pretty.”

“She looked cute in her own way though?”

“Oppa!”

“Just saying.”

Bada frowned and bared her fangs. Her brother scratched his eyebrows before turning his gaze.

“Should I not do it?”

“Oh? I thought you said it would be a good experience. Then you should do it.”

“But I thought you hated her.”

“Oppa, do you still take me for a middle school student? I’m not that childish anymore. I’ve grown up now. I know that Kang Sora, that girl, is a cocky one, but I can turn a blind eye to that. Also, even though she’s cocky, she was never someone who would put less than full effort into something she wants to do.”

“That’s a decent evaluation, coming from you.”

“I told you, I’m a grown up now. You should learn from me and not let your personal feelings interfere with your work, okay?”

“Yeah, yeah. I’ll keep that in mind.”

Smack, Bada covered her head and looked at her brother. After smacking her head with the back of the fork, he took the empty plate and put it in the sink.

“Bring anything that needs to be washed.”

“I have a cup in my room!”

Bada pointed at her room when she saw her brother looking at her. He sighed before going to her room. She won this battle. Bada smiled in satisfaction and changed the TV channel.

* * *

Before Maru closed the door, he looked at Bada, who was sitting in the living room. She looked like she did her best to put up a pretense, but it was so obvious to him.

'How cute.'

He closed the door before sitting down on his bed. He got a basic grasp of what Sora was like. She was someone who was filled with confidence. It also didn't seem like she was just all talk. While she didn't seem to have a good relationship with his sister, he couldn't evaluate her personality just based on that. He needed some experience with that girl to know what she was really like. It was very dangerous to evaluate someone based on someone else's opinions.

He took out his phone and looked for Koo Ando's number. Since he got to know about Sora a little, it was the club president's turn now. He had to know about what was going on in the film production club before he accepted or denied their offer.

-Hello?

Maru greeted first when he heard that voice.

"Is this Mr. Koo Ando's phone?"

-Yes. I'm Koo Ando.

"Then that's fine. I'm Han Maru. Can you take the call right now?"

Chapter 520

Ando hesitated for a while before hanging up after saying that he would call back in just a bit.

"I'll be leaving for a bit."

Bada, who was absorbed in watching TV, just waved at him without looking. After leaving the house, Maru went into the nearby convenience store and bought a canned coffee. It was nearing the end of March. The evening winds had warmed up to the point that he could stand outside without shivering. Just as he was sipping on the coffee, he got a call.

"Hello?"

-Hello? It's me, Koo Ando.

"Yeah, can you take the call now?"

-I just left, so I'm fine.

"You couldn't take the call before?"

-I was at a study café.

"Sorry about that. I called thinking that you were at home."

-I was about to take a break anyway, so it doesn't matter that much. You called because of Sora, right?

Yeah - Maru replied before standing up with the coffee in hand.

“From what I saw during the day, you don’t seem to have any interest in shooting the movie, am I right?”

-If it’s about if I do or not, then I guess I lean towards the latter. While we are called the film production club, we didn’t produce anything during the past few years.

“I only heard a bit so don’t count me on this, but I heard that you guys did do shoot in the past.”

-Nothing like that happened even when I was a first year. We just discussed movies in depth. Like you said, I heard that they shot movies and played them during the festival around five years ago, but there’s none of that now. No one knows what shooting a movie requires, nor do we want to do anything like that.

“So Sora’s getting excited all by herself, huh?”

-That’s right, probably.

Probably, huh. Maru kicked the bottle cap on the ground.

“Then can I take it that the club does not have any intention to help out with the shoot?”

Ando fell silent at that question. Maru did not urge him to speak and just waited patiently with the phone against his ear. When he left the residential area and entered the park in the apartment complex, Ando spoke again. Maru looked at the spotted cat walking nearby as he listened.

-It’s not like we need to do something.

“You’re right. Since we’re at it, can I ask what you do at the club?”

Ando started talking in excitement. About how cohesive the film production club is, how warm they were, and how comfortable it was there. He listed the good things without taking a single breath. Just listening to him was enough to know just how much he cared about the club.

“Good club.”

The acting club charged forward with only the goal of winning the acting competition. Achieving an objective required sacrifices, so the acting club only had people that were willing to invest their own time. They trained very harshly, and sometimes even brutally, yet those kids would endure it. That was because they had a clear destination.

The film production club should be in the same position. It wasn’t that they had an explicit objective, but the purpose of their activities was clear in that they increased the friendship between students, and relieved stress from studies. On the surface, it was strange that the film production club did not create any movies, but considering that it was just a high school club, there shouldn’t be much of a problem. In fact, they could be considered much healthier than the people who went to their clubroom because they had nothing to do during extracurricular activities time.

“Then let’s say that we never had that conversation. Tell Sora that as well.”

-Huh? Ah, okay.

“Sorry for calling you so late.”

Maru hung up. In a situation where the rest of the film production club didn't have any will to work, there was no way things would progress smoothly if he just worked with Sora alone. A movie wasn't shot with just the director and the actor.

A cameraman to hold the 6mm film camera.

A person in charge of sound to monitor the sound coming through the microphone attached to the camera.

A person in charge of lights in order to block out unnecessary lighting.

A scripter to record each shoot in detail.

Even if the director was the one holding the camera and even doubled as the scripter, more people were needed to hold the reflectors, the boom mic, as well as various other equipment.

Well, if forced to, one director could take care of all of that. Putting a directional microphone on the camera and putting it on a tripod, then clapping the slate for each scene and cut, and then watching the footage after the shoot - it was possible to do all that by oneself. The director could then reorganize the script while watching the footage and do the final check on the equipment before going to the next scene, starting all of that from the beginning again.

It wasn't impossible to do a one-man shoot, but Maru had no intentions of participating in such a messy thing. Sora said she was planning on a 20-minute movie. 20 minutes. It only amounted to a third of an hour, but Maru knew because he had experience shooting a movie. Shooting 20 minutes of a movie with a camera took an incredibly long time.

Judging from the synopsis that Sora wrote, they wouldn't be able to complete all the scenes at the school. School, the main character's house, the background that represents his inner state. Even if she minimized the locations to those three locations, as each scene in a film needed to be shot several times at different angles, it would take an absurdly long time.

It was impossible to do that by herself. Even if she did, she wouldn't end up with a good result. If a director, who was supposed to wholeheartedly focus on the film itself, was concerned with the various equipment, there would definitely be problems with the final product. Furthermore, what about the post-processing? There should be narration in the movie since this was a movie that portrayed the inner state of the main protagonist, and that would require post-syncing the audio during the editing process, and even mixing the audio. It just wasn't possible.

There shouldn't be a reason they couldn't do so if they took shortcuts, but Maru was doing this in order to gain high-quality experience, not because he wanted to waste some time on fun club activities. If he deemed that filming the movie would not help out in his career or if the environment to shoot wasn't even set up properly, there would be no reason for him to participate.

If a proven director, such as Choi Joonggeun from 'Twilight Struggles' and Park Joongjin, or someone else who already had experience producing something asked him to help, then he would've said yes even if it was a one-man shoot. No, he would even be willing to carry the equipment himself and climb a

hill, if necessary, and then set up everything and do the acting after that. Those directors were worth his effort after all.

However, Kang Sora clearly didn't belong to that category. She was just a high school student who never shot a movie before. There was no need for him to accept her request when she couldn't even set up a proper environment to produce a film.

"She'll take care of that by herself."

If she was really willing to shoot it, Sora would eventually find a way, whether it be persuading the film production club, or looking for other people to do it. He pitied Ando a bit since she would obviously try to nag him first, but he was the club president of the film production club, so what could he do about it? He would have to either persuade Sora otherwise or reach a different conclusion.

Maru crumpled up the empty can and started walking to his house.

* * *

"Why do you look like an uneasy puppy?"

"Don't ask."

Ando picked up his bag and left the classroom. He thought about going home, but he headed to the clubroom since he felt like he would be dodging the problem if he did so. He opened the door and looked inside. It seemed that Sora wasn't here yet. He sighed and sat down. When Sora came to this clubroom, Ando inwardly rejoiced. That should have been the same for the other 2nd year juniors as well. A cute girl said she wanted to join. They would never reject her, and would much rather hold a welcome party instead.

Ever since the pretty 3rd year senior graduated, the clubroom was a bit lonely, and then a girl appeared, so he even imagined a school romance. However, such a fantasy was broken in just one week. Sora looked like she was crazed over film production. What about this kind of movie? Do you think there's a suitable location to shoot it nearby? Do you know anyone good-looking? Hearing the barrage of questions, Ando, not to mention the others, fell silent. They were called the film production club on paper, but as they didn't have any experience in participating in the production of one, there was no way they had any knowledge about it.

The atmosphere naturally leaned towards the person with the stronger will, and while Ando found it bothersome, he did not stop her. He couldn't really say something to someone who wanted to make a movie in the film production club.

Recently though, she seemed a little too overbearing and did everything by herself without telling the others, so he tried to caution her, but that did not work. She was like a bulldozer. However, that ended today. Maru refused. He texted Sora about that yesterday. From what he knew of her, she would immediately call back and snap out asking why he decided that by himself, but unexpectedly, he only got a text back asking him to come to the clubroom tomorrow.

Along with a knock, the door opened once again.

"Huh?"

Ando looked at Maru who came in while yawning.

“Why are you here?”

“Sora called me here.”

“Sora, did?”

After that, the 2nd year juniors all came to the clubroom as well. Everyone said that Sora had called them here. When the promised time of 5:40 came around, Sora came in. She was with a girl he hadn't seen before.

“First, I'll apologize for being so rude until now.”

Sora bowed and apologized. Ando scratched his head.

“And this.”

Sora handed out some A4 papers. On the front page, it said 'Friend', and below that were the objectives and directions.

“The one next to me is a classmate of mine who wants to make a movie with me. We talked to our homeroom teacher, and she decided to switch clubs.”

The girl introduced herself in a shaky voice. It seemed that she was nervous. She immediately hid behind Sora after she did so.

“I thought that you all weren't creating anything just because you didn't have any good ideas. I thought all by myself that you would definitely be eager to participate if there's a decent item. I'll apologize once again for misunderstanding all of you.”

Sora bowed once again in apology. The girl next to her also bowed with a puzzled expression.

“But I found out after talking to Han Maru-seonbae yesterday. That I wasn't listening to you. Like what you said, I think it's good to gather with the intention to watch a movie. Of course, I'm still a bit angry at the fact that you all have zero interest in film production despite being in the film production club.”

After saying that, Sora sighed. She looked like she was calming her agitation.

“That's why I'm going to talk to you all properly this time. If you hear me out and still do not gain any interest in film production, then I will never talk about it again. I will not make any more rude requests. Instead, just once, I hope you all can hear me out seriously. I'll also listen to your words.”

Ando curled his lips inwards and looked at the plan. He thought that she would act like usual and force her ideas on everyone else, but he didn't know that she would prepare something like this.

Ando looked at Sora. She was waiting nervously with her lips sealed.

“What do you think we should do?” he asked the 2nd year juniors.

They were all staring at the paper they were given in puzzlement. After a bit of time passed, one of them spoke,

“Shouldn’t we hear her out at least?”

The others seemed to be in agreement.

Ando grabbed the plan with both of his hands and asked Sora.

“I’ll tell you this beforehand, but we don’t have any experience in shooting a movie. That’s why we don’t have any interest. You know that there’s no guarantee that we’ll do it after we listen to you, right?”

“Yes. But I am confident. I will persuade all of you. Film production is a fun thing after all. There’s nothing better in this world than it.”

Ando nodded. If he thought about it, he also didn’t hear her out properly because he was tired of her attitude. He then looked at Maru. Maru just shrugged once. He didn’t seem to care at all.

“Then we’ll hear you out.”

“Okay.”

Sora took a short breath before standing in front of everyone else.