

## Once Again 521

### Chapter 521

“I’ll first tell you why I want to shoot this movie. At first, my intention was to be the whistle-blower. There’s a bullied main character, the bullies, and then the onlookers. By having the camera observe the three groups from a distance, I wanted to show the problems that the students living in this era are going through. But I thought a bit more about it. I believe that there should always be a solution to whistle-blower-type situations. It is definitely valuable to make it known that such problems exist, but bullying has long since been an issue, and many discussions have taken place already. There are proposed solutions, and whether they are effective or not, we’ll have to see in the future, but since it’s already been talked about, I decided to change the direction a little.

That’s when I thought that I should escape the whistle-blower mindset and decided to show how people act instead. The main character is a target of bullying, but he eventually escapes that restraint. Having been freed, the main character could reach out to others that are in the same situation that he used to be in, but he could also prove himself to be different from the rest by ignoring them completely. Usually, it would be a happy ending just by grabbing that person’s hand, but you know that doesn’t happen in real life. I wanted to create a story that’s more extreme and wanted to show the vagueness of people.

Is the main character, who was someone that got bullied, somehow that managed to escape, and someone got into bullying others really evil? Or is he a victim as well? If you want to blame someone, then whose fault is it? I want to throw these questions to the audience. The synopsis I wrote based on that is on the next page. Please have a read.”

Maru flipped over the page. The synopsis he saw yesterday could be seen. It seemed that this was the first time anyone else in the club had a look at the synopsis as they all seemed quite absorbed into it. He skimmed over it to find any differences, but there didn’t seem to be any.

Sora, standing at the front, was looking at the club members with an expression filled with confidence.

Everyone seemed to have finished reading the synopsis as they started moving. Sora started speaking around that time as well.

“Does anyone have any questions about the synopsis?”

Maru quietly looked at the people of the film production club. They looked at each other but did not say anything. Well, it wasn’t that surprising since none of them had any interest in producing a film before today. If they passionately asked questions about this synopsis, there wouldn’t be a problem in the first place.

“I’ll consider that you don’t and go to the next part. If you flip over another page, you’ll see the storyboard. It’s not completed yet, it’s just the beginning parts. I made it to show you that that’s the plan I have, so just take it as a reference.”

Maru flipped over the page at the same time as everyone else and looked at the next page. There were some illustrations that looked like it was a scan of some hand-drawn pictures. They were very crude. A circle was a head, and a long object connected to it was the body, while hands and feet were represented by triangles. Next to the pictures were some sentences that describe the situation.

“What is this?” One of the club members had asked that.

“It’s called a storyboard, you can think of it as a manual for shooting the movie. I’m not good with my hands, so the drawings aren’t that good, but I think the structure is perfect.”

“So you’re shooting it just like this?”

“Yes. As long as we stick to that, we’ll end up with a splendid movie.”

She sounded very confident. The club members all looked at each other and whispered among themselves. So she even went this far, looks okay, she looks serious, etc. There were some good reactions. Sora’s confidence seemed to have risen a level. It was obvious from the thickened smile on her face. Maru did not say anything and just checked a few things with his pen. He was planning to ask all the questions he had in one go at the end.

“Seniors. You should have seen the content our club produced before up there. Don’t you feel your heart racing when you look at the movies that our seniors made six years ago? You know, I really want to try making this movie seriously. It’ll be hard. It will take a lot of our time as well. But I believe that the satisfaction and fun we will get out of it are worth it. Think about it. Imagine shooting a movie with all of us. Watching movies is good, but that’s just consumption. I believe that true fun lies in the creation.”

Sora raised her synopsis to her eye level.

“Also, with this, I believe that we’ll get good results at the film festival. Plus, that’s one more line on your student record. It won’t just end as a simple hobby, you’ll be able to gain prizes for it, I mean, there’s a prize for the winners after all. From what I know, the grand prize is around 1 million won. If we get the prize, we’ll split it fairly. Don’t you think that’s good?”

Sora stopped there. She seemed to want everyone to exchange opinions.

Ando spoke after staying silent for a while.

“What do you all think?”

“I don’t think it’s a bad idea. At first, I didn’t really like it since when Sora first said that we should do it, it seemed like she was just bothering us, but now that we got to hear her out like this, she sounds like she knows a lot, and isn’t just being reckless.”

That was positive feedback. Then, the boy sitting next to him spoke,

“Meeting up and watching a movie together is good, but after listening to her, I think it’s a good idea to create something. After all, we are the film production club. Sora seems knowledgeable in movie production as well.”

The general opinion seemed to be leaning towards do than don’t. The people that seemed to be 2nd year students all agreed that they should try it out. Ando put down the plan and asked.

“You’re asking us to help you make this movie, right?”

“Yes. I’ll also be really happy if I can make it with all of you. Since it’s like this, we should really try it out. I’m really confident. As long as you follow me, I’ll pay you back with a year that you will not regret.”

Sora's provocative words made Ando groan before nodding. He still didn't look like he accepted it fully, but it seemed that he couldn't just ignore the opinions of his juniors.

"It'd be strange not to do it when you prepared so much for it. Honestly, I was surprised. I thought you were pretty much joking since you seemed to be over your head when you talked to us about it."

"Sorry about that."

"No, I did have my misunderstandings after all."

Seeing the other members, who had lukewarm reactions at first, leaning towards doing it, Maru tapped on the table with his hand. While he felt sorry for breaking the mood, he had to ask some things here.

"You are accepting questions, right?"

"Eh? Questions?"

Sora hesitated for a while before replying 'yes' in a cheerful voice.

"First, the synopsis. You switched your mind from being a whistle-blower to showing what people are like, right?"

"Yes."

"So what are you trying to tell your audience through this movie?"

"Like I said before, whether the main character should be seen as a sinner or a vic-"

Maru raised his hand to stop her. Sora curled her lower lip inwards and stopped speaking.

"Sorry for stopping you. I heard that before but what I really want to ask is what you're trying to show through this movie. Throwing questions at the audience. Is that it?"

"Huh, that's..."

"I'll change the question. Which side are you on? Is the main character you created a victim after all? Or is he in the wrong?"

"I think that..."

He is in the end - she added after a pause.

"Why is he in the wrong?"

"Because in the end, he abandons his friend."

"Then the intention is a little weird. You shouldn't be asking the audience whether he's good or evil, but rather you should be portraying him as an evil person and asking the audience what they think, am I wrong? The film will change according to which side the director is focusing on, and if you create the movie when you have already deemed him as evil, then wouldn't the audience think that he's evil as well? They might be misled into thinking what you're thinking."

"That wasn't my intention though...."

“But you’ve already come to the conclusion that the main character is in the wrong. Oh, do tell me if I’m jumping to conclusions when I’m thinking that the main character is evil because he’s in the wrong. Is there another interpretation?”

“Uhm... I just wanted to show that such a thing can happen.”

“Show that such a thing can happen, I see.”

Maru twirled the pen in his hand. There were works that were created without intention. Not all people working in the arts produced their works with perfect calculations. However, Sora expressed her confidence in her work. She even said that she had an intention, and he just asked her to make that vagueness a bit more definite, but she was at a loss for words.

He nodded once before flipping over to the next page. This was the storyboard part.

“Did you check on all the locations?”

“Eh? The locations?”

“You said this was the storyboard. Aren’t storyboards supposed to be made after scouting all the locations out and getting the angles from them as well?”

“Ah, right. I just made it thinking that that’s the general direction I’ll take.”

“Then this is more of a sketch than a storyboard. Also, how are you going to take the shots in each scene? The actor’s movements, camerawork, shot types, there’s nothing about those on here.”

“I was planning to decide after looking at the camera at the scene.”

Maru twirled the pen once again.

“Didn’t you just say that this was the manual?”

“I did.”

“A manual doesn’t just mean vague direction, does it?”

Sora fell silent.

The reason Maru asked questions about the storyboard was because of two things. One was to see if she really knew what she was doing, and the second reason was because he was curious about the reason why she actually put this here.

“Did you just draw poorly to show the seniors of your club that something like this exists? That’s how I felt about it.”

“...”

“I’m not trying to interrogate you or anything, I just want things to be clear. If you truly want to shoot a movie, these are the people you should be asking help from more desperately than anyone. Don’t you think you should have been more honest? I am lacking in some parts, but I want to fill that up as we shoot things together - or something along those lines. Were you planning to pretend that everything was perfect and get their agreement first before starting the shoot?”

Sora silently looked at him. Maru did not look into her eyes. He didn't want to peek at someone's mind without reason. The emotional consumption on his part was quite big when he looked into someone's mind. He especially felt really iffy if the opponent was swearing on the inside while smiling on the outside. He would use it if it was necessary, but he didn't feel the need to use it against a kid.

Since there was no reply, he just went on to the next question.

"From what I heard, you have to hand in the final piece by the end of May, am I right?"

"Yes, that's right."

"I'm not that knowledgeable about short films, so I looked into it a little, and apparently, most of them take about two to three months to make, even on a tight schedule."

"I'm also thinking around two months."

"I feel like we can only fill those twenty minutes if everything from the pre-production to the post-production is smooth. What are you going to do about the equipment?"

"Equipment?"

"You need a camera to shoot a movie. A camera that can shoot with the required specifications for the festival."

"I'll look into it."

"It takes a lot of money if you want to buy it, so try looking into renting. I guess you can ask that graduate."

"Yes!"

Sora replied in a brighter voice than before.

"You said that you haven't scouted the locations yet, but do you already have some places in mind?"

"For now, there's the school. As for the house, I'm planning to use mine. I'll think about the rest and write it down afterwards."

Maru nodded. Sora sighed.

"Then it's decided, right?"

"What's decided?"

"That you're shooting with us, of course."

He was wondering why she sighed, but it turned out that she was sighing in relief. Since she looked like she misunderstood, he decided to correct her quickly.

"What about the script?"

"Ah, the script. I can make one quickly. It's all in my head."

"In your head, huh. So what, I'm supposed to be shooting inside your dream or something?"

Maru rotated the plan he placed on the table 180 degrees before pushing it towards Sora. Sora made a confused expression.

"I believe that there's at least 10 million people in this country that shoot dramas and movies in their heads. But shooting is reality. Equipment, location, script. Not even one of them is ready. It's not that the character I'm supposed to be acting is attractive to me either. Let me ask you one thing. Why should I do this?"

"I can prepare everything quickly. I'll show you I can."

"Then get everything ready and bring it to me. I think you're mistaken about something. Just because I have time left over doesn't mean I want to do unnecessary labor. It's much better to get some other experience during that time. Also, I might not look the part, but I am an actor who works on contract. No, let's say I'm some random nameless actor. Even a character that walks by without saying a single word gets paid to do it. Compensation is required for labor. That compensation doesn't necessarily have to be money, but it needs to be something that benefits me. Creative experience? Honestly speaking, from what you've shown me until now, I don't understand just what you're trying to do at all. If you want to write a novel, I can cheer for you. You were good with your sentences. But if you are going to direct and produce a movie, then bring something that might entice an actor. I don't belong to your club, and I hope you can remember that I'm here due to someone's request."

He looked at Sora, who shut her lips. She didn't look like she had given up. That was good in its own way. He was thinking that he would gladly accept the shoot as long as she prepared properly. However, if this was all she had, he was planning to take his hands off this entirely. What he wanted to do was acting, not film production.

"I'm not that knowledgeable about movies either. But what I do know is that shooting is not that easy. Talk about it amongst yourselves before giving me an offer. If I think I'm interested, I'll definitely do it for you. I don't want to be too stingy after all."

Good luck - he added before standing up. He heard Sora call out to him, but he closed the door.

## **Chapter 522**

"Move as slowly as possible. But you need to be conscious of the fact that you are walking. You are slowly recreating the motions of walking. Expressing slow movement and slow walking are two completely different things. You have to consider in your mind which part of your foot detaches from the ground first, how your arms are moving at that time, and where your gaze is heading. It will be no good if you stop thinking completely. You have to use your brain fully. Think that there's a camera above your heads. You will be looking at yourselves through that camera. Imagine a strict teacher inside your heart. That's the best method."

Miso clapped very slowly. The students, lined up in a long line, slowly started walking according to her claps. Moving slowly. That was a method of bringing natural and subconscious usage of the muscles into the realm of consciousness. If even one's breathing speed was controlled to a slow speed, it was possible to feel the movements of various muscles. For the first few minutes, it might be a little boring, however, with enough time, those that did this exercise would find themselves sweating.

Maru looked away from his juniors and looked at an old-style paper in front of him. Next to that was a board of mdf that would have to become a door frame. They decided on the play they were going to perform at the summer acting competition two days ago. It was a story set in a countryside village.

The stage included a flat wooden platform and a house with a thatched roof. They decided to make the old paper doors with old-style papers, and the roof with some straws glued to some mdf with wood glue. He drew some lines on the mdf with a pencil before dragging it over to the other side of the hall. He placed the mdf on a chair to act as a table and started sawing the wood with a coping saw. Maybe being a woodworker wasn't so bad either - he thought as he looked at the falling sawdust.

"That looks fun."

"Want to have a go?" Maru asked as he offered the coping saw.

Miso refused with an expression that said 'why should I?'. The other club members were still walking slowly.

"Have you talked to the film production club kids?"

"Talk to them, huh, that I did. Over there, can you step on that part on the chair at the end?"

Miso stepped on the end of the mdf. Maru got into a sawing posture again before continuing.

"So, did you decide to do it?"

"For now, I haven't decided yet."

"Why? You don't like it?"

"They haven't shown me anything yet, so I can't exactly like or dislike anything. Oh, press a little hard. You're capable of snapping this board with your bare hands, aren't you?"

He agilely avoided the slap that flew at him before moving the saw to the next line. It wasn't that the door was actually going to be used, so it just had to look the part. He was planning to snap it off once he sawed quite far.

"They haven't shown you anything? From what I heard, they seemed to be really passionate though."

"Passionate, yes. But passion doesn't create films. I made a visit to the film production club, but they haven't produced anything for several years, so they don't even have the basic knowledge nor the tools. There are no cameras, and it's just filled with DVDs and video tapes."

"For equipment, you can just rent. I mean, students can't really afford a 6mm film camera. That's why they just buy the film rolls."

"I'm thinking that too. Actually, equipment isn't a big problem. Bluntly put, you can just solve it with money, and that graduate friend of yours who used to belong to the film production club can also help out. But the main problem is that there's no script either."

Maru exerted some strength and snapped the wood. Along with a loud crunch, the board was snapped unevenly. It was around 50cm, and the outcome looked decent enough.

“There’s no script?”

“Nope, there isn’t one. Also, what’s interesting is that there’s a storyboard. No, it’s like a storyboard, but it’s more like she just sketched some things that were inside her head and I can’t exactly make my decision based on that.”

“I get what you mean. But that’s the norm. If she had perfect pre-production skills, she’s way past being an amateur. Go easy on her. Oh, should I pull on this part?”

Yes - Maru replied before pulling the board too. It snapped cleanly in half with a snap. Looking at the clean cut, Maru smiled for some reason.

“Maybe I should try making more sets some time. This kind of thing is fun.”

“Playing house is always more fun than running a real house. So, what are you going to do”? If you refuse, that friend of mine will call me and start nagging.”

“Does that person have your weakness or something? That isn’t like you.”

“He’s taking the photos for the wedding album.”

“Aha, that makes more sense now. So that goes down the drain if I don’t do it?”

“Our friendship isn’t that cheap. We made this promise a long time ago. Also, I’m paying him. Among the people that work in this industry, not even one person likes doing something for free for a friend.”

Miso turned her head around before shouting. You guys are speeding up! - Hearing her shout, everyone flinched before slowing down again.

“The reason I told you about that shoot, was only because it could help you out. Don’t have too high standards. They just started off after all.”

“To be precise, it’s not they, but her. I told you right? That they don’t have any intentions of making a film despite being a film production club. Right now, just one girl is jumping around everywhere trying to make this a thing.”

Miso blinked several times.

“They aren’t at the stage where the whole club is preparing for it and they called you when just one kid is fantasizing?”

“Pretty much.”

“Forget it. Don’t do it. I thought that they were all preparing for it and that one girl popped out in particular. If what you say is true, then that means that she’ll be a one-person director, and if she doesn’t have anything prepared at this point, that’s game over.”

“I thought you told me to go easy on her.”

“I thought she would have the basics down at least.”

“I’m a guy who will do things if people tell me not to, so I somehow want to help them out since you said that.”



“Why don’t you come up with a better lie? I can clearly see that you have zero intention of helping them.”

“I do have some. Like what you said, they are students, so they can’t be perfect. It’s not that I don’t have any time either, so I can help them out if I really wanted to. But like I said before, they weren’t able to show me just what kind of a film they were trying to shoot, so they don’t sound attractive right now. I’m not getting paid for this, so that’s even more of a reason not to do it if it’s not fun either.”

“Do you know that you sometimes sound like you’re a veteran at life?”

“My motto in life is that money is the best. Didn’t you know that already?”

“I did realize that you weren’t right in the head, when you wrote down 300 million, but I didn’t know you were that crazy for money,” said Miso with a laugh.

Maru also laughed back.

“So, what’s the conclusion? You’re going to help them if you find it interesting?”

“You told me that it will be a good experience. I’m going to wait it out a little longer before deciding. That Sora girl isn’t entirely dumb. If she has the desire to shoot the film, she’ll get herself ready before calling me again. I’m going to make my decision then.”

Maru placed a few pieces of MDF on top of one another. It should be about done if he nailed these together and pasted the paper onto it.

“What if it’s lacking at that time as well?”

“I don’t really mind it being lacking. I raised my expectations since she looked so confident, but they’re currently at rock bottom right now. The environment for shooting, minimum preparation, and also, a bit of respect. As long as she has those, I’m planning to talk to her properly.”

“Respect?”

“She was taking for granted that I will be participating in the film. She didn’t look like she was trying to persuade me. She looked like she was announcing facts to me, so I grumbled a bit yesterday.”

“How picky.”

“Another one of my dreams is to become a splendid kkondae. I should build up for that while I’m still young. Using my connections to flex, using money to persuade people, and being treated like an important person. That’s my ideal life.”

Miso raised her thumb, saying that that was splendid.

“I’m thinking about this big for the door. What do you think?”

“We’re going to place two, so it’s not bad.”

“I should really finish making the set and go watch the others. It’s also a little boring to do it by myself.”

“You’re the only staff member for now, so do your best. If you don’t like it, you can always come to the actor team. You’re very welcome there after all.”

Maru shook his head as he looked at the club members frowning as they walked slowly. It was much better to nail stuff here rather than joining that group.

"I am practicing the basics on my own, so I'm okay."

"Really? What a pity. It would be really fun if you could join us."

Work hard - Miso turned around after adding those words. Maru whistled as he heard the groans of the others. He could already picture them going home in pain.

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It had been a while since he didn't have a shoot on a weekend. This was because the episode about Yeseul's one-sided love was starting. From what he heard, Yeseul, Jichan and Giwoo had a shoot from Saturday through Wednesday.

"I'll go up to the clubroom today."

"You don't have a shoot today?"

"It's been a while since I didn't have a shoot on a Saturday. I'll go up and see how the others are doing. Is senior Miso coming today?"

"No, she's not coming today."

"Also, I heard that you decided to meet up on Sundays as well."

"That's because we decided on the script. There's yours in the clubroom too so take a look later."

"There's mine as well?"

"Well, we made a copy for now. So that you can help when we go over the lines."

"Uhm, president, I'm a staff member though?"

"Do it anyway, you'll help out, right?"

"Whew, our little Park Daemyung has gotten a lot more evil."

Daemyung went up first. Maru shrugged before returning to his class.

"Maru, let's start cleaning."

A classmate tossed a broom at him. He was going to the faculty office, since he was supposed to clean it, when he saw a man walking up the stairs with a tripod and a black bag. From what he saw in that brief instance, there was a Sony logo on the bag.

'Is that him?'

It seemed that he was the graduate from the film production club. He also looked to be around his early thirties, so Maru was probably right.

After finishing the cleaning of the faculty office, Maru went up to the clubroom. He saw thirty bags lined up neatly on one side. The small clubroom only acted as a storage space for bags, since there wasn't

enough room. It was good that they had a lot of members, but that came with its drawbacks as well. He stepped between the bags to go to the display stand. The script that Daemyung talked about before was placed there. He grabbed a copy before going up to the 5th floor. When he climbed about half way up, he could hear some loud voices. It seemed that they were doing a vocal exercise, and since there were more than thirty of them, their voices reverberated throughout the corridor.

He quietly opened the door and entered. The juniors were looking towards the window. He greeted Daemyung, who noticed him coming in, with his eyes, before sitting down in a corner.

“You have to make a sound as though you are pulling out all the air you breathed in. You might feel dizzy, so watch out for that.”

The juniors all voiced out upon Daemyung’s instructions. Daemyung looked quite good as an instructor. Maru flipped the pages of the script so that he didn’t interrupt them. Just when he was looking at the first page, a shadow loomed over him.

“Should I tell them that you’re here?”

“Forget it. That’s not why I’m here. But their focus is pretty good. Not even one of them turned around even though the door was quite loud.”

“That’s because they suffered enough of instructor Miso’s punishments. They would have to run laps around the field if they lost focus after all.”

“That’s true. How are the 2nd years faring?”

“Ever since they heard that skill will decide who will go up on stage, they’ve been practicing like mad. They are putting even more effort in than last year. Dowook seemed to want to do it as well.”

“That’s why this country will never abandon competitive studies. It’s effective. So, when are you going to decide on roles?”

“I’m talking to the instructor about it right now.”

“Don’t you need to decide soon? It’ll be April next week.”

“We will. She seems to be picking some people as well in her mind. She’ll probably tell me soon.”

“How do you see it? Does anyone catch your mind?”

“I’m torn because everyone’s good.”

“What a happy worry you have there. You are going to do the read-through today, right?”

“Yeah.”

“May I add some input after I listen to it?”

“Of course.”

Just then, there was a knock on the door. Maru thought that he was mistaken and looked at the door for confirmation when he heard the knock again.

“I’ll go get the door.”

Maru stood up before walking towards the door. He waved his hand at the first year students who glanced his way before opening the door.

“Ah, seonbae-nim.”

Sora was standing outside. It wasn’t just her. The members of the film production club were there as well.

“What brings you here?”

“The script is done.”

Sora carefully took out the script from her bag. Her attitude had slightly changed from last week, when she boldly put the synopsis in his face.

“You could’ve texted me though.”

“There’s something else I need to talk about as well.”

“Something else?”

Sora fell silent and looked at Ando standing next to him. Ando coughed before stepping up.

“We want to try creating a movie with the acting club. We wanted to talk to you guys about it, and that’s why we’re here.”

## **Chapter 523**

Although their visit was rather sudden, from their serious expressions, it seemed that they had resolved their internal problems.

“You came to our club last time, seonbae-nim, so I felt like we should be the ones visiting this time. Are you busy right now? If you are, we’ll come back another time. It won’t be that long, so I hope you can hear us out at least.”

Saying that with a foolish laugh, Sora turned around to look at Ando behind her. Ando also nodded.

“I’m not really busy, so it’s fine. Also, we need to get this resolved quickly. The film festival isn’t that far away. But I just heard that you wanted to create a movie with the acting club?”

“Yes.”

“Then wait a bit. I should bring the right person as well.”

Maru called Daemyung over. Daemyung came to the entrance wondering what it was about.

“Daemyung, this is the film production club. Film production club, this is Daemyung, the president of the acting club.”

Maru introduced both parties as the middle man. Ando, the president of the film production club, stepped forward as their representative and greeted Daemyung.

“The film production has something to say to us, are you okay with that?”

Maru waited for Daemyung to answer. Since the film production club expressed their intention to work together with the acting club, Daemyung’s opinion was going to matter a lot.

“For now, come inside. It’ll be a bit noisy though since we’re practicing.”

Daemyung led the film production club inside. The film production club was startled when they heard the loud voices resounding in the large venue. When Daemyung left, Dowook was naturally put in charge of everyone. Although he didn’t like stepping up in front of others, Dowook did what was necessary if the circumstances pushed him to. Maru glanced at Dowook before sitting down in front of the acting club.

Daemyung brought some drinks and handed them out to the film production club members.

“I get the general gist of it, but I don’t know the details. I hope you can tell me the reason why you’re here.”

Daemyung started first. The film production club looked at Ando, and Ando spoke,

“The reason we’re here is to ask you guys, the acting club, if you can work with us.”

“Work with you?”

“Yes. We are going to make a film, and we need people other than just the lead character. Characters that just sit down in class, the chatters, the passersby. Ever since we started trying to add details to each situation, we realized that we need quite a lot of people. That’s why we thought about borrowing the acting club’s power.”

“It’s a collaboration!” Sora said in excitement as she clenched her fists.

“I get what you mean, but this isn’t something I can decide on by myself. There’s an instructor for the acting club, so we operate on a set schedule. It’s not that we don’t have time, but I can’t really make that decision.”

“I think that this is a good opportunity for the acting club as well. It’s an opportunity to practice acting.”

The talker had switched to Sora for some time. Maru looked at Ando. He didn’t look uneasy like he did before. It seemed that he thought it was natural for her to be the one talking.

“We are doing our own practice,” said Daemyung softly, but firmly.

Ooh, Maru was a little impressed. From the way things were going now, it seemed that his intervention wasn’t necessary here. Daemyung was splendidly fulfilling his role as the president.

“However, I get that it’s not a bad opportunity, can you wait a bit?”

Daemyung stood up while taking out his phone. After seeing him leave through the door, Maru spoke,

“Can I have a look at the script now?”

“Yes!”

Sora handed him the script with both of her hands. The tentative title was still 'Friend'. Below that said 'Planned by Kang Sora' and then 'Produced by Film Production Club' below it. There were also the words 'To Mr. Han Maru' in bold letters. He wondered where she found out about something like this.

He smiled and flipped over a page.

-Scene 1.

The Alarm rings and Minho wakes up. Minho, having woken up, looks around for a while before turning off his phone alarm. Then he eats breakfast. His parents aren't here. They have gone to work. He feels a little sad about that, but he also thinks that it was good that they weren't here.

Minho: (sighs).

He eats breakfast. He then takes his bag and goes to school. He sees a black plastic bag on the ground on his way to the school. Minho feels sad since he feels like he's similar to the plastic bag. He stares at the plastic bag for quite a while before continuing to walk. He sees the school. Minho is afraid of going to school. However, he couldn't not go in, so he hesitates around the school gates before going in.

Maru nodded while looking through it. When he turned about three pages, he peeked forward, and the gazes that looked at him were pretty intense. Sora especially was acting uneasy. Please tell me what you think of it quickly - her eyes were saying those words.

Since it was a short film, the script wasn't that long. After reading the last page, Maru closed the script. The moment Sora asked how it was, Daemyung opened the door and came back inside. Maru gestured to them to wait for a little before looking at Daemyung.

"You called senior Miso, didn't you?"

"Yeah, we would have to split practice to do it after all."

Daemyung sat down.

"I called the instructor for our club to ask if we can help the film production club with creating the movie. To tell you the conclusion, we can."

"Really?"

Sora rolled her feet on the ground and shouted yes. At the same time, she grabbed Daemyung's hand and thanked him.

Maru coughed in a small voice and tapped Daemyung's arm. Jiyeon was staring this way. Daemyung was visibly startled and flicked Sora's hands away. While he overreacted a little, Sora didn't seem to mind.

"Then you're helping us, right?"

"Y-yeah. We will. I talked to the instructor about it, and she said that acting in front of a camera is just as helpful as acting on a stage. However, you must clearly tell us the number you need as well as the schedule. If you can't keep that up, we will make it as though we never had this conversation."

"I will definitely keep that promise."

“And one more thing. Does the film production club have a camera?”

“Yes! The graduate from our club came today and told us that we can use his until we hand in the film for the film festival. It’s a Sony 6mm camera from 2003. It’s a model that can record and show a live feed of it through a laptop at the same time. We tested it, and the quality is really good.”

Sora visibly brightened when she talked about the equipment. Maru just shrugged when Sora looked at him.

“I hope the acting club can borrow that camera a little.”

“Borrow the camera?”

“Yeah. Of course, only when it’s not being used for shooting the film. If you aren’t going to use it immediately, we want to use it first tomorrow. Can we?”

“That’s also one of the conditions right?”

“Yeah.”

Sora looked at Ando. This time, Ando took out his phone and walked outside. Since they couldn’t just lend other people expensive equipment that wasn’t even theirs, they needed to get permission for it.

“Did senior Miso tell you about the camera as well?”

Maru had asked. Daemyung shook his head.

“No, that was my idea. We are lending people, right? Even if the film does well and wins a prize, the only thing we get out of it is that ‘we had a good experience’, so I felt it was somewhat lacking. That’s why I talked about the camera. It will definitely be helpful if we can shoot our own acting and have a look at it ourselves. While it’s important for others to point things out, I heard that watching your own acting and analyzing it is a great way to improve.”

Also, it’s expensive to rent - Daemyung lowered his voice when he added those words.

“That’s pretty good.”

Maru raised his thumb. As both parties were students, they couldn’t exactly pay hourly wages for each person, so borrowing a high-quality camera was definitely not a bad idea. It could also give the acting club a fresh shock if they could watch their own acting through the screen. The practice rooms for actors weren’t filled with mirrors for nothing. To see and feel and improve, actors needed to be able to see their own acting in the perspective of a third person. In that sense, a camera was a splendid tool.

“Uhm, how was the script?” asked Sora.

“Ah, the script. For now, it looks ok since it has all the basics down. You managed to stick to the synopsis well huh.”

“Then...”

“For now, I will help you out regardless of whether the rest of the acting club helps out or not. You put in so much effort, so it’d be funny to say no at this point.”

“You mean it right? That’s good. I was actually really worried that you’ll refuse. When I was doing it, I was really fired up. I worked with the mindset that I will have you on my stage. Anyway, you liked the script, right?”

Hearing that question, Maru immediately shook his head.

“No. I just checked the bare minimum requirements for the shoot as well as your will. That doesn’t mean I like the script. There are a lot of things that need to be fixed. It’s bothering me and I’m not even an expert.”

“What? Really? I was confident though.”

“Regarding scripts, this guy knows better than me, so can I show it to him?”

Maru picked up the script and handed it to Daemyung. Daemyung looked at Sora.

“May I?”

“Ah, yes. You can read it, but....”

Sora clearly looked suspicious. Maru inwardly laughed. She wouldn’t be making such an expression if she knew who the person reading her script was studying under. Gwak Joon, the author of a bestselling novel with experience in writing a scenario for a full-length movie, as well as writer Bae Chulho, who wrote the historical drama Apgu, which got a peak viewing rate of over 35% on RBS. Daemyung met those two frequently and was widening his horizons. Maru told Daemyung that he wanted to read Daemyung’s autobiography-like novel several times, but Daemyung clearly told him that he had no intentions of showing anyone until it was completed. Daemyung also told him that it was ultimately going to become a script for a play based on a novel.

Daemyung silently read through the script. His round eyes turned sharp for just this duration.

As soon as he flipped over the first page, Daemyung spoke,

“First up, I think you have the wrong understanding of scenes.”

“I’m wrong?”

Sora tilted her head.

Daemyung then continued to read through the script without a word. Silence flowed for a while. The only sound they could hear was the sound of rustling paper as well as the sounds of exercise coming from the first year students of the acting club.

After reading the last page, Daemyung came back to the first page and spoke,

“Hm, fundamentally, you must state which location or venue the scene is happening in. The script is for the reader to clearly understand what’s happening, instead of being left up to deduction. For example, scene 1 should be set in Minho’s room right? And the time should be morning.”

“Yes.”



"If the director is also the writer and the actor, it doesn't really matter if only he or she can understand it, but many of us here are going to use this script to do the shoot, right? If that's the case you must be clear about the details. The emotional states can be left up to interpretation, but everything else should be clear and objectively understandable."

"...Yes."

Maru saw Sora pull her chair towards Daemyung. Daemyung didn't seem to have noticed since he was focused on the script.

"Also, I don't really want to say anything about your writing style, but I think you can write things a little more comfortably. Use short and compact sentences. The longer the sentences are, the more prone to misunderstandings they will be. Oh, about scenes, right? A scene is an event that occurs in just one place and one time. Here, when Minho wakes up and leaves the house, this should be scene 2. Then there are the directions. A script is supposed to be a picture. It's just a text version of the images that the camera will eventually take. In other words, the script should allow the reader to easily picture the scene in their mind. Writing 'his parents aren't here' and 'he feels sad' on the script like this... feels like the writer is lacking skills since they're replacing everything with explanations, and relying on the actor for everything. Honestly speaking, a script like this isn't necessary. This is nothing more than storytelling. The script should be something that should be close to the finished movie. That's the reason for its existence."

After saying those words, Daemyung blinked once before raising his head. Then he smiled awkwardly. Having finished talking about the script, Daemyung became the round man he usually was.

"O-of course, I'm not saying that what I said until now is entirely correct. You don't need to take it to heart. I mean it. I don't know anything. I'm just talking about some things I picked up here and there."

Just as he was about to put down the script after scratching his head, Sora grabbed his hand. Daemyung weakly screamed.

"Seonbae-nim. Can you teach me about writing?" Sora asked.

Maru laughed while covering his mouth, but then felt something prickle him so he turned his head around. Jiyeon was looking at this place with a plain gaze. There were no fluctuations in her emotions, so it felt even scarier.

He immediately forced Daemyung and Sora apart. It would be incredibly annoying if they caused her to misunderstand or something after all. Just then, Ando returned to the hall. From the smile on his face, it seemed that the talk went well.

"He told us that we can use it to our heart's content, and wouldn't mind even if it broke."

That was very nice. Maru looked at Daemyung. Daemyung nodded.

"Then let's talk a little more about what we're going to do with this thing, shall we?" said Maru as he pointed at the script.

## **Chapter 524**

"If I connect the line here and press record..."

When Sora moved back, the laptop screen switched. It was showing a live feed of the camera. Aram stood in front of the camera in curiosity.

“Can you see me?”

“Yep.”

Maru pressed the record button which was on the lower left of the video editing program. The recording began and a window popped up that said it was recording. They recorded for about a minute before playing back the video.

“Oh! It’s me.”

It played back everything without skipping from when Aram waved her hand to when Daemyung spoke.

“But the sound is echoing.”

“Don’t worry about that. The graduate seonbae gave us this.”

Sora connected a directional microphone covered with soft fur at the top of the camera. It seemed that she had learned how to use the camera properly from that person.

“Everyone. Walk in front of the camera and say something.”

The juniors walked past the camera one by one. The ones that liked to stand on stage showed some things off, while the others just awkwardly said their names before walking past.

Maru tried playing back the recorded footage. The sound of the wind, the background echoing noise, as well as the voices of the people talking behind the camera were mostly removed. The microphone was pretty good.

“He also gave us this,” said Sora as she opened a long bag that she brought.

Inside were some lines and a boom arm.

“Then we’ll leave for now. Do you guys have practice tomorrow too?” asked Ando.

“We do. We’re going to finish at one since it’s Sunday,” Daemyung replied.

“We’ll be here around 12. We do want to watch your practice as well. Of course, that’s if you guys are okay with it. Will that be okay?”

“An audience is always welcome. Having people around helps during practice as well.”

The film production club left the hall. After the messy atmosphere died down, the acting club started a read-through. Since they hadn’t decided on roles yet, they split into three groups of ten to practice.

“How was the script? Not from a technical perspective, just the content,” Maru asked.

After thinking about it, Daemyung replied,

“It does feel rather common, but it wasn’t that bad.”

“I guess it’s not that uncommon.”

“She isn’t using someone else’s work and everything is coming from her head though. I think that’s pretty amazing. Also, from what I saw today, they all seemed eager to do it.”

Maru leaned against the wall. Daemyung stood next to him. Maru watched his juniors do the read-through for a while before speaking,

“They weren’t that close when I saw them just a while ago, but they looked like they were on really close terms today. Even Ando, who said that he had no intentions of shooting any film, became eager to do it.”

“Looks like that Sora girl managed to persuade him well. She was full of energy.”

“If there’s a person like that nearby. It’s one of two things. Either it’s really exhausting, or you become crazy with that person.”

“He didn’t look crazy though.”

Daemyung burst out into a small laughter.

“Maru, has it been decided that the main character will be you?”

“Well, I’m not sure. They just said that they wanted to scout me, but I don’t think I’ve heard them say that I’ll be the main character. Also, it doesn’t matter if I’m the main character or not. What’s important is that I get to talk to the director. I should get to talk to her a lot when we film it. Since neither of us is knowledgeable, I hope I can gain something from this.”

“You are a regular character in a drama and yet you say that you don’t know anything. What does that make me?”

“I’m just saying. Rather than that, if they come back tomorrow with the characters sorted out, we’ll have to pick out actors for those roles from our club, right? You’ll have to talk to the film production club about it, but from the way I see it, I think they’re going to listen to your opinions, no?”

“Well, I’ll have to ask them tomorrow. Since holding an audition does require extra time and effort on their part, I do have to tell them that it might be even more tiring.”

“Don’t you have any thoughts about doing it?”

“I have my hands full just preparing my script and studying. These days, the writer gives me a lot of homework. He told me to analyze the script for the movie Chinatown, and it’s so hard.”

Daemyung stood up.

“Group 1, stand in front of the camera! After we shoot group 1’s read-through, group 2 and group 3 will come up afterwards. Let’s have a monitoring time where we tell each other their good points and bad points. I’m also going to show this to instructor Miso, so watch out for your pronunciation. You know that this isn’t reading lines from a textbook, right?”

Daemyung clapped and started moving.

\* \* \*

He left his house after eating a slice of apple and a handful of cereal with milk. His mother worried about him, asking him if that was enough. Maru said that he was okay. Since he was controlling his weight, he was avoiding oily and salty foods as much as possible. It wasn't that he had gained weight or something. He thought that he had a suitable weight, but he decided to try this out as a test. He currently weighed 68 kilograms. He was planning to bring it down to 63 kilograms, and then go back again.

He smelled something very tempting from the toast shop. He stared for a while before walking to the school. Intentionally losing weight definitely wasn't easy.

'No wonder girls always talk about going on a diet.'

It was like a life-long homework. Before he went inside the school, he visited the supermarket to buy some drinks and snacks. There were over thirty high school students with good appetites. The sheer money required for eating was definitely a little heavy for a student to bear. This was why Maru bought the snacks most of the time. Daemyung told him that he'd pay him later, but how much pocket money would a student get? Oh, he did receive some from Dowook, since he was pretty well-off.

Sunday morning. Although it was quiet on the 1st to 4th floors, the 5th floor was noisy. He could hear the voices of his club members through the closed door to the hall. Maru quietly opened the door and went inside. He saw the club members doing some warmups.

"Hello!"

Maru waved his hand when he heard the shout. He put down the food he brought before doing some warmups as well. Recently, the baseball club no longer used the hall on the 5th floor. He didn't know what happened, but he was thankful since it meant that the acting club could use it without worrying.

"Line up. Let's do a read-through. We're going to do it standing up today. Also, you can look at the script if you want, but try to memorize as much as possible."

The juniors, who were divided into three groups, started going over the lines. The thirty of them showed different levels of skill. There were some that seemed to have memorized the lines already and said everything from memory, and some that memorized most of it and just looked at it from time to time. Memorizing lines was the basics of acting. Since that was just pure repetitive labor, more time investment meant more memorization, and it showed. There were seven people who had memorized the entire thing completely, and there were ten who couldn't take their eyes off the script. Although it was a short period of time, there were clear differences showing up among the kids already.

Maru also looked at the script while leaning against the wall. Although he wasn't participating, he wanted to get the basics down at least. He thought about the emotions of the characters as he went through the lines and said them out loud.

There was a method that he took great interest in lately, the 'internalization of the character'. It was a way of acting after bringing the traits of the character being acted inside of the actor. It was slightly different from method acting.

Method acting was an act of becoming the character itself. In order to sympathize and feel the same emotions as the fictional character, the actor would call out a similar experience or emotion he or she had in the past in order to try and understand the character as much as possible. If they didn't have such

experiences or emotions, they would expose themselves to similar situations in order to do that. As a result, the actor would perfectly imitate the character and taking a step further, would become that character.

Internalization was a bit different. It was the same in the regard that it requires sharing the experiences, emotions, and traits of the character, but in this case, the actor would not throw him or herself into the character. Instead, the character would be brought inside the actor.

Maybe these two were just two different stages in acting, or they might be two different formats altogether. Discussing which one was better was meaningless, it was much wiser to think about which method fit the actor more.

Maru was thinking about how to efficiently use his two 'selves' inside him.

The self that fulfilled the acting instinct tended to lean towards becoming the character. That self would reach a stage where he forgot about himself to reach a state of selflessness in order to imitate the character to the limits. If it was not possible to imitate and the expressivity of acting was immature, that self would then burst out all the emotions, forgetting that he was acting and would throw everything out there. The act he did with Joohyun was similar to this. Since he couldn't dig deeper into a character who became a murderer at a young age, he instantly clashed a bunch of emotions together. Putting it simply, he was relying on Joohyun.

Unlike that, the self that watched everything from a step behind chose not to become the character itself, but to bring the character into him. He tried to understand the traits of that character and analyze them to act out the movements that the character is most likely to take in certain situations. It was clearly different from becoming the character itself. When he looked into it, he found that this was a more traditional way of acting. What he did in *Twilight Struggles* was similar to this. He dug into the character, but 'Han Maru' was at the core of that character.

It did not change the fact that both of them required some basic studying. There wasn't any act that could 'just be done'. Acting required expressing what an actor knew, or felt before after all.

"Uhm, seonbae-nim."

Maru raised his head when he heard a voice call out to him. There was a junior standing in front of him. He had fallen into contemplation while staring at the script without even realizing that someone was in front of him. That junior laughed foolishly before saying that they should eat some snacks. Looks like it was break time. He had a look at the clock. The hour hand was on 12.

'I was completely out of it, huh.'

He walked over to where everyone else was sitting.

"Sit over here."

Daemyung made some room for him. Maru sat in that gap. He saw a first year junior smile awkwardly at him from next to him. He had never talked to this person before.

Maru looked at the thirty-two people sitting in a circle. He realized that he had never talked to the first year students. During weekdays when he didn't have a shoot, he was always making props in the corner,

and during weekends, there weren't any opportunities to talk to them properly since he had shoots. It would be great if the senior-junior relationships were good, but he didn't feel the need to force himself to try and get close to them, so he didn't talk to them. Due to this, it seemed that a lot of juniors were awkward with him here.

'Even I would be awkward if I was in their shoes.'

He was always by himself, and whenever he talked, he was talking to the instructor, so there was no way the distance between them could shrink. Maru picked up some snacks and gave them to the junior sitting next to him, and he flinched when he saw that junior lower his head as he received those snacks with both of his hands. Was he that difficult to deal with?

Fortunately, they were on close terms with the other seniors. Bangjoo seemed to be called 'hyung-nim' among the first year boys. For reference, the 'big hyung-nim' was Dowook. For some reason, this felt like a mafia organization.

This should be fine. Since he decided to put some distance, this was suitable. It wasn't like he was going to meet them a lot either.

"Who's going to be the main character for the film?"

One of the juniors asked. Since the acting club didn't have any of those strict relationships between seniors and juniors, none of them held back from speaking.

"The film production club will be here in just a bit. We're going to talk about it then. Though, it'll probably be Maru."

"Ah, Maru seonbae-nim, huh."

Maru looked at the eyes that all looked at him. Some of them had the 'I see' eyes, while others questioned 'why'. Miso declared that she would give her full support as long as they did well. They were probably all greedy for results. Maru in fact welcomed the challenging eyes. It would be no fun if he just snapped their spirits just because he was the senior.

"They'll probably hold something like an audition, right?"

Another junior asked. His face was even smaller than Aram's. Oh, how handsome. Maru realized once again that he had zero interest in the new members this year.

"Looks like everyone wants to do it."

They all replied 'yes' as though they were waiting for that line. Daemyung seemed a little surprised by their boldness.

"I'm asking just in case, but who wants to be the main character here?"

An actor always had to be bold - Miso said this all the time, and the juniors all kept those words close. Maru looked at the boys that raised their hands immediately. Out of the seventeen boys here, more than half - eleven of them - raised their hand. A lot of girls also raised their hands as well. Unfortunately though, the main character for this play was a boy. The girls probably raised their hands since they didn't know about the script, but in any case, they were really eager to do it.

“This was unexpected.”

Although he said those words, Daemyung was smiling in satisfaction. Maru grinned at some of the juniors that looked at him before eating some snacks. He wasn't overly eager to do this role, but since this was a great opportunity to create a film on equal footing as the director, he did not plan to concede so easily. Of course, if there was someone good, he would gladly hand it over. Having not enough skill in this field of work meant being pushed to a supporting role, or even a minor role.

“Han Maru, are you sure you can keep that main character role?” Dowook giggled as he said those words.

Maru shrugged and looked at the first year students sitting on the other side. There was a boy that was staring holes into him. He didn't know the boy's name. He looked like he wanted to duel fair and square or something, so Maru felt quite perplexed.

“Daemyung.”

“Yeah?”

“What's that guy's name?”

“Him?”

Daemyung shortly uttered 'ah' before speaking,

“Ahn Chihwan. He's good looking isn't he?”

“Ah, Chihwan, huh.”

“You should learn their names at least.”

“Yeah. I really should.”

“But Chihwan's really staring at you. Maybe he considers you a rival?”

“Hey, I already lost to him in the appearance area. If he's good at acting as well, I'm gonna be sad.”

“There you go, joking again.”

Maru looked at Chihwan. When he met eyes, that boy became startled before bowing. He was very tall and good looking, but his actions were pretty cute. He was the type that would be popular with the girls.

‘He said he wants to play the main character too, huh.’

Maru nodded and looked away.

## **Chapter 525**

Ahn Chihwan was mesmerized by instructor Miso at first glance. Her unstoppable actions and crisp voice, as well as the confidence she exuded whenever she did something. She was someone who he thought of as a cool woman, and he respected her a lot. Of course, it wasn't that he started liking her as a member of the opposite sex. He just liked her as a person. Actually, their age gap was too wide.

Chihwan wanted to catch Miso's eyes. It wasn't only because she said that she would give her full support to those that proved their skills to her, he also wanted to hear her compliment him in person. There was nothing better than being acknowledged by the people you acknowledged after all.

'Maru-seonbae.'

It wasn't that Chihwan was confident in his acting. However, he knew that acting was a form of art, and therefore, vague without clear measures of performance. That was why he thought that he had the potential. Evaluating acting had to be very subjective because of its nature. Since there were no clear answers like mathematics or something, he should be able to win against a senior who started acting much earlier than him.

Chihwan bowed towards Maru-seonbae, who he met eyes with. It had nearly been a month since he entered the acting club, and he had never seen Maru talking to anyone in the first year. He would always be reading a script from far away or be making some props or sets. It would be understandable if he was some peculiar person, but he also looked like a decent person from how the 2nd year seniors and 3rd year seniors talked to him. The food they were eating now was also brought by him.

"Uhm, aren't you doing the play with us, Maru-seonbae?"

Chihwan asked. Maru was in a vague position among the 1st year students. He didn't act like a senior, nor did he completely ignore them. He came to practice when it wasn't the weekend, but he did not practice with them with the intention to go up to the stage together.

He was the only staff member in this club. Chihwan was curious. Why did someone capable enough to show up on TV volunteer to be a staff member? From how he came to practice, it didn't look like he didn't have the time either.

"I am doing the play," said Maru. Chihwan couldn't understand him.

"That and that. And that thing over there."

Maru pointed at the stage props piled on one side of the hall. They were items created by Maru when the acting club gathered to practice.

"I'm not participating in the play as an actor, but 'doing the play', as you put it, is something I'm doing."

"But isn't acting much better?"

"There are plenty of people who want to be actors, so why would I? You and I aren't that different, and since I'm saying this, I'll make this clear. To me, the acting club is second on my priority list. Right now, I'm showing up regularly since I don't have a busy schedule, but I don't know when I'll become busy again. It'll be nonsensical for me to want to be an actor in such a situation."

Chihwan nodded. He was right. It would be a huge problem if he couldn't perform when he was an actor.

"Why don't you talk to us, Maru-seonbae?"

A girl asked. She was Park Hayeon. Last week, the first year students had a get-together by themselves, and she was the moodmaker back then. Chihwan perked up his ears. He was curious about that as well.



"It's not that I'm trying not to talk to you. Like I said, I'm someone who'll rarely show up to the club if I become busy. I don't plan to act like a senior, nor expect the treatment of one, so most of the time, I just end up observing. Daemyung and Dowook are leading you guys perfectly well, so there's no need for me to interfere with that either."

"Oh, I see. It would've been great if you talked to us though. I thought you hated us first years."

"There's nothing to hate, nor anything to like. We don't know anything about each other after all, and I don't have a huge interest either. I'm looking at you just like you are looking at me. There's no need to act friendly just because I'm your senior, right? There's no law stating that a junior must respect their senior."

True - Chihwan thought as he sipped on his drink. Now that he heard all that, he thought that Maru was pretty reasonable. He originally thought that this senior was someone who was detached from the rest, but it seemed that he might get along with him.

"But it would be great if we can get close to you."

"If you want to, then you can try. I'll always be over there. If you want to become friends with me, then come to me and talk to me. I'll judge whether you can be a friend of mine after a small interview."

After smiling, Maru's eyes swept across the first years before he started speaking,

"For now, this is strictly my personal opinion, so don't take it to heart. I do not think that you need to become close to someone just because they're in the same social circle as you. Becoming friends is something very personal. While I'm willing to help you and care for you as your senior, don't expect any friendship from me. Of course, I will treat you nicely if you treat me nicely too."

"Then I guess we should talk to you if we want to become close to you, right?"

"Usually, I prepare various talking subjects before I talk to someone who I want to become friends with, and say that 'we should be friends' to those that I need to become close to."

Chihwan nodded subconsciously when he heard those words. He agreed with that statement. The more he listened to Maru, the more he liked Maru. He thought that Maru was a senior who liked quietness, but he was completely off the mark.

Park Hayeon nodded in understanding with a smile. When there was a short silence, Chihwan thought that this was an opportunity and asked,

"Then what do you do usually, seonbae-nim?"

Chihwan became curious about this person named Maru. The way he thought was similar to him.

"Me? Usually, I read books at home."

"What kind of books do you read?"

"Anything that I can get my hands on. Oh, except self-improvement books."

"Do you like sports?"

"I don't really do ball sports. I mostly do boxing."

"What's your favorite food?"

"I'm not picky with food, but I like healthy foods. Natural mushrooms, eels, and even octopuses are good too."

"I like eels too. Though not octopuses. What made you want to become an actor?"

"To earn money. But hey, why does this feel like we're conducting a hearing here?"

"It was you who said that we should talk if we want to become close to you. To talk to you, we need to have something in common, and to find that out, questions are the best way. I'm going to become close to you, seonbae."

"I don't like men though."

"Think of it as a friendship between men. Oh, can I ask you one more thing?"

"Go ahead. I'll answer you as long as you don't ask for something like my bank password."

"This is my first time learning acting, okay? When I thought about it, I realized that I can only evaluate myself properly if I compare myself to someone else. It's not that there's a checklist or something, right?"

"You're right."

"With that being the case, uh, I might sound a little rude, but may I ask anyway?"

"I think you're being plenty rude already, so go ahead. The others seem to want to know as well."

Chihwan felt everyone looking at him as he spoke,

"I can be better than you at acting, right?"

"Sure. Among the thirty-two people here, there might be people that are even better than me. I believe that talent is more important than effort or being passionate."

"Then since I'm being rude, can I ask you another question?"

"You don't have to ask for my permission, just ask. It doesn't look like anyone else has a question anyway."

Maru changed his posture and looked like he was a bit interested. Chihwan nodded and spoke,

"I heard that the film production club is coming today. Has it been decided that the main character is going to be you?"

"No, nothing's set in stone. Like I said before, I was only asked to participate before."

"Then if the film production club states you as the main character, that means that we don't have any opportunities, right?"

Chihwan saw that some of his colleagues' eyes had changed. Everyone probably wanted that role.

“Do you want to do it?”

Maru asked.

Was there a need to think about it? Chiwan replied yes.

“Alright, then. I’ll tell the film production club that we should hold an audition. I’ll try to persuade them even if they want me as the main character. I’ll tell them to decide after seeing everyone’s acting.”

“Really?”

“It’s not even that hard, so yes. But you guys will be going home late if that happens, is everyone okay with that?”

Everyone said that they were okay with it. Even the people that didn’t seem to have any interest in becoming the main character seemed to become greedy now that Maru said all that.

Knock knock - there was a knock on the door.

‘They came at the perfect time.’

The door slowly opened and the people from the film production club came in. When the bold girl that always walked at the front came in, she gave Maru a pile of paper. It seemed to be a script.

Maru and Daemyung quietly talked to the film production club. Words like ‘why’ could be heard every now and then. After around ten minutes, a rather skinny man stood in front of the acting club.

“I am Koo Ando from the film production club. Uhm, we were originally going to take people based on recommendation, but we discussed holding an audition to pick people out. That’s why we’re going to hold an audition right now. Also, bear this in mind, but neither I nor anyone else in my club is an expert in acting, so we are only going to base our judgement on our feelings. We don’t know anything about acting.”

Ando smiled awkwardly before stepping back.

The camera was then set up. The film production club sat in front of the laptop connected to the camera. They all looked rather embarrassed. Oh, the first year girl that he thought was the oldest among them was glaring at the acting club with her arms crossed. He overheard her name before - Kang Sora. She was apparently the director of this film.

“We’ll start with the main character. The method is simple. We’ve brought five copies of the script. For now, five of you, please come forward if you want to try out for the main character.”

It was better to take the beating first, so Chihwan went forward. When he did, the others did so as well. After hearing that the main character was a boy, the girls had to watch from the side.

“Please take a copy, each of you.”

Chihwan picked up the script. It was much thinner than the script for the play.

“Don’t read it yet. We’re going to make it a fair competition,” said Sora as she walked forward.

“Is there anyone else who wishes to apply for the audition?”

Hearing her words, all of the first year boys from the acting club raised their hands. The only ones that were not were Bangjoo and Dowook.

"If you don't plan to participate, please sit over there," said Sora as she pointed at the first year girls.

"Just one was bothersome enough already. Two sounds like a total pain in the ass."

"I want to focus on the play as well."

Dowook yawned before sitting next to the girls. Bangjoo sat next to him.

"Then I'll take it that the rest of you are all taking the audition, so please step outside for now."

Sora proceeded with the audition as though she had prepared for this beforehand. As Chihwan had a script in his hand, he remained behind. The four others with the script did the same.

"You have ten minutes to read through the script. After that, you will act the scene you're most confident with. I won't mind overlaps between the participants. It will be fairer if we look at you one by one, but that takes too much time. Also, Daemyung-seonbae. Please watch it with us and give us some opinions."

Daemyung, who was watching from the side, sat in front of the laptop.

"And I hope everyone here can give some judgement as well. When they start acting, please write down your impressions of them. You can write anything you like, whether it be long or short."

Ripping out pages from her notebook, Sora handed out pieces of paper to the two seniors, Dowook and Bangjoo, as well as the girls. She was really clear-cut when it came to work. Chihwan was inwardly impressed. As the acting club always carried writing equipment with them in order to edit scripts, there shouldn't be a problem with writing their impressions down.

"Ahn Chihwan, you won't make it if you do it awkwardly."

"Seongsoo, you nervous now?"

"Why is Sijoon here? He doesn't suit the role of the main character!"

The girls giggled and got ready to write. Chihwan felt his grasp of the script tightening. He suddenly felt nervous.

"Then I'll give you 10, no, 15 minutes starting now. Please read through the script."

As soon as he heard Sora's voice, Chihwan opened the script. It was written a bit like a script for a play. What was different was that it was split into even smaller scenes. It didn't seem like there would be any problems with understanding it.

"You don't need to memorize it. You can read it while you act, so please find the scene that you're most comfortable with. The seonbae said before, but we don't know that much about acting. That's why we are going to go with the person that we feel is the best. Oh! You need to do actions as well. Lastly, we are going to look at your appearance too."

Hearing that, Chihwan raised his head.

“Appearances counts towards the score?”

“Well, it is a story about being bullied.”

“Then am I not at a disadvantage?”

He had never heard that he was ugly wherever he went. He was also far from the ‘being bullied’ type according to his appearance. While this might seem cocky of him, it was an important problem to Chihwan. It would be rather frustrating if he didn’t get the role because he didn’t look the part.

“Try doing it for now. It’s the air around you that matters.”

Chihwan nodded.

That’s right, I’ll show them what I got.

## **Chapter 526**

15 minutes. It was a short amount of time, but still long enough to finish reading the script. Since she said that they didn’t have to memorize it, rather than reading through all of it, it was more important to understand the general context. This was his first time acting for something in front of everyone here. Rather than acting skills, Chihwan thought that it would be the setting of the environment that would decide the audition.

‘The main character’s name is Minho. There’s no mention of his looks.’

Since the script wasn’t that difficult to read, he managed to read the entire thing in just ten minutes. Personally, the main character had a personality he really hated. Abandoning someone that was once his friend? But it wasn’t that he couldn’t understand him completely. There was a guy that didn’t talk much with the others when Chihwan was in middle school, and he did feel pity when he looked at that guy. Leading a solitary school life had to be very excruciating.

“Five minutes left,” said Sora.

Chihwan flipped the page back and looked at the middle part. This was the part where Minho reached out to the bullied friend and said that they should overcome it together. Chihwan really liked this part. It was clearly the moment in the play that was abundant with emotions. Rather than a scene where he was being bullied, a bright and cheerful scene would probably be better for the audition.

He uttered the words in the script out loud. The other students sitting next to him seemed to have decided on the scenes they wanted to do as they all started muttering their lines. He also imagined the situation inside his head and practiced some actions as well.

“Then let’s start. If anyone wants to come forward, please go ahead.”

Chihwan looked at the others for now. Being first was definitely going to be quite a burden here. While he was confident, he thought that he should improve himself after looking at how everyone else did it.

“Then let’s start from the left.”

Since there were no volunteers, Sora pointed to the left. His peer walked forward with an awkward expression on his face. Chihwan was sitting to the far right, so he was last. That wasn’t bad.

“Don’t be too nervous. We aren’t looking for perfection. If you can’t remember the lines, don’t panic and just look at the script.”

Daemyung told him to relax and take it slow. Chihwan felt himself becoming even more nervous when he heard those words. It finally felt real to him that he was acting in front of someone else.

“Please begin when you’re ready. Oh, tell us which scene you’re doing before you start.”

After saying those words, Sora looked at Chihwan’s peer who stood in front of her with a calm gaze. Chihwan felt as though he had a stomach ache. Just watching from the side was so nervewracking already, so how nervous would he be if he was the one standing there?

“I’m Kim Yoohwan. I’ll do scene 11.”

Yoohwan barely managed to speak and readied himself. Chihwan quickly flipped through the script to look at scene 11. It was the part that was slightly ahead of the scene he was planning to do.

Yoohwan, who wandered around in front of the camera for a while, took some deep breaths before starting his act.

“Uhm, if you’re going to eat by yourself, would you like to eat with me?”

As soon as he started talking, Chihwan clenched his eyes shut. He couldn’t bear to watch. The shaking voice, nervous hand gestures - it was an act that made the watcher feel ashamed. Chihwan clenched his teeth since he felt as though his whole body was being tickled. If he laughed now, he would be glared at by everyone else. He glanced next to him and saw that the others were also desperately trying to hold back their laughter. Some were twisting their bodies up. The girls were better. Since they were the judges, they were watching the act quite seriously. He felt rather ashamed when he saw that. He calmed his mind down and watched his friend’s acting to the end.

“That’s the end.”

“Okay, thank you for that. Next person, please come up.”

The friend that finished his act first sat down with an expression that looked like he was freed. Chihwan thought that he should’ve gone first if he knew that this was what it was going to be like. Chihwan licked his lips because of his impending turn. This was no time to laugh. He was going to be standing up there quite soon. He thought that he should try not to be nervous, but that made him more nervous instead.

“I am Kim Jinpil, and I’ll do scene six.”

It seemed that being second didn’t lessen the nervousness. Jinpil’s breathing was even shaking. As he looked at the script several times even during the same sentence, Daemyung told him to take deep breaths midway.

Chihwan couldn’t laugh this time. He realized that what he was seeing now, might very well be his own future. So acting wasn’t so easy. He focused and watched the acts of his friends. When he watched seriously, he no longer felt embarrassed. Instead, he was now filled with worries since he could catch the many immature parts that they showed. Younghoon, who went up third, was someone who was often complimented for his good pronunciation by the seniors during read-throughs, but right now,

everything he said sounded completely incomprehensible. Chihwan realized just how hard it was to read through a script in a short time and act based on it immediately.

Eventually, the person sitting next to him stood up. He somehow felt even more scared with no one beside him. The fellow that stepped forward took a deep breath before starting to act. He didn't think much about him usually since this guy was rather docile normally, but he was much better than the three that came before him. He was shaking and was stuttering from time to time as well, but this was the first time he felt that someone was looking at the camera while acting.

"Jinsoo, you're good," Daemyung said those words after the act ended.

Now there was even more pressure on him. Chihwan had another look at scene 14 before standing up.

"I am Ahn Chihwan, and I'd like to do scene 14."

He felt like he was going crazy. As soon as he stood in front of the camera, his thighs tensed up and his knees started shaking. The gazes of the people that looked at him from the other side of the laptop were scary, but he never realized that a camera lens, which wasn't even a living thing, could give off so much pressure. He felt his head go blank as he barely managed to utter his first line.

"It's hard going to school, isn't it? I find it hard too. Everyone looks down on me."

What was the next line again? During that instant of silence, Chihwan could feel gazes that looked at him and hear some whispers, which made his head go completely blank. He dazed out for a few seconds before hurriedly taking out his script. He finally realized why the people before him looked so nervous. They all probably felt like him. What was the next line again? Which page was it on? Wow, this is completely crazy.

"Uh, uh... so it's we should uh... we should help each other out. The winner is the one that lasts till the end!"

At the end of his sentence, he put too much strength into his words because he was so relieved that it was over. He didn't even remember what he said. He heard the judges thank him before he walked to the others and sat down next to them.

"How was I?" he asked.

"You looked like a total idiot," his friend replied.

"That was so damn hard."

"I couldn't remember a thing when I walked up there and saw the camera. I chose a short scene on purpose, but why couldn't I remember it?"

"I tried to go with the cool scene, but boy do I regret it now. I was thinking about how I should do my hand gestures, my gaze, and my walking style, but nothing came to my mind when I actually stood up there. It's driving me crazy."

Chihwan clicked his tongue. It wasn't even that hard. He just had to say a few lines and reach his hand out with a smile on his face, yet that was so hard to do. What was curious was that his nervousness disappeared when he realized that his act was over. Disappointment replaced his nervousness, and only

regret remained behind at the end. Even though he had a plan, he couldn't even start the 'p' of his plan before everything ended.

"The next group is coming in," his friend pointed at the door and said.

Chihwan shook his head as he saw the five people come in with confident expressions on their faces.

'Let's see how you do in fifteen minutes.'

The benefit of being the first to take the medicine was that he could enjoy the pains of the followers. Chihwan looked forward to what kind of acting his friends would put on show. It was definitely a comedy, to say the least.

\* \* \*

Ando glanced at Sora. She was writing things down with a serious expression. It seemed that none of them were to her liking.

'Well, they were all strange.'

In the first place, they shouldn't have had any expectations for them to do it properly after giving them only 15 minutes. Even he, who had zero experience in acting, knew that that was a difficult task. That was why he tried to look at the air they gave off rather than their acting skills as much as possible, but this audition made it hard to do even that. No, this couldn't even be called an audition anymore.

"Wait a moment."

This participant had a quick look at the script before continuing. A person with good memory should be able to memorize a couple of lines in a few minutes. But not even one of them finished their act without looking at the script. Was it that hard? Ando tried memorizing the lines after reading for ten minutes, and it was so easy. If he, who wasn't so smart, could do it, they should be able to do it as well.

'Looks like stage fright is really scary.'

Even though the judges were their peers, there were more than twenty people watching them. These boys probably rarely stepped up in front of the blackboard in class to present their answers, so it might be much more difficult than he imagined to act while everyone else paid attention to them. Ando imagined himself in front of the camera.

'Oof, that's not happening.'

Just imagining that was enough to make him become nervous. He could indirectly understand that not just anyone could become an actor.

"Seonbae, do you have anyone you've taken a liking to?" asked Sora in a small voice.

Ando slowly shook his head.

"They all look pretty much the same to me."

"I think so too. I'm watching them seriously, but none of them caught my eyes."

"We were going to pick them according to the feeling they gave off anyway."



“That’s true. What do we do if even Maru-seonbae is like that?”

“Well, I’m not sure, but he’s been acting for a long time, hasn’t he? He should be different.”

“I’m worried since he only has 15 minutes.”

“Ah, right. Then he might be similar.”

“For now, I picked these five. Since the main character is being bullied, I excluded the ones that looked cheerful. Also, the good-looking ones too. I might be biased, but from the way I see it, most of the people that are bullied are shy-looking or are quite small.”

Ando nodded. Ando never had bullying issues in any of his classes throughout his school life. He didn’t know what kind of people were bullied, but like what Sora said, they shouldn’t be the likable-looking type. Thinking about it rationally, the ones that were teased when he was young all looked a bit dazed. Bullying had to be something that started from a trivial reason like that.

“I was actually bullied because I was overweight. Also, I stuttered quite a bit. Though, I still do that now,” Daemyung confessed something unexpected.

Ando looked at Daemyung in surprise. Bullied? He didn’t look like someone who would experience that at all. In fact, with a body like his, Ando thought that he was the one who overpowered everyone else.

“You were being bullied, seonbae? You don’t look like that though. Since you are quite cute, you’re more like a mascot rather than someone who would be bullied,” said Sora.

Daemyung smiled awkwardly and said that the reason he was bullied was something very trivial. Someone who had experience was sitting right next to him? Daemyung must’ve heard that someone that had the image of ‘being bullied’ was not good-looking, right? Ando felt sorry.

“So having a big body is a reason for bullying as well, huh. This whole bullying thing, I guess it starts off because of the pettiest reasons. It’s childish, really childish.”

Sora looked a little uncomfortable as she said those words. Maybe something came to mind?

At that moment, the door opened and the last group entered. Ando looked at Maru, who stood fourth in line. Until now, it was hard for him to discern the level of acting of the participants since they were all generally the same. If even Maru was like that, they would really have to base their judgement on looks.

“You have 15 minutes to read the script, and please start acting starting from the person on the left,” said Sora.

Ando picked up his pen. The audition was over after these five. The film production club, after all its ups and downs, was going to start creating a film again. Ando looked at Sora, who looked resolute. Although she was quite rude, he had seen her true feelings during the past couple of days. Plus, the other club members also agreed to create a film together. When he decided that they should create a good movie and told Sora about it, Sora expressed her thanks with a face that looked like she was about to cry.

‘We were a little taken aback back then.’

They didn't know that she would show tears, so they had quite a hard time calming her down. Ando looked at Sora. He met eyes with her since she just happened to turn her head to see him as well, and Sora warned him saying that he should watch properly.

"Alright, alright," said Ando with a smile.

For some reason, he felt a bit hot.

## **Chapter 527**

Chihwan had almost given up at this point. There were seventeen first year boys in the club. Until now, he and thirteen of them had performed, and each one, including his own performance, was utterly cringe to look at. Just watching them made him feel embarrassed. It felt like there were thirteen antenna towers spreading embarrassment frequencies around him. At first, he could laugh about it, but after thirteen repetitions of that, he felt utterly embarrassed. He wanted someone to put on a good show to relax those expressions on the faces of the film production club. Well, from the way things were going now, such a thing didn't seem to be possible.

"Thank you for your performance."

The fellow that just finished scene 14 returned with a bitter smile on his face. Scene 14. It seemed that everyone thought that that scene was cool. Before that fellow, he and seven out of thirteen participants did the same scene. Chihwan wanted to cry because he was reminded of his awkward acting whenever scene 14 replayed in front of him.

"Why did you do scene 14?"

"Because the lines are cool."

"That's so simple-minded of you. You did it because it was cool?"

"What did you do then?"

Hearing that question, Chihwan didn't say anything. That friend of his asked if he did 14 as well in a small voice. He quietly nodded and was given a smack.

"Next."

Chihwan raised his head when Sora said those words. He saw Maru standing up. The others, who were chatting among themselves, all quietened down as well. Their senior was finally up.

'Will he really be different?'

Chihwan watched nervously.

"I am Han Maru, and I'll do scene 1."

He thought that he had heard wrong. Scene 1? Chihwan looked at the script. That was the scene where the main character woke up from bed, turned off the alarm, and left the house. There weren't any lines, not to mention big movements. It was a scene that had nothing to show. There wasn't anyone until now who chose this scene.

The film production club sitting behind the camera also seemed a little startled by his decision.

“Ah, okay. Please start once you’re ready.”

Maru calmly looked at his script in front of the camera. He didn’t look hurried at all. That was completely different from himself, who acted uneasy when he got in front of the camera. It was then that he realized that he could gain some time by doing that.

After closing the script, Maru said that he’ll start and lied down. When Chihwan looked at just that, he laughed a little, but it also made him realize something.

‘It’s not cringy like before.’

The situation itself was rather funny, but he couldn’t take his eyes off Maru. He was able to watch properly. This was a stark contrast to when he had to look at his awkward friends.

An act that didn’t look bad or weird.

Maru sighed as he reached out with his left hand without looking. He pretended to grab something before stopping. Like that, about 10 seconds passed before he slowly got up.

‘His expression is...’

He subconsciously thought that Maru’s eyes were cloudy. Maru sat down on a chair without any emotions before starting to eat. It was clear that he was eating even though there was nothing there. It wasn’t exaggerated either. A really exhausted kid was just eating food.

Chihwan felt as though he could hear sand being chewed. It was strange. There was nothing there, yet there was. There were plates, food, and water where Maru’s hands were reaching out to. He saw what he was not supposed to. It wasn’t like some precise pantomime or something either. Sometimes, he just awkwardly waved his hand in the air. However, that didn’t look forced at all. It was limitlessly natural.

He stood up from his chair and picked up his bag before leaving. He sat down in a place that was thought to be the shoe area before putting his shoes on. The fidgeting fingers tied his shoelaces several times, before loosening them again. Although he wasn’t that slow doing it, Chihwan thought that that moment was being dragged out endlessly. After standing up slowly, Maru opened the door and left.

“I’m finished.”

Turning around, Maru dusted off his pants before returning to where he originally was. Chihwan was unable to say anything. He realized too clearly how different Maru was.

‘So this is what acting is like.’

Maru-seonbae had shown him acting, and he was busy just following and understanding in his mind.

Chihwan smacked his own knees.

He wanted to become like that senior - he suddenly had that thought. Although all he did was a sequence of actions without saying anything, Maru was much better than himself, who just talked about something random. Chihwan could clearly tell that something was happening to the main character.

Chihwan reflected on his own performance. He wanted to look cool. After all, the character in that scene was a cool character that had escaped being a loser and had approached a bullied friend. All he had in mind during his fifteen minutes was just that. Although he wasn't able to show it off properly, he thought that he didn't take the wrong direction.

However, the moment he saw Maru's performance, he realized that he was horribly wrong. He couldn't explain exactly why, but he noticed that his own performance was aiming in the wrong direction. He was reminded of the words that art and porn were different. It was really true.

"Ah... yes. Thank you for that."

Sora, who always spoke immediately after everyone's performance ended, paused for quite a long time before speaking this time. Next - she added as she looked at the student sitting next to Maru.

"...Do I have to? I mean, can I do it?"

Those words came from that boy's mouth.

\* \* \*

Sora was watching the last acting club member. Scene 14. The scene where the main character reached his hand out to the new transfer student. Sora also thought that it was the most important scene in the movie. That was because it was when the main character became the most likable. After this, he would ignore the transfer student and start bullying him instead. The members of the acting club seemed to think the same since many of them chose scene 14.

A performance in just 15 minutes. She didn't have high expectations, but she found it a little pity since they were all similar across the board. She could understand stuttering and getting the gestures wrong. She wasn't holding the audition to see acting experience after all. She had already expected that they would not be that good at expressing their emotions and gestures. However, the fact that they all focused on that scene was rather disappointing. Had they read the script from beginning to end, they should have realized that the main character wasn't feeling entirely good when he reached out to the transfer student.

A film was a series of organically connected flows, but everyone based their act on short context alone. This also couldn't be helped since they only had 15 minutes to prepare, but as the original creator of this work, she felt quite bitter that her work was expressed in a way she didn't intend.

'But despite that.'

Sora looked at the memo on her desk. There were five names on that paper. Since their acting skills were generally on the same level, she picked out people who suited the character based on appearance. The club president, Ando, also didn't have any problem with that.

However, this list was no longer necessary.

She crumpled the piece of paper before putting it in her pocket. She had already decided. The moment she watched his performance, nothing else came to her mind other than the fact that he was the right one for the job. If anyone disagreed, she was willing to fight that person to maintain her opinion.

"Thank you for your performance. For now, I'll gather everyone's judgments."

Sora collected the notes that she handed out to the watching members of the acting club. At the top were Kang Dowook's and Ahn Bangjoo's. Sora looked at theirs first. They were the seniors of the acting club. She was curious about what kind of opinions they gave.

'They didn't put any effort into this at all.....'

From numbers 1 to 17, the two of them only wrote one line for everyone. They were generally negative as well. Well, Ahn Bangjoo's was pretty decent. At least he wrote which part he liked, and which part could have been done better.

'It's cringe.'

That was it for Kang Dowook's paper. He wrote that for numbers 1 through 15. He only wrote something different for number 16, which was Maru.

-Just go with him.

He was blatantly disinterested, but Sora liked that. His thoughts matched hers. Everyone else was no good. Maru-seonbae had to be the main character. She handed over the notes to Ando-seonbae. He made a flustered expression as soon as she handed them over.

Sora then looked at what the girls wrote. Some of the girls even made a list of criteria and scored based on the participants' performances. This kind of meticulous judging was quite useful. The main character was already decided to be Maru, but a movie wasn't just created with the main character. The transfer student as well as the original bully were important as well. As long as she based her decisions on the opinions of the majority, the chances of her failing at casting should decrease considerably.

After looking at the notes for a while, Sora spat out a short breath before lifting her head. Although she had already decided on the main character in her heart, she couldn't just ignore the audition altogether.

"I recommend Han Maru-seonbae," she said first.

Ando nodded.

"Me too."

"Me too."

"And me."

The 2nd year seniors were of the same mind. Sora looked at Daemyung this time. She asked if he had any other opinions and Daemyung shook his head.

"I thought that Maru should be the one to do it from the beginning. It would instead be strange if he lost to the juniors."

It was decided then. Sora stood up and spoke,

"The main character will be Maru-seonbae."

She pressed down on the desk with both of her arms and looked at the acting club sitting in front of her.

"If you have any complaints, you can say them now."

No one said anything.

“Well then, please take care of us in the future, Maru-seonbae,” said Sora as she looked straight into Maru’s eyes.

\* \* \*

“Try to do the read-throughs without looking at the script as much as possible. Starting next week, we are going to plan movement lines. Instructor Miso becomes more strict once we start practicing with movement, so you should be prepared for that.”

Chihwan looked at Maru, who sat in the corner, as he listened to Daemyung’s words. After the mini audition held by the film production club, Maru sat down in a corner as though nothing had happened and started making props again. Chihwan realized that many others were looking at Maru just like him. It was natural. They got to watch how he acted right in front of them. The air he gave off was completely different. They couldn’t help but take glances at him.

‘I only thought that he looked natural when I watched the drama, but now that I think about it again, he fitted into the drama better than anyone else without feeling off.’

Although he originally didn’t watch ‘New Semester’, ever since he entered the acting club and found out that Maru-seonbae was in it, he started watching it for fun. As Maru was a supporting character, he didn’t appear or talk that much when he did, so he never got the feeling that Maru was good at acting. However, he realized after seeing the wordless performance he saw today. He never got the feeling that Maru was good since he looked natural and didn’t seem like he was acting at all.

‘He didn’t look forced at all.’

He was thinking such, when,

“Looks like everyone’s mind is elsewhere right now.”

Daemyung smiled and put down the script. Chihwan immediately came back to himself.

“Maru, can you come over for a bit?”

Daemyung called out to Maru. Chihwan observed Maru, who came with wood glue in hand, in detail. The gloomy expression he had during the wordless performance couldn’t be seen anywhere. He looked like a completely different person due to the discrepancies in emotional states.

“Why?”

“Because everyone’s looking at you,” said Daemyung.

“Me?”

Maru turned around to look at the juniors. Chihwan did not look away when Maru’s eyes were on him.

“Uhm, seonbae-nim!” Chihwan raised his hand and spoke.

Since he spoke up anyway, he decided to do something big.

“I want you to watch my acting.”

“Acting?”

“Yes.”

“Instructor Miso will be coming tomorrow, so tell her to do that. She has much better judgement than me, and is also a lot better at explaining as well.”

“Uhm, the instructor is... a little scary. Also, I want to show my act to you and get your opinion!”

“From me? Why?”

“I fell for you after I watched you before!”

He realized that he said something rather strange after he uttered those words, but he believed that his true intentions had gotten across. Man to man. Such a thing was supposed to be direct.

“If you’re confessing, I’d like to decline politely. Also, I hope you stay 10 meters away from me from now on.”

“No, that’s not it!” He had shouted in panic when Maru smiled back faintly.

“Ahn Chihwan, right?”

“Yes!”

“Go ahead. I’m not sure if I can be of help, but I’ll try.”

As soon as he said those words, the others raised their hands as well.

“Can you have a look at me as well?”

“I’d also like you to watch me.”

“If you have the time, please watch me too!”

Chihwan glared at the others.

“Hey! I’m first!”

He darted off and stood in front of Maru. Maru-seonbae said he liked boxing, and he really had a good build. He realized when he stood in front of him. Although he was a little shorter than him, he looked solid, or maybe his center of gravity was really stable. He felt like he was looking at a tree that sprouted out of a block of concrete.

“Daemyung. Is it okay to do this during practice?”

“It’s fine. This can also be a facet of training. Also, we need to start picking as well.”

Hearing Daemyung’s words, Chihwan gulped. Although they had split up into three groups to practice, more than half of them, no, more than two-thirds of them would not be able to go up on stage. Daemyung was probably referring to the fact that it was about time they selected the actors and started practicing for real.

“Then I guess I can have a look. It’d be good if the girls can do it as well, right?”

“Yeah. Girls, you can perform with the script for the play. As for the boys, you should show Maru what you did for that audition before. Maru will tell you various things.”

“I don’t have that much to say though.”

“Do it anyway. They are our juniors.”

Maru crossed his arms and sat down on the chair. Chihwan felt a completely different kind of nervousness than when he stood in front of the film production club. Maru’s eyes looked scary. He felt like anything uttered from that mouth might make him dizzy.

‘This, this is the real deal!’

If he was going to do it, he might as well do it properly.

Chihwan snorted.

## **Chapter 528**

Giving advice was a sensitive thing. Maru dug up an old memory. He didn’t remember exactly what kind of situation he was in, but he could clearly remember the woman’s words filled with conviction.

-My words will never reach you since they are always said in vain, but I will keep saying them. Maybe one day, I’ll reach you if I try several, dozens, or hundreds of times. I cannot guarantee that my words will change you. However, there’s no guarantee that my words will never change you either. Even if my words disappear in vain, if I say them many many times, perhaps one day, one person out of the hundreds of people that heard me might have changed. I will be able to smile in satisfaction when that day comes.

Whether he heard those words from a company education session, or from a teacher when he was in school, he didn’t remember. The voice was clear to him, but the context wasn’t. He didn’t even know who those words were directed at, but he could make out the meaning quite clearly.

These kinds of words appeared quite a lot during speeches on TV programs. They were said to wrap things up after giving a speech. That the speaker would be satisfied if just one person out of the entire audience had his or her life changed because of that speech.

Most of the time, advice was useless. Maru thought that as well. If advice was effective, this world would have turned into a utopia a long time ago. To listen to others and make those words their own was definitely not something easy. There were very few people that could do that. Words that took the form of advice when entering other people’s ears usually disappeared without going through the brain. They were mostly substituted by mocking laughs or perhaps annoying noises, before getting dumped into the psychological trash can.

Maru was aware of the importance of advice. If there was one way to learn about the essence of life without experience, it would be to get advice from those that had experienced it already.

He had already experienced how important it was to listen to someone else’s words, so Maru did not take any advice he heard lightly. He took them to heart even if it was something awkward. Even from nonsensical advice, there were things to be gained after disassembling its meaning and reversing its



intent. Maru was well aware that a combination of such words was enough to change the personality known as Han Maru.

Most of the time, advice did not hold more meaning than words of interruption.

However, from time to time, they possessed power unlike any other to people that were ready to accept that advice.

That was the reason he rarely advised people despite knowing that it was useless most of the time. Maru did not like responsibility, nay, he was afraid of it. He wanted to make an escape path for himself whenever he thought about the weight that words contained.

Advice always came hand in hand with responsibility. Whether it was advice coming from the bottom of the heart, or an awkward one made up on the spot in order to maintain face, if there was a person that listened to that advice and changed their life due to it, the advisor might one day receive this question: I lived my life as you told me to, so why am I in this state?

“I am going to have a look at your acting, and I will tell you my own opinions without holding back. If you need advice, I will naturally give you some. However, there’s something you must keep in mind. You may listen to my words, but don’t trust them fully.”

Maru looked at the kids standing in front of him.

“Those of you that said you dreamed to become an actor, please raise your hand. Only raise your hand if you truly want to join the entertainment industry.”

Seventeen boys, and fifteen girls. All of the first year students raised their hands. Whether it was Miso fanning the flames, or it was just that such people had gathered at the acting club, he did not know, but Maru still sighed in a small voice.

“I want to become an action actor!” Bangjoo, who was watching from one side, raised his voice.

Maru told him to calm down. In Bangjoo’s case, his will was clear. His familial circumstances could help his dream as well. There was Ahn Joohyun to back him up, so what did he have to worry about?

But that wasn’t the case with the first year juniors here.

“Since you are all aspiring to become true actors, I will say it once again. You may listen to me, but don’t trust my words fully. If you live your life while taking my advice as the truth, you will definitely regret it.”

He paused after saying up to that point. After a moment, his juniors spoke.

“Seonbae-nim. You’re being way too serious.”

“Right. Just do it lightly. We aren’t kids.”

“We’ll filter things out by ourselves. We aren’t idiots.”

Maru hammered the nail once again as he looked at his juniors.

“If you think that way, then I guess it’s good.”

“But why did you say those words?” Chihwan asked.

“To avoid responsibility.”

“To avoid responsibility?”

“Yeah.”

After making sour expressions, the juniors burst out laughing. The girls were even slapping each other's arms as they giggled.

“Maru-seonbae. You're actually funnier than you look.”

“I thought you were a scary person since you always stayed quiet, but you're a completely different person once you start talking.”

“No one's going to ask you to take responsibility. You're worrying way too much.”

“No one's going to blame you so just tell us a lot.”

Most of them seemed to think that he was joking. Maru also did not add anything. He did expect things to go like this. They were still students after all. They were detached from words like 'responsibility'.

“Then let's start. Jinpil, was it?”

“Yes!”

“Do the same thing you did in the audition,” Maru said to the first year junior standing in front of him.

\* \* \*

“It's natural that you are bad since you didn't have enough time to interpret the script. However, you should have thought about what you are going to do at least.”

Chihwan looked at Maru, who was speaking with his legs crossed. Dongmin, who had finished acting just now, was totally silent as he listened to Maru's words. His expression became stiffer and stiffer as Maru continued to speak. It wasn't that he was dissatisfied. It was probably because the questions Maru asked were very hard to answer.

The nine people that showed their acting to Maru until now experienced the same thing. Whether they were good at acting or not, they were given sharp questions. They tried their best to give good answers, but Maru would give them new questions as soon as they answered.

“Th-thank you.”

Dongmin turned around with his shoulders drooping. Chihwan looked at Daemyung, who stood behind Maru. Usually, the club president would clap and encourage everyone, but he was staying quiet for some reason. Thanks to that, the atmosphere on the 5th floor was quiet and even desolate.

‘I thought he would take things lightly.’

He did find it a little strange that Maru was talking about responsibility and whatnot before he started looking at people's acting, but he thought that he just understood wrong. When Jinpil's acting ended and he was given a barrage of questions, he thought that that was because he was the first. But that wasn't it. Maru was very persistent with his barrage of questions to the point that it felt unpleasant.

During Jinpil's turn, he honestly just laughed. He found it funny that his friend was just licking his lips, unable to answer the questions at all, and he even wanted to leave behind a record of it as a video. However, when the same thing repeated for the 2nd and 3rd times, he was no longer able to laugh. He realized that he would soon be one of the sacrifices to those merciless questions. The girls sitting next to him even started writing things down as they waited for their turn. The acting advice session that started off with a laugh became a stifling event.

Looking at Maru, who took a bit of a break to drink some water, Chihwan took a deep breath. It was his turn now. He kept looking at the script while he waited. Even if he couldn't act that well, he didn't want to make any mistakes.

"Chihwan was next, was it?"

"Yes, it's me."

"Do you think you can do it now?"

"Yes!"

Chihwan thought about scene 14 as he stood up. He missed a lot of things during the audition since he didn't have much time, like the fact that the main character was reaching his hand out to the transfer student when he was in a difficult situation himself. Based on common sense, it would be incredibly difficult to even talk to the new student. The scene 14 that he only thought of as cool might not turn out to be really like that.

"Are you ready?"

"Ah, yes!"

He hesitated for a while because he was thinking. Chihwan started acting immediately. A little more awkwardly, thinking that he should do it like he was struggling.

"So, we should help each other out. They say the winner is the one who lasts until the end, right?"

Chihwan slowly reached out. He briefly forgot what kind of shape he should make his hand when offering a handshake, but he did not have any time to think about such a thing so he just pretended to grab slightly.

He then breathed in deeply before stepping back. He sighed in relief. He didn't make any mistakes when saying his lines. Unlike the first time, when his head was totally blank, he was able to think a bit while he acted this time. Wait, wasn't that a great improvement? He was still awkward, but he was proud of the progress he made.

"You're finished, right?"

"Yes."

"Is your dream to become an actor as well, Chihwan?"

"Yes! I want to become an actor."

"May I ask why?"

“Uhm... I haven't thought about the reason, but being an actor is good. You can become famous and earn a lot of money.”

“I see. I guess that's clearer than the others. Then let me start asking questions.”

It was finally here. Chihwan straightened his waist. He did not make any mistakes when he acted. He believed that the intensity of questions would be a lot weaker than the people that came before him.

“I keep saying this, but there's no need to take me so seriously.”

“Yes.”

“Then onto the first question. What kind of character was the main character that you acted?”

He could answer that quickly since he was expecting that sort of question.

“A pitiful person who's being bullied.”

“Does being bullied make you a pitiful person?”

“What? Don't most people think that way?”

“I'm asking about your opinion, not the general opinion.”

“I think that it does. He's being bullied and excluded by the others in his class. It's definitely not a situation where you should laugh.”

Maru faintly nodded. Perhaps he was satisfied with that answer?

“How did you feel when you acted?”

“How did I feel?”

“I'm asking for the emotional state you were in when you acted out the 'pitiful main character' that you talked about.”

“Honestly speaking, I didn't really feel anything. I was too caught up with doing my lines properly.”

“That's definitely possible. Let's make assumptions then. Let's say that you have a perfect interpretation of the script. What did you feel when you acted out this character in front of the camera?”

After thinking about it for a while, Chihwan replied,

“Of course, I felt pity.”

“Why?”

“Eh?”

“Why did you, I mean, why would you feel pity?”

“Because he's a pitiful character.”

“Let's say that you and I are two people on very bad terms, and I just won the lottery. How would you feel when you saw that?”

“Not good, at least. I might be annoyed. You’re a person I hate after all.”

“Now, let’s say that in this situation, your soul came into my body. You have just won the lottery. How would you feel?”

“Hm, good, probably. I won the lottery after all.”

“Then, let’s change it again. You are looking at the main character being bullied. You felt pity. Now your soul went into the main character. Would you still pity yourself?”

Chihwan felt like he was given a big whack. He quickly opened the script. Throughout the script, there were parts that implied that the main character was going to commit suicide. When he read that, he pitied the main character even more. However, how would he feel if he was in the main character’s shoes? Would a mere ‘pity’ be enough to describe his own emotional state?

“I want to live. I want to kill. I want to die. I don’t know how, but I need to go to school. I feel crazy. I want to throw up. I want to run away. It’s horrible. There’s no hope. I want time to stop. I hope the world can end. I want to go where there’s no one. I want to start over in a place no one knows me. I want someone to help me.”

Those words came from Maru’s mouth. The individual lines, that weren’t connected in any way, sounded scary as though they represented the main character’s emotions.

“I think that the foundation of acting is whether you can make the viewers accept or not. Acting contains a lot of variability, but I think that it all comes down to whether you can invoke sympathy in the viewers. The character on the screen is definitely not them, but they sometimes cry, laugh, and even become angry when looking at that character. That’s because they are sympathizing with the character. The emotions that the character harbors inside are also within the viewers and are also similar. That’s why we are able to share emotions with fictional characters.”

Chihwan nodded. He understood what Maru was trying to say.

“Do you get what I mean?”

“Yes, I think I get it.”

Something welled up in him. He felt like he found out some great secret. Maybe his acting would reach a completely different level - Chihwan had such thoughts.

At that moment, Maru gave him the next question as though he read his mind.

“However, most of us don’t have any experience being bullied. What we know is a fraction of abstract emotions that we ‘think’ such people feel, as well as the persuasive information that we receive through the media. In the end, it is all fake. We can only act on what is fake. In that sense, Chihwan.”

“Y-yes!”

“What do you think you need to do in order to make something real out of something fake? Don’t think about it too deeply before answering. I’m not taking an ‘I don’t know’ for an answer, so bear that in mind as well.”

Oh no. The barrage of questions had just started.

“You can take your time. Daemyung, give me some water.”

Chihwan looked around. He saw the faces stricken with fright from those that were waiting for their turn. It seemed that practice was going to be really long today.

## **Chapter 529**

“It’s quite late.”

9 p.m. Although Sunday practices usually ended around 3, it went on for longer today. He waved his hand at his juniors leaving the hall in tatters. They smiled back at him awkwardly.

“Aren’t you tired?” Daemyung asked as he tossed him his bag.

“I am. My throat hurts a bit as well. I’ve never talked for so long before after all.”

Maru looked at the three 2-liter water bottles in the plastic bag. He had drunk those over the span of six hours. When he decided to watch everyone’s acting, he did not plan to do things lightly, but nor did he plan to dig so deeply. When he talked to them, he realized that he got something out of it from talking to them, and when he kept asking questions because of that, the sun had set.

“Why didn’t you stop me?”

“I just kept watching since it looked fun.”

“Really? They looked tired though.”

“Not for them, it looked fun for you. Also, it was fun just listening to them, so I didn’t want to stop you. In the first place, they wanted this after all. They should have been prepared for this much at least.”

“Were you always the strict character?”

Daemyung shrugged. Maru turned the lights off in the hall before checking whether there were any windows open.

“Where’s Dowook? I think I saw him with Chihwan before.”

“He left first. Apparently, he has to help out with cleaning a large vehicle at the petrol station.”

“He’s going to succeed that business, so I guess he should do that. But it looks like Dowook and Chihwan are pretty close, eh? I could see them together for quite a bit today.”

“Chihwan also likes bicycles, apparently.”

“Oh, really?”

They relied on the light from their phones to walk down to the 2nd floor. They knocked on the door of the night-duty room which was to the right of the staircase and told the security guard that they finished practice.

“You should go home early.”

Leaving behind the security guard who climbed upstairs while yawning, they went down to the 1st floor.

“You’re riding your bike home, right?”

“Yeah.”

“Then I’ll get going first. See you tomorrow.”

“Watch out on your way home.”

Daemyung disappeared with the juniors who were waiting by the school gates. Maru pulled his bike out from the bicycle rack. The wheel moved and the chains started turning.

He thought that he should lubricate it since he could hear unpleasant friction noises from the chains. Dowook would probably take care of it if he asked. As for the fee, some bread and milk should suffice.

He turned on the headlights he attached in between the two handles. He lightly kicked off and went outside of the school when he saw a long shadow right underneath his wheel.

“Why haven’t you gone home yet?” Maru asked as he looked at Chihwan.

“I had something to ask you, seonbae-nim.”

“Ask me? You should’ve done that through text.”

“I don’t think that’s polite.”

“I’m not that stuck-up.... So, what did you want to ask?”

“It might sound like a stupid question, but there’s no one to ask around me other than you.”

Chihwan tensed his eyes.

“Is it hard to become an actor?”

Maru replied without hesitation.

“Yeah, it’s hard.”

Done? - he added before pedalling away. The bike moved forward.

“Seonbae-nim!”

Chihwan walked quickly next to him.

“Is it really that hard?”

“It is really that hard.”

“Do you think it’s harder than studying?”

“Studying is hard too.”

“Then which one is harder? Becoming successful as an actor, or becoming successful through studying?”

“Well, both of them are hard. But in the case of the former, there are elements of gambling. If you have an ace up your sleeve, you will become popular, but if you don’t, you either take it slow and steady, or just fall altogether.”

Maru sped up his pedalling. He was pretty exhausted right now. If the questions were on point and he could help with them, he would’ve stopped to answer them, but he didn’t feel the need to answer any of them since all the questions required the resolve of the person.

“You’re good at running.”

Despite the fact that he sped up, Chihwan kept up with him.

“If there’s one thing I’m confident in, it’s running.”

“Why don’t you make use of that talent and become an athlete? You have a good build too.”

“I only like running. I’m not good with ball sports either, and I’m a little afraid of them.”

“I guess you’ll be a marathoner then.”

“I abandoned any thoughts of that after I did a half marathon once. I’m not fast enough for short distances, and I tried swimming as well, but there are real freaks in swimming. Their legs and shoulders are just enormous.”

“You tried a lot.”

“My older brother used to tell me that it’s good to try everything.”

“Then you can continue to do that in the future. If you keep trying, you’ll find something that fits you.”

“What if I don’t?”

“There actually might not be any. Actually, that’s the case for most people. How many people in this world actually know precisely what they want to do? They just end up doing it due to circumstances and become adjusted to it. That’s just how people live.”

“But that’s a really boring life.”

“Is your house well off?”

“I think so.”

“How good is ‘I think so’? Do you have real estate?”

“Uhm, I’m not sure about the details, but as far as I know, we own a building.”

“What did your parents say when you said you were going to an engineering high school?”

“They just wanted me to graduate safely, and not make any bad friends.”

“Are you on good terms with your father?”

“Before I entered the acting club, we always used to go fishing together. My father really likes fishing. He’s totally obsessed with it. I like it too.”



“What about your brother?”

“He runs a café.”

“I guess that’s that then.”

Maru put the brakes on. Even though Chihwan must have run for around five minutes, his breathing was stable. His stamina was really good.

“What’s what then?”

“Don’t worry about anything and just try various things out.”

“Can I?”

“If you are uneasy about it, then you should first go home and consult your father about it. He’ll probably tell you to do what you want. If you slip midway, you can just succeed one of your family businesses.”

“But that’s not my life. I want to try achieving success with my own power.”

Maru narrowed his eyes and looked at Chihwan. Why did these Ahns have such strong personalities?

“What do you want to hear from me?”

“What?”

“I might not show a lot of emotions on my face, but I’m really tired right now, okay? If there’s an answer you want, tell me. I’ll give you that answer.”

Hearing that question, Chihwan crossed his arms and pondered about it. Maru looked at him for a while before stepping on his pedals. Chihwan chased him from behind while shouting ‘seonbae-nim’.

“Are you a stalker?”

“No.”

“Then please let me go home. I really don’t have good stamina. I have a fatty liver as well.”

“Really?”

“Oh, I didn’t tell you yet, did I? I actually have cancer.”

Chihwan quietened down before narrowing his eyes to look at him.

“Why are you doing this to me? If you are doing this to me to haunt me, then I’d like to tell you that it’s really effective. Your plan was very good.”

“I said that’s not it.”

Maru narrowed his eyes and spoke,

“This is becoming really unpleasant for me. I have an incurable disease where my self-confidence plummets when I’m with good-looking people, okay? If you were a cute girl, I might have made some

time to listen, but no matter how I look at you, you aren't the cute type. You are biologically male as well."

"...You're really different from what I thought."

"That's how it is most of the time. Well, can I leave now? It's getting cold too."

"Then should I buy you coffee or something?"

"No, I'll politely decline."

"Then what about a blind date?"

"Sorry about that, but I already have a girlfriend."

"Really?"

"I'm going to propose to her soon."

"I'm scared because that doesn't sound like a lie to me."

"Well, I'm serious about this one."

After making a surprised expression, Chihwan soon clapped and congratulated him. Maru shook his head in resignation.

"I lose."

"Lose what?"

"You really are my natural enemy."

He was daring, yet pure. It was impossible to calculate his next actions because he didn't think about such a thing at all. He was like a puppy that wagged its tail as it approached him. Even if he shouted 'go away' and flicked it away, it would flinch and glance at him before approaching him again and then lying on its backs wanting to play with him. Maru really wasn't good with people like that. He could easily come to a conclusion with people who talked while pressing buttons on a calculator, but those that stayed true to their emotions were hard to deal with since there was no concrete result in mind, causing the conversation to drag out endlessly. Bangjoo seemed reckless because of his loud voice, but he knew how to handle himself in front of others, so this guy couldn't be compared to Bangjoo either.

To compare him to someone, he was like the polar opposite of Suyeon.

"Think about what you want to ask. I'm going to give you ten minutes to ask and then I'll leave right after that, so choose your question carefully," said Maru as he pointed at his watch.

Although Chihwan's personality was hard to deal with, Maru liked him because he approached him in order to solve his curiosities. It was just like how people who asked how to eat something were much more likable than those that just nagged to be fed.

He got off his bike and looked at Chihwan.

After thinking about it for quite a long time to the point that he was groaning, Chihwan brightened up before speaking,

“How did you become an actor?”

“Things happened.”

“Can’t you explain to me in more detail?”

“I was acting in the acting club, and an opportunity arose which led to my meeting with the president of my current agency.”

“Ah! I guess you asked that president to make you an actor.”

“That’s how it was.”

“What did you ask him to do?”

“It’s a bit complex, but to sum it up into one line, I told him that I’ll act for three years for 300 million won.”

“Ah.... what? You gave him three hundred million won?”

“No.”

“Then you received three hundred million?”

“I did.”

“No way, that must be a lie.”

“You’re quick.”

“It’s hard to know whether you’re telling the truth or not because there are no signs when you are lying, seonbae-nim.”

“That’s why one of my career paths was a scammer. If I scam about 10 billion and then rot in jail for two years because of economic offense, I’ll still be able to live an easy life after all. If I put all that money under someone else’s name, it won’t be taken either. This country is so pro-scamming.”

“Th-that doesn’t sound like a joke to me.”

“Then maybe I’m right. Also, you know that time is ticking right?”

Five minutes - he added before putting a foot on a pedal.

“Have you ever regretted doing acting?”

“Regretted? Fortunately, no, at least not until now. I’m earning money, it’s fun, and I get to spread my name around. If I can last long, I’m thinking that it’ll be a pretty good job even if I don’t become hugely popular.”

“Don’t you want to become successful?”

"It'd be good if I did. Yeah, that would be great. But rather than becoming successful, I'm more interested in not failing. It'll be fine as long as I don't slip. I'll be satisfied as long as I can feed myself and my family."

"Is feeding your family that important of a goal for you?"

"Being able to eat properly is the most important thing. Of course, pooping too."

He yawned and looked at the time. Ten minutes was almost up.

"Time's almost up."

"Wait!"

"Let's do one last question. I'm really tired right now. You should go home as well. Where do you live?"

"It's nearby."

"Damn kid. I have to ride my bike for over 30 minutes to get home. Let me go home already, okay?"

Chihwan laughed before scratching his head.

"Then let me ask you just one more question."

"What is it?"

"Can I become an actor like you?"

"I wouldn't know."

"Can't you tell me that I can?"

"You will not be able to become an actor."

"Seonbae-nim!"

"I'm leaving now. Also, you are forbidden from approaching me within a 5m radius for a while. You're draining my energy. Oldies like me get tired when talking to young 'uns like you. Okay?"

The bike strode forward. His sleepiness flew away when the cold air hit his face. Once he got home, washed up, read through his script once, and lied down, the long day would finally be over. Just as he was thinking that, a short breath escaped Maru's mouth because he heard a breathing sound. Chihwan was running towards him.

"Seonbae-nim! I really want to become an actor after I saw you acting! So I'm going to ask you a lot of things in the future too! I'm quite persistent, you know?"

Watch out on your way home - Chihwan saw him off with a cracked voice. When he glanced back, he was panting with his hands on his knees.

"Just go back to studying, kid!"

"No!"

"Then become an actor!"

“Yes!”

Maru smiled as he pedalled.

He found a new junior he had taken a liking to, though he was a bit reckless.

\* \* \*

Chihwan straightened up his body after seeing Maru-seonbae going off into the distance. He felt like his heart was going to burst after running at full speed for a while. He panted for a while to calm his breathing before turning around when,

“Ah.”

He forgot about something important. He took out his phone. He looked for a number in his contact list before pressing the call button. There was a series of call beeps before the other party picked up.

“Uhm, Maru seonbae-nim! I completely forgot about this and didn’t giv... seonbae-nim? Seonbae-nim?”

Maru hung up on him. Chihwan licked his lips before looking inside his bag. The lubricant for bicycle chains that Dowook-seonbae gave him was still inside.

-You have something to ask Han Maru? Then give him this since you’re waiting for him. He’ll take care of it if you give it to him. He rides his bike every day, yet he really doesn’t take care of it.

Chihwan shut his lips tight.

“I guess I can’t help it.”

He tightened his bag straps before running at full power. He should be able to catch up if he ran like his life depended on it.

“Seonbae-nim! Wait! Don’t run away, just wait a bit!”

Chihwan ran at full speed towards the bicycle that kept speeding up.

## **Chapter 530**

“Let’s come back after some food. Tell everyone to regather by 2 o’clock,” said Park Hoon as he cracked his neck sideways.

He left a few days ago to cover for the historical drama B team at the request of a senior at the TV station and returned yesterday, and it seemed that his fatigue hadn’t completely disappeared yet. This was why he disliked shooting in the countryside.

“Please come back by 2 after lunch,” Minjoong shouted.

Until a while ago, Minjoong was just an immature assistant director, but now he was a full-fledged worker capable of handling his own jobs.

“Senior, let’s go. I booked the cutlassfish restaurant nearby.”

“You should take some people and eat without me. I’ll look after the equipment.”

“Eh? You should come with us.”

“Go when I tell you to. Senior! Please go and have your meal. I’ll look after the equipment.”

The camera director made a circle with his fingers and then took the camera team and left. The lighting team also left their equipment behind before starting to leave.

“Then I’ll be back as soon as possible.”

“Take your time. Also, sir Hwang likes cutlassfish a lot, so give him the big one.”

“Yes, of course.”

“Don’t order any rice wine though. One glass will become two.”

“Understood.”

Park Hoon stretched his legs out as he leaned back in the temporary chair. Right now, he needed sleep more than he needed food. In his mid twenties, when he just entered the company, he didn’t feel anything when he stayed up the entire night, but now that he was nearing his forties, he had to prepare himself for quite a lot if he wanted to stay up the entire night. As stamina meant everything in this field, it was about time he left the field for the desk, but Park Hoon wished that he could shout ‘cut’ even when he was past 50.

“Director, aren’t you going to eat?”

Suyeon, wearing a white T-shirt and jeans, waved her hand as she approached him.

“Nah. You should have yours, Miss Kim.”

“I heard that the cutlassfish restaurant nearby is really good.”

“Maybe it’s good, but I can’t leave behind all this equipment here. Urgh, I’m lacking energy so stop talking to me and go get some food.”

“Thank you for all your work.”

Park Hoon nodded. If he was shooting at the school like he normally did, he would’ve gone to the restaurant with ease of mind, but he was outside right now. This was in order to shoot a field trip episode that was essential to youth dramas.

“The Spring wind is good.”

Early April, this time of the year had the perfect weather to shoot outside since it was neither cold nor hot. Park Hoon covered his eyes with the shade of his baseball cap before placing his feet on the camera box. This place felt like heaven.

When he enjoyed about ten minutes of relaxation, his hunger, which he had forgotten about, came back to him. Now that he thought about it, he only had a pack of soy milk for breakfast. Although he bought those soy milk packs since they were good for the body, he started drinking them as replacements for breakfast after some time.

He reached inside his jacket in order to soothe his hunger. The chocolates he always brought with him out of habit were supposed to be there, but his fingers came across nothing. Maybe he finished them yesterday? He suddenly remembered that he was chewing on something during the night.

Park Hoon sighed before taking his hand out. There wasn't anyone around either, so it seemed that he was going to have to wait in the middle of nowhere. Just then, he found someone walking into the shade of a nearby tree with slow steps. He pushed aside the cap that covered his vision before having a closer look.

"Maru, what's that in your hand?"

Maru, who was about to sit down and lean on the tree, stood up again. Park Hoon's attention was on the black plastic bag in Maru's left hand. It was highly probable that there was food in it.

"Are you not going to eat lunch?" asked Maru as he walked up to him.

Park Hoon said 'later' before pointing at the plastic bag.

"It's bread and milk. Would you like to eat some? I only got them because I felt low on sugar. There's strawberry flavor and chocolate flavor. Which one do you want?"

"Chocolate if possible."

Maru took out some bread and milk from the plastic bag. The bread was a type of castella that was known for being hard.

"Don't kids these days dislike bread like this?"

"I once ate it like it was my main food, so."

"This?"

"Yes."

Park Hoon stuffed the bread in his mouth before drinking a bit of the milk. When the sweetness seeped into his body, he felt much more clear-headed. It seemed the reason he felt tired was the same as Maru - he was running low on sugar.

"But you're still young, why are you worried about your sugar level?"

Maru didn't reply and just grinned instead.

To Park Hoon, Maru was a peculiar kid. Other child actors around Maru's age usually found him very difficult to deal with. Recently, they started asking him questions about acting, perhaps due to all the time they spent together, but they never talked about personal stuff. A young actor and a director. It somewhat sounded natural for there to be some distance between the two, and even Park Hoon thought that it would be rather weird if the two were close, but when he talked to Maru, he strangely felt at ease. It wasn't just because of Maru's character. When he talked to him, he felt like there was something in common. If it was a kid pretending to be an adult, he would feel something iffy about it, but Maru didn't give him that feeling.

"Is the cutlassfish really good?"

"It's decent. The roasted one is meh, but you can eat the simmered one because of the spice."

"Don't people usually refer to that as bad?"

"Well, it is edible. If you can't leave because you have to look after the equipment, I'll look after them in your stead."

"Forget about it. I'm responsible for them. It will be a huge pain if I leave it to you and something bad happens."

"I guess that's true."

"But why are you here alone? Where's your usual crew?"

"I'm not sure, I left early after eating. There was a café in front of the restaurant, so they might be drinking coffee there."

Park Hoon nodded.

"Would you like more?"

Park Hoon hesitated as he looked at the bread in front of him before accepting it. Ruining his appetite with sweet food was secondary. Right now, the priority was to ease his tongue and stomach that desperately craved food.

"I'm not stealing this from you okay? I'm only eating it because you're giving it to me."

"Why of course."

He chewed pieces off the bread before suddenly thinking that it was quite funny seeing this scene. He was getting food from a little kid. Just as he licked off all the cream on his hand, he heard some rustling behind him.

"What's this? And here I thought I could score some points with these."

When he turned his head around, he saw Suyeon, whose hands were holding a paper bag with a café logo on it.

"I guess I'll have them instead."

She brought over a folding chair before naturally sitting next to him.

"Miss Kim, what about lunch?"

"I'm not good with fish. Maru, would you like one?"

"Sure. I'm trying to lose weight, but I can give up for today."

"Hey, you'll never lose weight like that. You should be desperate."

Park Hoon looked at the sandwich moving around in front of him before reaching out.

"You want one too, director?"

"Give me one if there's some left. For some reason, my body is craving for some flour today."



“This isn’t free, so you have to treat me to something later.”

“How petty.”

Thanks to the fresh vegetables in the sandwich, his mouth felt much better now.

“You should eat some more. I was too greedy and ended up buying too much.”

“You’re right, why did you buy so much? Who’s going to eat all this?”

“I’ll just say that this is a stress-relief method for an actress. Now, get eating. I want to get some vicarious satisfaction from it.”

It seemed that he wasn’t going to get that cutlassfish. His stomach wasn’t big enough to eat fish after eating all the sandwiches here.

“Now that I think about it, you’re both in JA, huh,” he said as he drank the coffee that Suyeon gave him.

Suyeon nodded.

“Rather than me, why don’t you look after your junior?” asked Park Hoon.

“I do. I even called you to look at him in a good way. Well, it turned out that you forgot about all of it. Also, he’s the type who would get his own food by himself, so I don’t need to worry about him.”

“I gladly accept any food coming my way. But you keep wanting something from me when you give me something so that’s why I don’t take anything from you.”

“There’s no free lunch in this world. If something comes, then something goes.”

Park Hoon watched Maru and Suyeon talking to each other. He had never seen these two together during the four months he had been working with them. There was no rule that stated that people belonging to the same agency had to be close, and in fact, he saw many cases where they were even wary of each other, so he thought that these two might be such a case, but from the way things were going now, these two seemed to be on pretty close terms.

“Are you two close?”

“No.”

That reply came from Maru.

“We’re really close. Just like siblings.”

And that was from Suyeon.

The two replies came at almost the same time, and Maru didn’t seem to show much of a reaction while Suyeon tried to take away the sandwich in Maru’s hand. Of course, Maru did not let it get taken. He opened his mouth wide and stuffed in half of the sandwich in one go.

“Look at that, he’s totally selfish.”

“You ‘han’t ‘just ‘hake ‘hack wha’ you ‘have away.”

“Say it after you eat it.”

“You can’t just take back what you gave away. They say that even dogs don’t touch you when you eat.”

Park Hoon came to his own conclusion after looking at the two: the two were very close.

“Uhm, director, may I ask you something?” Maru asked after wiping his mouth with some tissue.

“What is it?”

“When we shoot, there are cuts taken from the main character’s perspective, right?”

“The POV cut. What about it?”

“When should it be used to be effective?”

Park Hoon stared at Maru.

“Are you studying directing already? You want to try your hand at being a director?”

“No. I am participating in a film festival soon, and what we’re making is made by just high school students, so we are lacking a lot of things. The script is pretty decent after polishing it up, but I’m worried about how to make it look good on camera.”

“Film festival?”

“Apparently, it’s the Seoul Youth Film Festival. I’m also on the helping side, so I’m not sure about the details yet.”

“Oh, that. The international competition that’s being held for the first time this year, huh.”

“You know about it?”

“I do. I don’t know a lot, but I do know one of the judges for that. But hey, are you directing that film?”

“No, I’m an actor.”

“Yeah, you should stick to one thing. You’ll end up losing both if you try to chase two. Um, POV cuts are taken from a subjective angle. It’s very good for expressing the mental state of the character. Even when just showing a simple view, when it’s taken from the main character’s perspective, the audience will try to find some meaning in it. In suspense films, the tension of the emotions will vary according to how well you use those POV cuts.”

“Oh, I see.”

“If you want to use a POV cut, you first have to make it clear whose perspective it is. You can’t have the audience wondering whose view it is. However, POV cuts require some specific cuts before, so it’s no fun if you use them all the time. It’s not called the ‘point of view’ for nothing. You should use it in scenes that you want to emphasize but think twice before using it. It will be a waste of cuts if you try to emphasize something unnecessary.”

“Thank you. I’ll remember it to tell the person that will be directing the film.”

“Man, the world has gotten good. High school students can shoot films now, and there’s a place where they can show it off.”

He didn’t say that in a mocking tone. He sounded truly envious. This was something unimaginable when Park Hoon himself was in high school

“Try your best. A director only gets better the more he shoots, and actors improve the more they get shot.”

After saying those words, he sat up. Maru and Suyeon also stood up.

“Alright, have a nice rest.”

“I’ll be leaving too. Also, you should get some sleep. It’s really dark under your eyes,” Suyeon said as she pointed at his eyes.

When he yawned and after getting some rest, Minjoong came back telling him to get lunch.

“Nah.”

“Aren’t you going to eat?”

“I had something to eat separately. But rather than that, didn’t you get a phone call from an unknown number recently?”

“An unknown number?”

“Wasn’t there some woman that talked in a really soft voice?”

“Soft voice, ah! There was. Why do you ask?”

“What did you do back then?”

“Well, she was saying something, but I couldn’t hear anything so I just hung up. It was during the shoot as well.”

Park Hoon faintly smiled and nodded his head.

“Congratulations.”

“Eh?”

“Writer Lee Hanmi wants to see you personally. She wants to see who it was that hung up on her after answering her phone call like that.”

Park Hoon continued,

“Let’s pull the shoot by 10 minutes. It looks like everyone has eaten already. The higher ups have been nagging about going over budget and whatnot recently too. Okay?”

“S-senior. Was that really writer Lee Hanmi?”

“Consider yourself lucky. That proud Mrs. Lee wants to see you in person. Who knows? She might throw another script at you for your own personal work. Though, you’ll probably be half dead by then because the president will kill you.”

He tapped on Minjoong’s shoulder. Minjoon’s face was going dark.

‘Ah, now that I think about it....’

Writer Lee Hanmi also said that she wanted to see Suyeon once. Since she was an immensely popular writer, he couldn’t just ignore her. Suyeon would also probably accept gladly if he told her that.

“What are you doing? Message everyone.”

“Y-yes.”

Park Hoon chuckled as he looked at Minjoong, who looked like he was dying.