

Once Again 531

Chapter 531

"If you like her, you should just confess," said Maru as he grabbed Giwoo's shoulders.

Giwoo made a complex expression as he shook his head.

"Yeseul wouldn't want me to confess to her."

"So? Are you going to keep watching her like a flower in a vase? You are really frustrating. You have the smarts to study, but you don't have the smarts in this area. Jichan will take Yeseul away from you like this, you know?"

"What?"

Giwoo widened his eyes and made a surprised expression, when,

"Cut. Let's do that again. Giwoo, your expression is good, but don't reveal it too much."

"Yes, understood!"

Maru pushed up his glasses before taking a step back. This was the episode where Giwoo's and Jichan's one-sided love for Yeseul became deeper. It was the main event of youth dramas, the one-sided love. The role of Lee Chan - Maru's character - in this episode was to fan the flames. He, along with Dongwook, induced Yeseul, Jichan, and Giwoo to gather in one spot while they watched. The cheerful girl who knew nothing about love, Yeseul, would start to become conscious of Giwoo, and Jichan would express his heart in a twisted way after he saw that.

"I guess our characters are turning into flintstones huh," Maru said to Dongho, who stood next to him.

"Flintstones?"

"We are characters that lose all presence once we set fire to the event. There was a huge decrease in cuts after the trainee teacher's first love episode."

"What can we do about it? Their popularity is through the roof. Have you seen the forums?"

"I haven't checked them since the first episode."

"You should look at them when you go home today."

Dongho sighed a little before leaving the camera angle. Producer Park Hoon's ready signal entered Maru's ears. He stood in front of Giwoo before getting his emotions ready. Since he just had to say a couple of lines, he didn't need deep emotions for it.

"If you like her, you should just confess," he uttered the same words.

* * *

"This shoot is quite long."

Joomin sat next to him. When she opened the orange insulated bottle, a bitter coffee fragrance could be smelled. Maru reached out.

“What?”

“Aren’t you going to give me some?”

“I am, but you’re reaching your hand out like it’s natural. This is mine, you know?”

“I’m a bit tired. I haven’t done night shoots in a long time. Anyways, it is black coffee right?”

“I always drink black.”

He received the coffee that Joomin poured for him with both of his hands before taking a sip. It was 10:13 in the evening. They had returned from the field trip shoot to the school and had kept shooting until now. Only one episode aired per week, and there were rarely any night shoots since there were a lot of underage actors, but it seemed that they were going to spend the whole night today from the way things were going now.

“Why do we have to be caught up in this when they’re the ones busy?” Dongho grumbled.

Maru gave him the lid of the insulated bottle with coffee in it. He intended for Dongho to shut up after drinking it. After drinking a sip, Dongho made a sour expression before putting down the lid. Dongho did not like black coffee. Of course, Maru knew this already.

“If you don’t like that, you just have to become successful. The schedule is only tight because the main actors can’t make the schedule. We can’t really do anything about it.”

Maru shook the lid off before returning it to Joomin.

The reason they were shooting late into the night was because they were shooting for two episodes worth of shots. Since the three main characters, Giwoo, Yeseul, and Jichan, couldn’t make time to shoot together next week, they naturally shot more today.

“I also want to become a popular star so that everyone else can match my schedule,” said Joomin while resting her chin on her hands.

Maru looked 20 meters away from where he was sitting. In the corner of the school field, where bluish lights were installed on either side, Yeseul was sitting there. They were given a break after three consecutive NGs, and Yeseul, who was responsible for the NG cuts, was looking at the script with a face filled with worry.

“If they had me do it, I’m confident that I can do it without NGs.”

Dongho clicked his tongue. This time, Joomin gave him the lid filled with coffee. It had been five months since they had started working together. They knew how to handle each other now.

Maru picked up the script. Only when Yeseul completed this scene properly could they go to the next scene, and only then could they go home.

Yeseul: (Smiling, but not knowing what to do) Y-you’re here.

Giwoo: (Looking at Yeseul without saying a word)

Yeseul: You don’t need to mind what the others said during the day. They just said that to tease you.

Giwoo: (Opening his mouth trying to speak, but then closing it again)

Yeseul: (Looking at Giwoo, before looking at the school gates behind him.) L-let's get going. It's pretty late. Should we get some tteokbokki on the way home? That place was really good.

Giwoo: Uhm, Yeseul..

Yeseul: (Flustered) ...Yeah?

Giwoo: What the other kids said, they weren't lying. I like you.

Yeseul: (Clasping her hands, looking a little uneasy) What do you mean. Wh-why are you..

Giwoo: (About to speak, but then looks at Yeseul's hands) I-I was joking. I just said it because I wanted to see how you react? How could I possibly like you? We are just close friends.

Giwoo turns around, and Yeseul looks back. After a sigh of relief comes a sigh of disappointment. Yeseul shakes her head in an attempt to deny her own emotions, but she can't call out to Giwoo so easily.

Yeseul: (Just barely, in a small, muffled voice) G-giwoo.

NA: If I had acted a little more gentle to Giwoo back then and had listened to his words just a little more carefully, maybe it wouldn't have turned out this way.

The NG kept happening when Yeseul collapsed her hands. She looked visibly flustered even from afar. It wasn't a scene filled with affection. It was more of a cozy love between high school students, but Yeseul kept freezing up and causing NGs. Maru inwardly tried saying that line. The number of periods in the lines indirectly expressed the pause between the lines. One was a short one, two was a visible pause, and three periods meant that there should be a slight pause in the audio.

Dongho, who stood next to him, said the lines in a falsetto voice.

"What do you mean. Wh-why are you. - What's so hard about this?"

Maru pressed on Dongho's shoulder before standing up.

"Where are you going?"

"To the director."

"Why?"

"To tell him that I just found a new actress for the job. You can do it right?"

Dongho violently shook his head and pulled on his arms. He would probably stay quiet for a while.

"Have you ever shot romance, Joomin-noona?"

"Me? Other than when I helped out a senior of mine with her graduation piece, no."

"Is it hard?"

"It's different from person to person. You'll have to act in front of the camera, right? I think that the emotion of liking someone can only be perfectly expressed when it is true to a certain extent. Yeseul is

probably embarrassed by that. Not as much as stripping naked, but in any case, she would have to show her inner feelings to others. It's hard to act in a love scene without any emotions at all. Moreover, this is about the awkward first love of a high school student, isn't it? It's a bit complex too. I looked at the script, and it doesn't look that easy. Those directions before the lines, they only have their facial expressions to express them. It might have worked on the first try, but with things dragging out like this, it should be pretty difficult."

As soon as Joomin's words ended, a 'cut' could be heard from a distance. It seemed that the shoot was stopped once again. Maru saw Yeseul apologizing to everyone. Giwoo seemed to be consoling her, but Yeseul didn't seem to be calming down at all.

"Looks like this will take long."

"Right?"

"If they can't do it, they'll start with us, so there shouldn't be a problem. Noona, do you have some coffee left?"

"Yeah."

He took a sip of the steaming coffee when he saw the assistant director coming their way.

"We're going to start right away, you okay with that?"

"Yes. But I don't think that scene's over yet."

"We decided to do yours first. The director told me that we can't keep you waiting."

Maru drank the coffee in one go before standing up. Dongho and Joomin also followed him. The shot with the three of them was quite simple. They just had to hide on top of the platform and then come out and say a few lines.

They walked across the school field to the platform. Maru saw Yeseul and Giwoo leaving the camera frame and sitting on the stand. Maru met eyes with the two, but he didn't say anything.

"Hyung-nim. Please do a crane shot from above and tilt down to the door on the platform."

Park Hoon talked to the camera director before coming their way. Maru put away his script before looking at Park Hoon.

"You guys should go home after getting it done. As for your eyes, look at where Yeseul was looking. Also, watch out for your breath since it might turn white if you breathe too heavily."

"Yes."

Park Hoon returned to the monitor before giving the ready sign. He blew any thoughts besides those of the shoot out of his mind as he said his line. They got an okay sign pretty easily.

The camera director moved positions.

"Watch out for double action! Just do what you did just now!"

Hearing Park Hoon's words, Maru returned to his original position. Since they shot several cuts of the same scene with the same camera from different angles and edited them in post, the actions of the actor differed quite a lot according to each scene, but when it became discernible to the audience, it would become a clear error. Since he had put his hands on the floor of the platform, he put his hands on the platform this time as well. He bent his right knee slightly and lengthened his neck out.

"Noona, didn't you place your hand on my shoulder before?"

"Ah, right. I forgot."

"What about Dongho?"

"I'm ready. I'm the same as before."

"I don't look different, right?"

"You don't."

Confirmations between actors were important as well. The camera started rolling again and they repeated the same lines. Thanks to practicing together while they rested, they were able to get an okay sign in one go without an NG.

"Thanks for your work. You should go home."

Home, hearing that sweet word, Maru smiled subconsciously.

"Your eyes were good, you three. Well done."

"Thank you."

The compliments of a camera director had a different flavor to a director's.

"I just wish that they could do as well as you. I want to go home too."

The camera director walked away from the camera while groaning. Maru looked at Dongho and Joomin. The three of them climbed down the platform with pleased smiles on their faces.

"I'm going home~."

Dongho hummed for a while before coming back to himself. He started saying his goodbyes to the staff and the director. Maru and Joomin also said their goodbyes to everyone they came across. They couldn't show their excitement to everyone else who would be staying behind. If they weren't polite, people might talk bad behind their backs.

"Thanks for your work."

"Watch out on your way home."

Since they worked together, if he talked to them with respect, the other party would reply with smiles as well. He picked up his bag that he put in front of the vehicle carrying the props. Dongho was picked up by his parents, while Joomin ran outside saying that she had called a taxi.

Phew, it's over - just as he was about to leave the shooting location with ease of mind, he heard a voice calling out to him. When he turned around, he saw Giwoo and Yeseul.

"Do you have some time?"

It was Yeseul who spoke first. However, Maru could see that it was Giwoo, standing a step behind Yeseul, who urged Yeseul to speak to him.

"What for?"

"Uhm, Giwoo told me that asking you will help quite a lot."

"Help?"

Maru looked at Giwoo standing behind her.

"You were of big help during Apgu as well. I was reminded of that time."

He understood what this was about now. Maru looked at Yeseul.

"I'm sorry, but I wouldn't know how a girl thinks on the inside."

"I knew it, huh."

Yeseul sighed. Maru looked at the staff members standing behind the two. Since he had experience being a background actor, he knew how stressful it was for the staff when the shoot kept getting delayed. Maru was reminded of producer Park Hoon's tired face. It wouldn't be strange if he collapsed at any moment due to exhaustion.

"Let me ask you something."

"Huh?"

"What do you think of Giwoo?"

"Giwoo? Why do you ask?"

"Do you like him?"

"N-no."

"Then are you awkward around him?"

"No, that's not it either."

"Then there's only one thing you can try out here. Would you like to try? I can't guarantee that it will be effective though."

Yeseul nodded. Maru waved at Giwoo.

"Stand face to face."

"Like this?"

Yeseul looked at Giwoo. Giwoo also looked at Yeseul.

“Try hugging each other.”

“What?”

Yeseul took a step back as though she thought that this was nonsensical. Giwoo looked like he didn't care.

“If you can't do it through acting, what else can you do other than make yourself actually feel affection? I heard that skin-to-skin contact is good for raising emotional intimacy. That's all I can say to you. Whether you try or not, it's up to you. But bear in mind that the director's expression does not look good right now.”

He told them to work hard before turning around. Maru predicted that the two would try hugging. What could they do about it? Time was ticking after all.

‘Rather than that, Kang Giwoo, that guy, I really like him.’

He asked for help wherever possible in order to escape a disadvantageous situation. Maru wanted to applaud him when he acted like this had nothing to do with him. He really liked this guy. So much in fact, that he felt angry.

Maybe this was a likes repel scenario? Maru clicked his tongue.

He felt like he would never be able to get close to that guy, ever.

Chapter 532

When he arrived home, it was nearly midnight. He almost had to take a taxi from Seoul to Suwon if he was just a little late. He went to the convenience store near his house and bought a triangular rice ball and a ramyun. He was hungry since although he had some bread for lunch, he didn't have anything for dinner. Thinking that going on a diet without a clear objective was really hard, he ate the rice ball and the ramyun.

After leaving the convenience store, he walked as he stroked his full belly. When he walked for a bit, he saw his house. He climbed the stairs and arrived in front of his door. Maru entered the passcode before opening the door.

“You're late, have you had dinner?”

He saw his mother coming out of the bedroom.

“I did. Go to sleep already and don't worry about your son.”

His mother nodded before closing the door. He took a light shower before going to his room. Parents were people who would worry about their children even if they were fully grown up if they couldn't see their children for a while. Her son, who was still a minor, was walking around late at night, so it was no wonder that she was worried. Even though he understood how she felt, he felt a little frustrated whenever he saw her peeking out with a tired face. She could be a little more at ease.

Usually, Maru would have read a book before sleeping, but there was something he needed to check today. He turned on the PC and opened a browser. He searched 'New Semester' and went to the TV station's website. He saw the internet forum for the viewers right next to the replay service.

Click.

After he clicked and the page loaded, he saw titles decorated with all sorts of special characters. It was practically unreadable by those not familiar with the internet.

"O...ur, Giwoo...oppa..."

He interpreted those words as he kept reading. When he read for a while, he learned a few familiar patterns, which gave him some speed. There were nearly 3000 posts, and there were new articles popping up even as he read them. Maru opened another browser before searching New Semester again. He scrolled down to find some articles about it.

"18% viewership, succeeding the lineage of youth dramas. Talented acting from fresh actors. Popular with students. Unexpected love from the soldiers. Oh, what?"

New Semester's broadcasting time was 5 p.m. When he thought about how the soldiers would finish their weekend work and then watch New Semester in their barracks, he pitied them. At the same time, he sighed when he thought that he would have to enter the military in a few years.

That was for later, so he decided to forget about the military for now. He looked at the rest of the articles. Most articles talked about three child actors, and there were quite a few articles that were written in an interview style. He didn't know about this. The difference in treatment of the lead actors and support actors was quite high. No one asked Maru to do an interview regarding New Semester.

After reading those interviews, Maru closed the page.

"Yeseul is unexpectedly popular."

There was Giwoo as well, but a lot of the articles talked about Yeseul. There was also an article talking about how the cosmetics she used in the drama became popular among middle school girls. It seemed that they gained satisfaction from following an actress that they could relate with rather than top stars - the article ended with that.

He thought that that was reasonable. The products used by top stars were mostly brand-name products and always had a high price tag. To middle school girls, who had thin wallets, imitating Yeseul, who felt much closer to them, was better than imitating top stars who they had to just admire like idols. The journalist also kindly said that the cosmetics were products from a relatively low-cost cosmetic company. There should be many girls who would buy the products after looking at this article.

Maru returned to the TV station website. He rested his chin on his hand before going to the next page. When he scrolled through about 10 pages, he understood what Dongho was talking about on the set.

They were all about Giwoo and Yeseul. There were especially a lot of requests that went 'please let them start dating'. There were articles cheering for Lee Chan, but it seemed that his popularity wasn't as high as Giwoo's since he grumbled quite a lot during the story.

Maru's opinion was that the rebellious Lee Chan was much more attractive than the bright and sincere Giwoo, but from the proportion of the forum posts, Giwoo was overwhelmingly ahead.

"The interpretation of the character became a little strange, I guess."

Through the screen, Lee Chan looked less like a rebellious kid and more like a nagging kid. This was after he fixed his acting upon the director's instructions. During the shoot, he even looked like an idiot with a loud voice. He could understand it since the charm of being rough was something that was really hard to express, but it did not change his thought that the character became a little lacking.

Maru clicked on the post titled 'Our Marriage(12)'. As this forum was a public TV forum, it allowed him to see the real name of the poster who seemed to be a girl. In that post was a novel with lots and lots of unreadable special characters in it.

Bringing a cup of water, Maru started reading it. The story was quite simple. Yeseul and Giwoo graduated and got married. What told Maru that she was quite an enthusiastic viewer was that she was bringing up props and lines that briefly flashed past in the drama. Looking at the comments, there seemed to be a lot of people cheering for her.

He suddenly thought of something and then pressed the back button to read the titles. There were quite a lot of posts written in a novel format. Surprisingly, they were all wishing for Giwoo and Yeseul to become a couple.

"Was this reflected in the script?"

He knew about the love triangle between Giwoo, Yeseul, and Lee Chan because he heard about it during the get-together before the first episode was shot. This drama was supposed to be a youth romance with Yeseul, who was ignorant about love, Giwoo, who was too shy to confess, as well as Lee Chan, who expressed himself without holding back. That was one of the main themes in New Semester.

And the confession just happened today. Maru looked at the script for episode 13.

Giwoo: What the other kids said, they weren't lying. I like you.

Yeseul: (Clasping her hands, looking a little uneasy) What do you mean. Wh-why are you..

Giwoo: (About to speak, but then looks at Yeseul's hands) I-I was joking. I just said it because I wanted to see how you react? How could I possibly like you? We are just close friends.

The conclusion was that it was just a joke, but in the first place, Giwoo wasn't someone brave enough to confess. Up until episode 13 at least, the character known as Giwoo was a well-rounded boy, but he was awkward when it came to love.

Maru thought about the scenes he shot today. He played a prank with Dongho to make Giwoo and Yeseul get closer together. The character known as Lee Chan was originally supposed to induce Dongho to do everything while watching everything from the back. He only stepped up to apologize in episode 8 because he had no choice. He wouldn't have apologized if things didn't blow up.

Yet that character started coming out to the front lines, as though he had become a cupid to connect Giwoo and Yeseul together. When he received the script, he thought that it was a way to express the

many facets of the character, but now that he thought about it a little more, this felt like the writer had given up on the character. His thoughts branched out. Just when did this all start...

Maru had a look at all of the scripts of episode 1 to episode 13.

Giwoo, Yeseul, Lee Chan. Were these characters made like this from the beginning? Or did something change mid way?

His thoughts reached back to the novel he just read. Maru left the scripts on the floor before sitting down. He grabbed his mouse and quickly started searching the posts. He mainly looked for those that were written in novel format.

“This is...”

In some of the short stories, Lee Chan had the role of tying Giwoo and Yeseul together. In those stories, only the smart aspect of Lee Chan was used to connect the two main characters. Although the method he used to connect the couple was different in every story, there was no difference in the fact that Lee Chan and Dongwook were at the center.

“Episode 6 has aired.”

Only when the episode about the teacher-in-training started would the character known as Lee Chan properly take root in the story. Doing pranks was just one way of showing himself off, and he was actually a character who would never do something that would bring himself harm. Lee Chan was a character who blamed the teacher-in-training’s lack of perseverance even as he apologized to her, instead of feeling sorry about it. Although it wasn’t explicitly expressed through his lines, his expressions and actions were enough to tell that Lee Chan wasn’t someone who just played pranks for fun. He was someone who thought himself to be equal to adults and acted as such; someone who hated being ignored, and even more despised others telling him to do things; someone who was at the peak of adolescence, but didn’t admit it. The fact that he didn’t step forward during most of the matters was also his own way of feeling smug.

‘The people that only watched up to episode 6 should know Lee Chan as someone who just shyly pulls off pranks.’

Once the 7th and 8th episodes aired, the writers of these short stories should get to know more about the character known as Lee Chan, but at the current point in time, there was no information given, so these short stories were written with the right level of knowledge of the story at this point in time.

Lee Chan the cupid.

Maru looked at the script for episode 13. Was the Lee Chan in that episode the same character as the Lee Chan in the 8th episode? He personally felt that two completely different people were borrowing Lee Chan’s name in these episodes.

The love missionary Lee Chan found in numerous short stories.

The minute change in Lee Chan’s character in episode 13.

He had a bad hunch, but he shook his head thinking that he was wrong.

The original author changed the personality of their character in order to use an idea from a novel written by fans? And so hurriedly at that?

Maru drank some water as he read those short stories.

On the first day of the shoot, Byungchan told him that she was the legendary writer that did 3 consecutive last-minute scripts. He also told him that she was a big-time writer who the staff members of the drama couldn't do anything about even though she changed her script three times in one day. When he heard those words, he just thought that she was really powerful as a writer.

But right now, that incident ticked his mind off. If it was a clear error, she should've just checked all of it at once and fixed them then. However, Byungchan said that she fixed it three consecutive times. Would a writer confident in their story stop the entire shoot and fix their script three times on the spot?

When he thought about that, Maru smiled bitterly and closed the website.

"Is that the problem?"

He looked at a mystery novel he was reading recently. It was a thriller/mystery about a woman who encountered trouble because she became the author of a bestseller by employing a ghostwriter, and how she solved those problems.

"I've read too many novels."

She was supposed to be a big-time writer. She should've changed the character because of clear intentions. If she was someone who would be swayed by the delusions that school girls wrote on forums, she would never have become a 'big-time' writer in the first place.

Thinking that he was fantasizing too much, Maru searched 'Writer Lee Hanmi' on the web portal. A woman with a bright smile popped up on the 'people' tab. Beneath that picture were numerous interviews and a list of her books.

"She looks younger than I thought."

He was thinking of a rather mature person since he heard that she wrote this drama to express the conflicts between generations, but she was a woman in her early 40s. As for her photo, she looked graceful to the point that she looked like an actress.

Maru yawned before clicking on an interview article. When he scrolled down as he read it, he came across the last answer. He crossed his arms and started reading it slowly.

-I do not look at the internet until the moment I finish the manuscript completely. That's what drives me to keep writing: having faith in myself and pushing forward with it. There's no one that knows my work better than me, so I believe that it's important to focus on that while writing. From time to time, some writers try to dissolve the ideas of others into their story because they think that feedback is important, but too many cooks will obviously spoil the broth. A writer must have confidence. I say this all the time when I give lectures. Have confidence in yourself to the point that you look arrogant. It's fine to do that when writing since the writer is god. Of course, I'm not saying that the opinions of others aren't important. I just want to emphasize that the opinion of others may be poisonous if you aren't at the center of your writing. Believe in yourself, and start writing. Then, the story will take you aspiring story

writers into a world of fantasy. Muse doesn't exist outside. Muse is inside you. Look inside and find him. Then maybe, all of you will be able to become writers. (Laugh).

Chapter 533

Looks like it's going to begin - she thought as she sat in front of the sitting table with the bread and coffee she bought from the bakery. She put down the laptop, which was her first treasure, before putting a plate and the cup of coffee on the table.

She opened the paper bag with the bread in it. The savory smell of freshly baked bread wafted upwards. She grabbed the bread before pulling it apart. The bread was split apart while showing off its spiderweb-like insides.

She munched on the bread as she turned on the TV. She would usually download most of the programs she wanted to watch on her laptop, but she always watched this specific program on TV, though, it was a re-run.

The title popped up on the screen. That family is suspicious. That title was good. Choi Haesoo thought that she should take note of it. She turned the volume up with the remote.

"It's the last episode."

She did hear that sitcoms were on the fall these days, and it seemed that they were discontinuing this series just half a year after it began airing. Considering that Soonpoong Women's clinic, which started off in 1998, had nearly 700 episodes now, sitcoms had gotten really short as of late. As the days changed and people's consumption patterns changed along with them, those long-running sitcoms might reach their ends.

"Is this country going to go with seasons now like other countries?"

Haesoo thought that it was still too early for that, but she did believe that things will start to change into season-based programs like foreign dramas. That was because ads earned more money that way. There was also less investment risk, so the investors should shift towards seasonal programs. Although there were loyal watchers right now and not that many channels, so they could still make a profit, but it was likely that the throne would have to be handed over to the internet soon. There were all sorts of videos floating around web storage services. When she saw the news that those websites that violated copyright laws earned tens of millions to even hundreds of millions of won, Haesoo believed that capital would start flowing into that place.

Sipping the cooled coffee, she watched the sitcom. When about 4 minutes had passed, a girl appeared, holding a spoon while knocking on her neighbor's door with an awkward smile on her face. Haesoo's smile thickened. Her daughter was cute today as well.

Her daughter had gone to the afterparty not too long ago. *She* looked rather disappointed and didn't say anything when she got home. When *she* said that she wanted to act in middle school, Haesoo told her to go ahead without the slightest hesitation. She also told *her* to do it properly if *she* was going to.

Her daughter surprisingly did it earnestly. It was to the point that Haesoo was worried that *she* was going to ruin her body. As a result of that, she was picked for a sitcom and managed to safely finish the last shoot as well. She was proud of *her*. What was so bad about being a single mother? It was okay as

long as she raised her daughter properly - that was what she had on her mind as she raised her child, but in one corner of her heart, she always wondered if her daughter lacked something because *she* was raised by a single parent. Thankfully, her daughter grew up properly. Haesoo didn't raise *her*, she just grew up. Perhaps *her* dream was to become an actress from the moment she visited Daehak-ro with her dad.

The coffee tasted a little bitter. Her daughter, who had briefly appeared on TV today yet again, left the scene with a grain of rice around her mouth. That hadn't changed until the end, so that felt rather unfortunate. *She* was a cute girl if she put on some makeup, though, that look of hers was cute as well. Haesoo was pretty sure that her daughter took after her when it came to her looks.

Looking at the 'thank you for your support until now' on the TV, Haesoo switched the TV off. It was time to work now. She put down the plate and the mug before turning on the laptop on the table. She ran the messenger program and the word processor.

"It's time to do work now."

The stain on the window, the laundry, the floor she hadn't cleaned since yesterday, as well as the rather bland-looking wallpaper had to all be ignored. The main enemy of a writer was not traveling that took a long time, but trivial jobs like that. Once she started on one thing, she would not be able to work that day anymore.

She exercised her fingers before starting to write the scenario. The romance novel she released at the end of last year had pretty good responses, so she decided to make a spinoff. She didn't know that a supporting character could be loved so much. Just as she was tapping on the ctrl key meaninglessly and cursing the white paper in her head, her messenger ringed. She usually turned the notifications to silent when working, but she had forgotten to do it this time. She could just ignore it, but Haesoo ended up clicking on that notification. Perhaps the fact that she hadn't turned the notification to silent was her subconscious trying to stop her from working.

"That's a name I haven't seen in a while."

A familiar name had a light next to it.

-Unni, can I see you?

She checked the message before replying.

-What's up for my dear famous writer to message a housewife with a kid.

-Are you busy?

She got a rather shy-sounding reply. Haesoo's eyes twitched. This person usually didn't act like this, as she was usually filled with confidence. Seeing her so careful with her words, Haesoo felt rather complex.

-What is it? Did something happen?

-Nothing. I just wanted to see you, unni.

Haesoo looked at the clock on her laptop. 12:40 p.m. She had eaten some bread, but she didn't feel full.

-Have you had lunch?

-Not yet.

-Come out. Let's go get something to eat.

-Thank you, unni.

-Why are you being so cheesy? Where should we meet?

-I'll go down to Suwon. Unni, you still live in Suwon, right?

-Yea, but since we haven't seen each other in a long time, let's meet somewhere good. I'll drive up to Seoul, so you treat me to some food, okay?

-Okay.

Haesoo changed her pants before putting on an indigo-colored cardigan. As for make-up, some sunscreen was enough. She had been living as a writer for 20 years and had become a woman who didn't care much about making herself look good.

"My girl, mom's going out to meet a friend. As for dinner, eat out with Maru. You know that mom's cheering for you, right?"

She muttered as she sent a text. She got a reply as soon as she sent it.

-What cheering! Are you going to be back late?

-Why do you ask? Were you going to do something with Maru if I'm late?

-Forget it, I shouldn't have asked.

Haesoo put her phone in her bag before leaving the house. She drove her car out of the apartment complex and started driving towards Seoul.

"I haven't been here in a long time."

It had been around 2 years. Haesoo smiled as she thought about the kid who cried a lot while writing when she was still a secondary writer. That kid had now become a well-known mini-series writer in the drama industry. Matters of the world were really unpredictable.

Haesoo drove all the way to Cheongdam-dong and got off in front of the place they promised to meet before calling her. It had been quite a long time since she called this number. They had been so close before, too. She felt that becoming negligent happened in a short time.

"Unni."

She took her phone off her ears when she heard the voice behind her.

"Lee Hanmi, haven't seen you in a long time, eh?"

"Unni, it's been a long time."

"Are you on a diet these days? You're so skinny. Though, you always have been."

“Unni, you look as healthy as always. That’s good.”

“That’s one thing I’m good at. But hey, are you really feeling ill?”

Haesoo touched Hanmi’s cheeks with both of her hands before pushing left and right in a joking manner. She thought that she would feel awkward, but it didn’t feel like that at all. She found Hanmi familiar as though there wasn’t a 2 year gap at all. She even felt rather embarrassed that she hadn’t called her first.

“Why are you so obedient now? You should shout ‘stop it!’ like you used to do.”

“Unni, I’m over 40 now.”

“Already? Nah, let’s not talk about age. I’m kinda scared of the fact that I’m 42.”

“Unni, you really haven’t changed, huh.”

Hanmi smiled faintly. Haesoo felt a little relieved when she saw that smile.

“Let’s go in.”

Hanmi guided the way. Haesoo lifted her head to look at the building. She was somewhat overwhelmed by the exterior of the building which was pitch black. After glancing at the signboard that said ‘House H’, she followed Hanmi inside.

“This place looks expensive.”

“I haven’t seen you in a long time, unni, so let’s get something good.”

“So big-time writers are different, huh.”

“Don’t put me on a pedestal.”

“Are you afraid that you’re going to fall?”

“Well, I might feel at ease if I actually fell.”

Haesoo stopped walking and looked at Hanmi. Hanmi became flustered and said that she was speaking nonsense.

“This place is really good. Unni, you should like it as well.”

Haesoo felt that she was trying to switch the topic. She decided to stay quiet for now. If this girl she hadn’t seen for a long time was not speaking about something, there should be a reason for it. And that reason should also be related to the reason she called her here today.

‘I just need to wait.’

She would probably talk about it if they ate some good food. It was probably her duty as the elder to calm down this uneasy-looking little sister. Haesoo stood right next to Hanmi.

“I’m going to eat a lot. You know how much I eat, right?”

“Go ahead. It’s fine even if you eat a lot.”

They were guided by the waiter to the 2nd floor. The tables on the 1st floor could be seen as she climbed up the stairs. The tables, which were placed regularly throughout the restaurant, were occupied by couples who looked their best, as well as middle-aged people who boasted their mature beauty. Haesoo looked down at her clothes. Perhaps she should have changed her clothes. She came here thinking that they were going to eat pig skin and drink soju like the old times.

They were led to a room with a curtain door around. She could see a bar on the other side. Although there were separate rooms here, it wasn't that the rooms were soundproof. In the first place, that was to be expected from how there was a curtain instead of a door.

"Order anything you like."

"Hey, you know I'm weak with English. You do the order. It's been a long time since I came to a place like this, so I don't know anything."

"Then I'll leave it up to the house. What about drinks?"

"I brought a car you know."

"But we haven't met in a long time."

"Looks like you really set your mind on it huh. Alright, I'll have to tell my daughter to sleep by herself tonight."

After ordering, Hanmi spoke again.

"I still can't believe that you got married and even had a kid."

"You feel jealous because a tomboy like me got married?"

"I thought you'd stay single your whole life."

"Hey, you are being quite strong even though we just started. Though, that's more like Lee Hanmi to me."

"Is your girl obedient?"

"Of course. I wonder who *she* takes after to be so smart. *She* does everything by herself and makes me sad at times. I wonder if I'm really a parent."

"You are way too blessed. A friend of mine told me that she regrets marrying every day."

"At times like that, she should just split up."

"You are really cool when it comes to things like that."

"Not as much as you, though."

Haesoo laughed as she looked at Hanmi. It felt like 20 years ago all over again. Haesoo was a senior in the creative writing department in college, while Hanmi was a freshman. Haesoo took a liking to Hanmi at a glance and dragged her semi-forcefully to her club, and they stuck together until they graduated. Everyone in the creative writing department knew the two alcoholic sisters of Dongchun university.

“What are you saying? I told you you peed on the blanket that day.”

“Hey, let’s set things straight. Was I the only one? What about you?”

“I didn’t.”

“Like hell. Should we gather everyone from the class of 83? Everyone else remembers except you.”

Haesoo laughed as she talked about old events. The tired-looking Hanmi returned to her bright expression as soon as they started talking about memories. When they were in a heated conversation, the food came out.

“I was just feeling hungry because of all the yapping, nice timing.”

“You still use the word yapping huh.”

“I blurt it out from time to time.”

After eating the pieces of complimentary bread, she ate the mysterious appetizer. It seemed like some fried jellyfish or something, and when she dipped it in sauce and ate it, the crispy texture and the slight acidity tasted good.

“Unni, you still write, right?”

“I do, every day. Magazines, magazines again, and then some novels, and sometimes congratulatory speeches.”

“A congratulatory speech?”

“Just once.”

“You are good at writing after all.”

“You are mocking me, aren’t you?”

Haesoo drank a sip of water before looking at Hanmi. Having returned to talking about reality, Hanmi was just fidgeting with her fork as though she had lost all of her appetite. Haesoo felt frustrated from just looking at her.

“What happened to you? I was waiting for you to say something, but this won’t do. I can’t wait.”

“It’s nothing....”

“Do you know what my girl used to say when I tried to take her to the dentist when she was young? I’m fine, it doesn’t hurt - that’s what she said. Your expression right now looks the exact same as hers. Didn’t you call me because you wanted to talk about it to me?”

Haesoo nearly pulled out her hair before moving next to Hanmi. She saw Hanmi closing her mouth firmly.

“Is it a man?”

“No, I don’t have a man.”

“Then what is it? Did you get scammed?”

“I would’ve gone to the police if that happened.”

“Then what is this problem that made the almighty Lee Hanmi so shy?”

After hesitation, Hanmi eventually spoke.

“Unni.”

“Yeah?”

“Have you seen my drama?”

“New Semester, was it? I did. Now that I think about it, that annoys me. You didn’t even tell me about this one, did you? When did things get so cold between us.”

“Sorry, unni.”

Hanmi lowered her head.

“I’m just joking. It’s my fault for not calling you when I’m the older one. Oh, and I’m enjoying the drama. It was good, you know?”

“Really?”

“Yeah. It’s just what I expect from a youth drama written by Lee Hanmi. Why are you talking about it all of a sudden? Don’t tell me you....”

Haesoo stared at Hanmi’s lips. A while later, those lips started moving again.

“What do I do? I can’t write anything.”

“This isn’t the first time, is it? Just think about the number of manuscript sheets we wasted trying to write a short story when we were young. A slump is just....”

“I ended up copying.”

“Copying? Copying what?”

Haesoo looked at Hanmi who closed her eyes.

Copy what?

She had an idea, but Haesoo intentionally suppressed that idea.

Chapter 534

She suddenly got a lot of time, so she walked into the fruit juice store in front of her school.

“You’re early today.”

The owner lady noted.

“We don’t have practice today. That’s why I was going to go home early and eat out with my mom, but I just got the cold shoulder. Oh, a strawberry smoothie please.”

She ordered before sitting down. The sitcom ended around a month ago. As for the afterparty, they held one the day before the last episode aired. When she started off, she was worried if she could handle it, but she managed to finish the last shoot without any big troubles.

‘Though, there were a lot of trivial events.’

Lee Miyoon. During the early days of the shoot, she trembled just by thinking about that name, but she didn’t feel anything now. Becoming used to being scolded was just that scary. Ever since she glared at Miyoon and snapped back, the number of scoldings she got increased, but that died down around two months before the end of the final shoot. She didn’t know whether that woman was fed up or was no longer interested, but it was a small victory on her part. Thanks to that, her mental stamina became a lot better.

“Here you go. Strawberry smoothie.”

“Thank you.”

She bit on the straw with her front teeth. If it was a month ago, she would be reading the script for the sitcom, but there wasn’t anything for her to do now. The acting club was also on break from practice today, so the only thing that waited for her at school was an empty practice room. Her classmates had all gone to cram schools.

‘I should go to college, right?’

The strawberry smoothie climbed up the transparent straw. A fresh strawberry taste spread out in her mouth, but she wasn’t able to savor that taste because she was fixated on the words ‘3rd year of high school’. When she was a 2nd year, only half of her class went to cram schools. The friend that sat next to her said that after school self study sessions were enough. However, ever since she became a 3rd year, the number of people going to cram schools increased a lot. When she headed towards the acting club after school, most of her classmates left the school with their bags. That was because the students that went to cram schools didn’t take self-study sessions after school. There were only around three or four people remaining behind.

Whenever she looked at those people, she thought about her own grades. Her school grades were about average. As she was aiming to enter the department of theater and film through early decision, she studied whenever she had time while still going to the acting club. Since the amount of time she invested was quite small, she couldn’t rank any higher, but she maintained her grades so that they didn’t fall below average. Back in 2nd year, she didn’t have any worries about that.

She naturally thought that her school grades were enough for the early admission and that she would boldly enter the department of theater and film through early decision. However, when she became a 3rd year student, and the sitcom ended, she started worrying. Would she really be able to pass the practical test?

She had confidence in her acting. She always believed that she could do well, and she put in the effort, having faith in the words that effort never betrays. As a result, she got to play the main character for the school play and did the sitcom as well. That was good. Everything went smoothly.

'But I'm starting to lack confidence.'

Phew - she sighed a little. If there was one thing that she felt while shooting the sitcom, it was that her acting had nothing special.

That right now was good - these were the words used by the director when praising an actor. She heard those words several times during the shoots. Of course, those words weren't directed at her, they were directed at other people. She had never even once heard the director say those words to her. Cut, okay, next. These three words were the only words she heard during the half-a-year that she spent with the director.

It wasn't that she was being arrogant when it came to acting. She thought that it was natural for there to be people better than her and that she should try to learn from them and aim to be like them. However, the fact that the director never praised her even once made her feel dejected.

Her peers who also appeared in the sitcom heard something from the director several times. If they did well, then they heard that, if they didn't do well, then they heard that as well.

'I really didn't hear anything.'

She realized the fact that she didn't even hear that she didn't do well. Was her acting that ordinary? Or was it horrible to the point that it wasn't worth mentioning at all?

On the other hand, Jiseok really shone throughout the shoots. The director also mentioned Jiseok's name several times, saying that he was good. Even the picky Lee Miyoong said that Jiseok was someone who knew how to act. That was the first time she saw Lee Miyoong praising someone like that.

Department of theater and film at Chung-ang University. That was her aim. It was one of the top three colleges for theater in the country. She had been aiming for that ever since she was in middle school. Jiseok also said that Chung-ang University was his first choice.

-There are lots of kids who are as good as me in the academy I go to. Try going to Film later. You'll roll your eyes if you see the kids preparing for the practical test. There are those that are practicing singing and even dancing. Oh, you know that Maru used to go there too, right? Try asking him.

Jiseok said those words to her.

Jiseok was praised by the director, and there were several people on a similar level as him aiming for Chung-ang University. As soon as she heard those words, the word 'study' came to her mind. She thought that perhaps she had a chance at regular admission since regular admission placed less importance on the practical test.

That was the reason she felt uneasy while looking at the people going to cram schools. Perhaps she should be getting her insurance ready for when she didn't pass the early decision?

She blinked and looked at the straw. The transparent straw had become a faint white. That was the result of her chewing on it.

“Ah, right. I saw the last episode of the sitcom. You looked pretty in it, you know?”

“Thank you.”

She replied with a smile, but she couldn't put any power into it. She returned the empty cup before leaving. Perhaps it was about time she seriously considered it. She would be able to increase the time she spent on studying if she reduced the time she spent at the acting club. Grade 3. That was the cutline for regular admission to the department of theater and film at Chung-ang University. She would have to take the practical test after that which would account for 70% of the admission test, but those that are really good at acting should have passed through early decision already, so the chance of passing that was definitely higher than early decision.

‘I got grade 6 in the mock exam I took in 2nd year.’

There was also the fact that she took the test lightly because she didn't think it was important, but even if she did take the exam seriously, the results wouldn't have changed that much. Raising her grade from 6 to 3 in 8 months clearly didn't seem like something she could do while participating in acting club activities. That could be seen from the kids remaining behind in class to study. Just as how she was putting her all into acting, those people were putting their all into studies. Yet their grades still did not rise.

Perhaps she should make some time to study after all. If she quit the acting club right now, she would have a considerable amount of free time. If she asked her mom to send her to a cram school, it wouldn't be impossible to raise her scores. She never thought herself to be dumb, so maybe there might be visible results if she invested as much time into studying as she did in acting.

“Cram school, huh. I heard that that place was really good.”

There was a cram school that the classmate sitting next to her praised endlessly. There was definitely potential if she raised both her school grades and prepared for the CSAT. She felt a little sorry towards the others in the club, but that was an inevitable choice, wasn't it? In order to go to a better college, it would be better if she focused on stu....

“What am I thinking?”

She looked at her reflection in the show window of a clothing store. A girl with a really dry, bland expression was standing there. She slapped her own cheeks loudly. She then started pulling those cheeks outwards. It hurt to the point that she screamed just a little. She felt the passersby staring at her.

She turned around completely to look at the show window. The reflection of herself in the window had a better expression now. She smiled brightly to the point that her lips ached a little.

Do not run away - she said those words with a muffled pronunciation. She started acting because she liked it. She dipped her feet in acting because she liked the vibe and the plays she used to watch with her father. Chung-ang University. It would be great if she got in, but it was no good if that was her dream. She was mistaken. What she had to chase was acting, not college.

If she focused on acting a little more than she did now, she should get results that fit her the best. She didn't want to look away from the important thing for better results. She should be able to pass if she

managed to find a way to pop out like Jiseok. If she didn't reach that standard, she would just simply choose another college.

Let's study if my acting isn't up to par - it horrified her to think about how her friends would be disappointed in her if they found out she was thinking such a thing. The opposite was true as well, if someone told her that they wanted to focus on studying because their acting wasn't up to par, she would've fought that person in anger. She would ask if acting only amounted to that for that person.

She turned her wrist to look at her watch. It was 20 minutes before 6. She felt drained of energy because of all the thoughts that flashed in her mind. It would be really depressing if she went home right now and then ate by herself. Just then, she was reminded of Maru. The text her mom sent as a joke mentioned that she should eat with Maru.

"I wonder if he's busy today."

Today was Wednesday. Since the drama shoots mostly occurred on weekends, he would be busy with his club activities if he was busy at all. Maru did say that he wouldn't play any roles in his 3rd year, but he also said that he would go to the acting club to look after his juniors and make some props, so it was likely that he was at school now.

She opened her phone but then hesitated a little. Was it really right for her to call when she was in a bad mood? She didn't want to become a naggy woman at all, so she was worried that she would start telling her worries to Maru if she met him right now.

"Should I just eat by myself today?"

Eating by herself. She realized that she had never eaten by herself ever since she entered high school. She would usually eat dinner with the acting club, and on days she didn't have practice, she would come home and eat with her mother.

'Ah.'

It suddenly came to her that her mother always ate dinner by herself. She suddenly felt very apologetic. The table at home was very large. Thinking about how her mother would eat by herself at such a big table, she felt a little sour in the nose. Today was very weird, so she decided to call today the emotional day. She texted her mom that she loved her. She got a reply back soon.

-Mom's drinking with a junior from college! Kya!!!!

"Kya?"

There were five exclamation marks after it. She wondered what that was about. Rather than that, drinking? Her mother was drinking? It was likely that something good had happened. After all, she only drank when there was something good happening.

-Did something good happen?

She sent that text. About a minute later, she got a reply.

-No!!! It's a total mess!!! Writers are shit, and my junior is so pitiful!!

“A total mess?”

She stared at her phone for a while before sighing. It seemed that her mother was drunk.

What to do now, then....

After hesitating a little, she sent a text to Maru asking if he was practicing.

-No, I'm doing a shoot.

-You're shooting the drama even though it's not the weekend?

-No, one of my juniors is going to apply for the film festival, so I'm helping out.

-You must be busy then.

If he was doing a shoot, it would be better if they didn't meet. Just as she was about to text 'do your best', she got a reply.

-I want to see you. Do you want to come over?

She wrote down 'I'm going to go home' before quickly erasing it and sending another text.

-Can I?

-Come. Let's eat dinner together.

That couldn't sound more welcome.

-Wouldn't I be a nuisance?

-An actress is coming so of course not. We're running out of actors actually. Everyone will like it if you come over, you know? Come quickly. I want to see you.

She folded her phone before turning around. The bus stop was on the other side of the road.

Chapter 535

“I think 3rd year classrooms are better, so let's have a look. I think different classrooms have different vibes. There isn't a class that looks beautiful though, does it? Since it's an engineering school and all.”

Sora went up to the 4th floor with her notebook. She visited the empty classrooms and wondered which place was the best. The classroom was supposed to show a healthy and energetic image as much as possible, because only then would the main character's sadness would be portrayed even more in contrast. She went into the 3rd year class 2 of the mechanical engineering department. She thought that it would be quite dirty since it was an all-boys class, but it was unexpectedly clean. There was even a cute tiger doll next to the frame for the class rules. It seemed to be hand-made from some sort of fabric.

The personal lockers at the back were decorated in various colors as well. There were even cushions on the backrests of the chairs. They were all hand-made.

“What the heck is this place? This is completely different from my class.”

Sora said that as she sat down on a chair. The seniors of the mechanical engineering department she saw when she came to school all looked menacing, yet their classroom was so clean and pretty. She even saw a purple ribbon on the curtain.

"This place. I think this place is good. What do you think, everyone?" Sora asked as she looked at the back.

The seniors of the film production club all nodded.

"Looks decent."

"Let's go with this place."

She felt like she would not come across a better place than this in the school. She tried visiting the other 3rd year classrooms just in case, but class 2 of 3rd year mechanical engineering was the best.

"Well then, let's start our monumental first shoot in this place. Oh, what do you think, Maru-seonbae?"

"It's good."

"Okay. Oh, when is that friend of yours coming?"

"Within 30 minutes at the latest."

"Then I guess we should get ready and start shooting. Minji, you are going to have to write down the things that happen here from now on."

Her classmate, Lim Minji, nodded before opening the notebook she was holding.

"When should I call our kids?" Maru asked.

Sora looked at the clock. It was 6 right now. She needed some time to get the position of the camera right and to position the props properly.

"I'll try to get everything ready by 6:30. Seonbae-nims, please close the curtains for now. It's supposed to be daytime, so it would be weird if it's dark outside. As for the lights, we'll try using just the fluorescent lights in the classroom and we'll add additional light with aluminum foil and a hand-held torch if necessary."

While the seniors of the club closed the curtains and arranged the desks, Sora moved the desk at the very back and put the tripod there. She connected the camera and turned on the laptop. At first, she was going to record on a 6mm film tape, but she changed her mind and decided to save it on the laptop since she heard that that made it easier to edit. The film festival allowed for DVDs so there wouldn't be a problem if she didn't record on 6mm film.

"Minji, you have to draw the structure of the classroom and the position of the camera, okay? We need that if we want to shoot additional scenes later down the line."

"Okay."

Minji was very good with her hands, so there was no need to worry about that. After they closed all the curtains, they turned on all the lights in the classroom. Since there was no natural light at night, the classroom was definitely darker than it was during the day.

Sora turned on the camera and checked the video on the laptop. The world portrayed by the lens appeared on the screen.

“Hm, Andon-seonbae. What do you think about this? It looks a little dark, right?”

She asked Ando, who stood next to her. After looking at the screen and the classroom alternately, Ando spoke,

“Jihoon, could you try standing in front of the camera? I want to see how dark it is.”

“Yes, seonbae.”

Jihoon, who was a 2nd year, stood in front of the camera.

Hm - Sora tapped on her chin. Perhaps due to the light coming from the ceiling, there was a shadow cast on the shadow. At first, it looked a little gloomy, but when she thought about it, it didn't feel that bad since the vibe it gave off felt close to how the main character felt.

“Jihoon-seonbae. Could you try standing over there?”

“About here?”

Jihoon stood in front of the TV in the classroom. Sora checked the screen before looking at Ando.

“What do you think, seonbae?”

“I'm not sure.”

“Just tell me how you feel about it.”

“Personally, I think it's good. The movie isn't exactly set in a good tone, right?”

“Right. The classroom itself looks cheerful, but the mental pressure experienced by the characters is quite considerable. The pathetic fallacy of the depressing lighting and the bullied kid might be a little cliché, but it makes it easy to tell, so the audience should have an easier time accepting it.”

“You're the director, so do whatever you want. We'll help you out from the side.”

Sora pondered for a while before deciding to shoot just like this. If the shadows were thick when they shot up close, they might have to use a reflector, but it seemed okay for now.

“Sora, I brought the vase from the faculty office.”

“Please put it next to the window.”

“Over here?”

“Yes!”

Sora moved to the back of the class before looking at the whole classroom. The white curtains brightened up the tone of the classroom. The vase also fit well with the scene and did not look awkward.

“The desks are a little too lined up. Let’s move them a little out of order.”

The seniors adjusted the distance between the desks. Just sitting down and standing up again messed up the order a little, which made it look much more natural. Sora nodded her head in satisfaction.

“Do you think this is okay?”

“Yes. This is fine.”

Sora looked at Ando. She felt happy when she saw him looking at the classroom with a smile.

When she first entered the film production club, she felt really bleak. She even felt hopeless when she looked at the seniors who had zero intentions of creating a film. She resolved that she should try to make a movie by herself and did her preparations, but the more she looked into it, the more she found out that a movie wasn’t something that could be made by one person.

It felt frustrating. She hated her seniors who had no interest in filmmaking despite the fact that they belonged to the film production club. That was why she tried to force them to do it, but she was willfully roasted by Maru. She thought that she had prepared a lot, but when a professional looked at her, it turned out that she hadn’t even scratched the surface.

What was funny was that once she suffered a defeat from Maru, she had much more leisure. She thought in the perspective of her seniors and looked back at her own hastiness.

Her seniors wanted to watch movies as much as she wanted to make them. Once she understood that difference in perspective and talked to them about it with her honest feelings, it surprisingly turned out that they actually had something in common. Even though her seniors said that they had no interest in making films, they knew too well about what made a movie look good. They talked about movies for hours. What content was good, what video was good - they talked about such things for half a day. Sora found out at that time that her seniors also loved films.

The day after that, Sora heard from her seniors, including Ando, that they should try to make a movie together. Due to the unexpected answer, Sora ended up bursting into tears right there. It was at that time that she realized that a person could cry from being happy.

“Seonbae, it’s fun, isn’t it?”

“We haven’t even started anything yet. We should look for fun once we get started at least.”

“What do you mean we haven’t started? We got everything ready. That means we are halfway done. So tell me. It’s fun, isn’t it?”

She persistently asked. Ando eventually nodded. Sora asked the same question to the 2nd year seniors as well. Everyone smiled awkwardly before saying that it was fun.

“See? I told you making films is fun. It would’ve been great if you had helped me out from the beginning. Anyway, you should listen to me from now on, okay? That’s your punishment for making your junior sad!” Sora said as she placed her hand on top of the camera.

“Haha, I wonder who it was that burst into tears and thanked us.”

“Fine, you’re the boss. I’ll do everything you say, so give me something proper to work on.”

“Get yourself together. Since we’re doing this, I want the prize.”

Sora’s nose twitched when she heard the words from her seniors.

“Don’t worry. I’ll get a prize, no, the grand prize. If we get the money, we’ll go and eat out together, okay?”

“Sounds good!”

“Let’s go to a buffet!”

“I like sushi.”

Sora tried capturing the figures of her seniors on camera. It felt good. This movie felt like it was going to go well.

“Maru-seonbae. I think we can start now.”

“Then I’ll go up to the 5th floor now. I’ll call 10, okay?”

“Yes!”

Maru left the classroom.

“We’ll get our uniforms as well.”

“Yes, please do that.”

The two 2nd year seniors left the classroom. Since Woosung High didn’t have a school uniform, she thought about shooting in casual clothes, but they decided to wear uniforms to give a sense of unity.

“I’m surprised you got them. You didn’t buy them by chance, right?”

“I got them from my middle school friends. I had to make a lot of calls, you know? Fortunately, everyone had theirs lying around. They gave me permission when I told them I’ll give them back after washing them. It’s all thanks to my personal connections.”

“Personal connections, yeah right. You really don’t change, huh.”

“That’s a compliment, right?”

“Yes, it is.”

Sora smiled at Ando’s words. A while later, Maru brought ten people from the acting club. They had picked these ten out beforehand.

“Ah, but what happens if the uniforms don’t fit?” Sora wondered as she looked at the members of the acting club who just came in.

“Only the ones that are in the frame need uniforms that fit. Hm, Chihwan, I don’t think you’ll fit any,” Maru said.

Sora looked at the boy called Chihwan. He was someone over 180cm in height. There wasn't a school uniform that fitted a boy that tall.

"Seonbae-nim, don't abandon me."

"I can't help it."

"Ah, Maru seonbae-nim. Should I cut my feet off?"

"Lunatic, stop talking nonsense. Uhm, Sora. Is there a uniform that fits him?"

"Hm, I do have a uniform I got from a pretty big guy, but I'm not sure. This guy's very tall too."

"It's not 'this guy', I'm Ahn Chihwan. Also, if I fold my shoulders inward like this, I should be able to wear one."

Chihwan curled his body inwards with a frown. Maru pulled back Chihwan's neck from the back. Sora giggled as she looked at those two. They were a funny duo.

"Here they are."

"Thank you for these."

She laid out the uniforms that her seniors brought. 8 of them had perfect fits, but the other two were a problem. Chihwan didn't fit into a uniform as she had expected, and one other person, a girl, didn't fit because of her large build.

'Well, the one that lent me this uniform was really skinny.'

No, rather than skinny, she was practically just skin and bones.

"Aram, I don't think you'll fit either."

"Why? I can wear this."

"The uniform will rip if you wear it."

"What do you mean rip? You're being really offensive you know, seonbae? Here, look!"

The girl named Aram tried putting her arm into a sleeve, and just that was enough to make the sleeve stretch out dangerously. Sora groaned and narrowed her eyes. Her seniors standing next to her had similar expressions.

"Why are you looking at me like that? I said I fit! Here, look. If I put my other hand in like this...."

Aram ended up putting both of her arms through the sleeves. Sora subconsciously placed her hands in front of her eyes. She felt like the clothes were really going to rip.

"...Won't it fit?"

Aram tried twisting her shoulders in various ways, but the buttons never met their buttonholes. Maru tapped on Aram's shoulders.

"There's no way."

Aram clicked her tongue before taking off the uniform. Sora sighed in relief after looking at the uniform. Fortunately, nothing ripped.

“But who was going to do the delinquent girl 1?”

She had Maru pick for the roles other than the main character because that was more efficient.

“Her.”

Maru pointed at Aram.

Sora had a hunch that would be the case. Sora bit her lower lip and fell into thought. The role of the delinquent who bullied the main character was quite important. She had to look like a student, but also feel evil and hateful at times. The fact that Maru recommended her meant that she was pretty good, so it would be quite a pity to leave her out because of the uniform.

“There’s no one to borrow it from though.”

Just as she thought about buying one, someone’s phone rang. It was Maru’s. After taking the call, Maru left the classroom and went downstairs.

‘Ah, his friend is here?’

He did say that someone who could help was coming. Maru came back a while later. Behind him was a girl who had long hair and a short stature. *She* was wearing a uniform, but it didn’t belong to any school she knew of.

‘It’s a girl?’

She thought that Maru was talking about a boy since he was talking about a friend. Maru brought in the girl who awkwardly stood in the corridor.

“Oh! Unni!”

Aram seemed like she knew *her*.

Sora quickly scanned the girl standing next to Maru. *Her* body figure was small, but her limbs were really long. *She* was quite skinny as well. *She* looked like *she* could fit the uniform in her hands.

‘It should be fine since we’re just getting a group shot, right?’

After organizing her thoughts, Sora asked about it immediately,

“Uhm, Maru-seonbae! Can your friend try this on?”

She offered the new girl the uniform first.

Chapter 536

She looked at the uniform in *her* hands once before looking at the girl who looking at *her* with a bright smile on her face. Perhaps this was what it meant when a person looked ‘blindingly bright’. Her eyes were so sparkly that instead of making *her* question why she had to wear this uniform, she just kept thinking that she should wear it. *She* came to herself and looked at Maru who was standing next to her.

“She’s a bit reckless.”

“Well, I get that.”

“Sora. At least explain to her what this is about. Don’t just ask her to wear something out of the blue. You’re supposed to be the director.”

Director? *She* looked at the girl. Her name seemed to be Sora.

“That’s true. I was looking at you thinking that that uniform would fit you perfectly, so I ended up saying that without thinking. I’m Kang Sora, and I’m directing this film. You know that we’re shooting a film, right?”

“Yes, I heard about it.”

“Oh, don’t speak politely. You must be a 3rd year if you’re a friend of Maru-seonbae’s, and that makes you an unni. Unni!”

Sora emphasized that word. *She* also briefly introduced herself.

“But I think I saw you somewhere before.”

Sora tilted her head before exclaiming.

“‘That family is suspicious’, am I right? You appeared in that one! U-uhm, that’s right, Wansook!”

Wansook. That was the nickname of the character *she* played in the sitcom. Although that character had a real name, *she* was called by that nickname more often than she was called by her real name, and after the 10th episode, she was never called by her real name. Everyone at the shoot called her Wansook as well, so it was a familiar name for *her*.

“Ah!”

“She is.”

Everyone around started recognizing *her*. *She* made an awkward smile.

“Oh my god! So both of you are on TV? That’s awesome.”

She looked at Sora who grabbed her hands while smiling brightly. Perhaps *she* would have a similar face if she picked up a 10,000won bill on the street. *She* coughed slightly when Sora looked like she had picked up a treasure, but Sora did not let go. In fact, she scanned *her* even more closely.

“Uhm....”

“Unni! Today’s our first shoot.”

“Oh, really?”

“Also, there’s a really attractive role for you here, do you want to try?”

“Me?”

“No, you must do it. This is called fate. I already have a premonition. The fact that that uniform fits you perfectly is proof of that.”

“I haven’t even tried putting it on though....”

“No! I’m sure of it. It will definitely fit you.”

“Moreover, she appeared on TV, so her skills could be vouched for.” Sora made an evil grin as she said that to herself in a small voice.

She pressed her lips together. *She* felt dizzy because of the storm brewing in front of her. *She* felt like she would accept whatever the girl in front of her said at this rate, so she stepped backwards for now. Sora approached *her* with a disappointed gaze. *She* quickly moved behind Maru. *She* needed a shield. This girl was somewhat scary.

“Calm down. Also, Aram is going to play that role,” Maru said.

“I don’t care if it’s unni who plays the role.”

Aram smiled and followed up. *She* looked at Aram. What *she* found out through the conversation just now was that she was taking something away from Aram.

She tensed her eyes before walking forward. *She* then gave the uniform back to Sora.

“What is it?”

“If there’s someone who has already been chosen to play the role, then use that person. A director must not lose the trust of the actors. I don’t feel good about it either.”

Sora blankly stared at *her* after taking the uniform. She just returned a firm gaze back to her. An actor always had a desire to act. Aram was also an actress. It was unthinkable for *her* to take away Aram’s role when she wasn’t here to play the role in the first place.

“Unni,” Sora spoke.

She couldn’t predict what was next, so she paid attention to Sora’s lips.

“You’re so cool.”

A smile returned to Sora’s face. Sora moved even closer to *her*. *She* flinched before taking a step back.

“You are right, unni. I was wrong. Uh, Aram....”

Sora’s lips twitched as she looked at Aram. Aram, who saw that, spoke,

“I’m a 2nd year.”

“Then, seonbae! Sorry about that Aram-seonbae. I was too fixated on the uniform, so I didn’t think things through.”

“Forget it. I’m not someone that gets angry at something like that. Also, unni, I really don’t mind. I’m only doing this because Maru-seonbae asked me to, I don’t really want the role that much. In fact, I

want you to do it. You were really cool in Myunghwa High's play. I want to see that again. Also, the uniform doesn't fit me, unfortunately."

Aram shrugged.

She looked at Maru.

"Weren't the roles decided?"

"Just the main character. As for the rest, we decided to decide on the rest while shooting today. Aram's role was a delinquent, but now that I look at you, I think you'll do a fine job too."

"What do you mean by that?"

"I mean that you look really gentle."

She was about to punch Maru's waist, but she stopped after seeing that there were many people around her. However, everyone was already looking at *her* clenched fist with awkward smiles on their faces. *She* smiled wordlessly before loosening her fist.

"You aren't going to hit me today?"

Maru was being really spiteful today. *She* decided to record it in her mind. One punch to the stomach. *She* turned her head around to face Sora.

"How are you going to use someone who knows nothing about this?"

"We were just going to get the background shot and the group shot. Oh, and test the camera too. Since the shoot overlaps with the acting club's practice hours, I don't have much time. Plus, other than Maru-seonbae, there's no one who's memorized the lines. I was planning to test the people recommended by Maru-seonbae and decide the roles that way. That's when you came in, unni."

Sora gave *her* back the uniform with a smile.

She stared at the uniform.

"Also, I'm not going to have you play Aram-seonbae's role. I'm going to get a uniform that fits her and shoot it that way. Instead though, it will look quite awkward if there's an empty seat when we get the group shot. You just need to wear this uniform and sit down as an extra. Can't you do that? It's just for memories!"

Sora widened her eyes and approached *her*.

"Shouldn't that be fine? I think it'll be good if I can shoot with you."

As *she* was hesitating, Maru approached her and talked to her in a small voice. *She* sighed slightly before accepting the uniform. Sora cheered loudly.

"So I just have to sit here without doing anything, right?"

"Yes! That's fine. You're pretty so just that will be enough to make the scene look good. Well then, everyone. Please get changed. We'll start the shoot now!"

She took the uniform and went to the bathroom to change. The skirt was a little short, but it was nothing unwearable.

"It suits you perfectly."

Aram said as she stood in front of the mirror. *She* checked herself in the mirror and left the bathroom, only to see Maru standing opposite to her.

"It suits you."

"Isn't it a bit short?"

"Girls these days all wear it like that. Rather than that, it's quite interesting to wear the same uniform as you."

"Should we take a photo together to commemorate?"

She took out her phone. Aram, who was watching, said that she'd take the photo and took the phone from *her*.

"You are too far apart. Get a little closer together."

Just as *she* was about to say that she should just take it, a hand grabbed *her* hand. It was Maru's. The distance between them closed to the point that a paper wouldn't fit between the two. *She* widened her eyes in surprise before smiling in resignation and then hugged Maru's waist.

"Whoo, the two of you look hot."

After taking the photo, Aram gave *her* the phone back. *She* checked the photo.

"Looks good," Maru said.

"Isn't my face a little too big?"

"You just have a big head."

After poking the grinning Maru on the waist, they returned to the classroom. *She* was originally just here to watch, but now she had changed uniforms and was getting ready to shoot. It didn't feel unpleasant though. Although it was just a background shot, *she* felt good shooting with Maru. This was the first time this happened since the amateur acting class during the winter two years ago.

"Uhm."

She turned around when she heard a voice. A rather tall boy was looking at her shyly.

"Yes?"

"Are you perhaps Maru seonbae-nim's girlfriend?"

"Eh?"

When she blinked at the sudden question, Maru, who was talking to Sora, came over and grabbed the tall guy by the ear before dragging him into a corner. The big kid flailed his arms in the air and shouted "Please look at me in a good light! I'll do my best!" before being dragged off. For some reason, it looked

funny so *she* chuckled while covering her mouth. There seemed to be a lot of interesting folk around Maru.

“Who was that?”

She asked Maru when he returned.

“Don’t take interest. He’s a tiring guy.”

“Why? He looks like an interesting kid.”

“He’s a stalker. That’s what this is about.”

“Stalker?”

She tilted her head and looked at the big kid standing in a corner. She met his eyes and he smiled back like a puppy. I’m Ahn Chihwan - he said to *her*.

“Hm, usually, people sit according to height, so can you sit like that for now?”

They sat according to Sora’s arrangement. *She* sat at the very back, while Maru sat at the very front.

“Please act like there’s a teacher in front of you for now.”

She opened the book that Sora handed out and pretended to study. When *she* looked at the book, she felt a little disturbed because it reminded her of college, but then she remembered that it was just a shoot and calmed her expression. The boy holding a camera slowly moved and started the shoot. It wasn’t that the entire class was in the frame. It seemed that he was shooting just the first and second columns from the left. The boy walked past *her*. There was a long black cable attached to the camera which was connected to the laptop that Sora was looking at. *She* looked at Sora’s expression through the corner of her eyes. Sora’s eyes as she looked at the screen looked very serious.

“Cut. The person on the 3rd and 4th seats, I can see that you’re being conscious of the camera. I want you to look more natural. Let’s do that one more time.”

“Sora, you don’t need to clap the slate?” Maru asked from the front.

“It’s a cut I’m going to add in the middle, so I’m not planning to use a slate for this one. I’m just going to get a few group shots to use in between scenes.”

Maru nodded before looking at the front. He looked quite serious. *She* also sat up. *She* started this shoot due to a coincidence, but since she started it, she didn’t want to do it awkwardly.

‘I need to experience as many things as possible so that I will gain individuality in my acting and have others praise me.’

After uttering a short breath, *she* grabbed the pen on the window sill. *She* slightly tilted her head like she usually did and started writing things down. Since there was supposed to be a teacher at the front, *she* also had to look forward from time to time. This time, the camera was shooting from the front. Unlike when the camera just shot the back of *her* head, she had to mind her expression this time as well. *She* felt a little tense when she thought that this was someone else’s work.

“Good. This time, we’re going to get an overhead shot. Ando-seonbae! Please get up on the desk over there and shoot from there.”

A shot was taken from the top of the lockers, from the top of the window sill, from the top of a chair, and even from the top of the TV box.

“I think that will do for now.”

She sat up before looking at the clock. It was just going past 8.

“Sorry for having you do all that when I called you out to eat dinner,” Maru approached *her* and said.

She shook her head. Her heart, which was quite complex due to college problems and acting, calmed down a lot during the shoot. Just like how people were necessary to soothe wounds caused by people, perhaps acting was necessary to solve problems related to acting.

“It was fun. It was also good to see some interesting people.”

“That makes me feel a little better. But are you okay with the time?”

“It’s fine. I’ll be by myself even if I go home tonight, so I might as well play around here. Ah, well I guess it’s not exactly playing, huh?”

“Just play around.”

Just as *she* smiled faintly, Sora spoke after looking at the screen for a while.

“This time, we’ll shoot a scene where everyone throws things at the main character’s head.”

She couldn’t understand what it was about at first.

“Throw things?” *She* asked Maru.

Maru brought the script next to Sora and showed it to *her*.

“Can I see it?”

“You’re helping out. Of course you can.”

She nodded before looking at the script. As it wasn’t that long, it didn’t take *her* long to finish reading it.

“So that’s what this is about. So you are being bullied?”

“Yeah. Suits me, doesn’t it?”

She shook her head. That was something she didn’t want to admit even as a joke. Maru smiled faintly before showing *her* the back of his head.

“Aim properly. Also, no sharp objects.”

“Should I throw a mechanical pencil?”

“I said no sharp objects.”

Maru returned to his seat. *She* split pieces off the eraser she was holding. At Sora's signal, *she* threw the eraser bits. The camera that shot Maru from up front moved up and down. "We'll take multiple angles this time as well. Oh, should we rest for 10 minutes before that? Now that I think about it, you've been sitting all this time. Let's start after a 10 minute break!"

At Sora's words, the students stood up and headed towards the bathroom. *She* also stretched her arms before standing up. Just as *she* was about to open the window to get some air, she saw Sora checking the laptop screen. *She* cautiously approached Sora and asked.

"Can I have a look as well?"

Sora grinned before turning the laptop around.

"Of course you can."

She sat on a chair and looked at the screen.

On the paused screen was Maru, curled up into a ball.

"Unni."

"Yeah?"

"Look at Maru-seonbae's eyes. Oh my god. If I don't get the grand prize with this, I'll just consider myself horrible at directing."

She clicked on the play button as she said those words.

Chapter 537

The Maru on the screen had buried his head in his arms. This was when all sorts of trash flew at him from behind. After silently taking the trash, Maru slightly raised his head. All sorts of trash obstructed the frame and slid down Maru's head before falling down. It seemed like rain. Maru quietly looked at the pieces of trash that fell on his desk. After slowly brushing away the countless bits of trash on his desk, he looked in front of him. His gaze was directly looking at the camera lens. She couldn't turn her head away from the screen.

Maru's eyes did not look depressing. He wasn't frowning and he didn't groan either. He just kept his mouth shut. He just looked at the lens expressionlessly with his pupils widened to the point that it looked merciless. A rain of trash fell in between him and the lens. She had the thought that the person watching this video would subconsciously hold their breath. It just had such a strong appeal. Maru, who was staring at the lens, slowly lowered his head back to his crossed arms. The rain of trash was still falling.

Tap - Sora pressed the spacebar and stopped the video. The white noise flowing out of the speakers stopped. Whee - the laptop fan started turning in order to dissipate the heat.

"I just chanced on it by luck," Sora said.

Luck. She understood the meaning of that immediately. She would have been truly surprised if Sora had shot that scene intentionally. The actor looking at the lens, the falling bits of trash, and a noise that was

nearly silent. The combination of those bland elements provoked a fearful sense of sympathy within her. If it was just Maru in the frame, no one would have figured out the meaning behind this footage. Perhaps they would have just felt awkward from the actor looking at the camera. However, the trash being thrown from behind, as well as Maru's bland reaction combined into one to create a gloomy atmosphere. The disharmony of ordinariness. By themselves, these elements were nothing special, but combining them provoked the senses of the viewer.

"I only asked them to throw some trash from behind."

"You really didn't ask them to do this?"

"I really haven't done anything seriously since today's the first day. So, I really didn't want anything much...."

The only direction was to throw some trash, and if Maru stayed down, the intention behind that might have been unclear. The video only had meaning because Maru looked at the camera. *She* felt as though Maru was talking to her. Are you going to pretend to never have seen me like the others? - like that.

"Maru-seonbae!"

Sora called out to Maru, who was peeking outside the window. Maru approached her.

"This, this was really good."

Sora played back the footage. After checking the footage, Maru nodded.

"I was planning to go with this image for the main character before he changes. Are you okay with that?"

"Of course I'm okay with it. If there's something better, you can try that one, but please go with this if you don't have anything else. I was originally going to have him frown a little more and express his pain, but I changed my mind after looking at your eyes. The expressionless one looks much better."

"If the main character is at the point where he refuses to go to school and is even thinking about suicide, he has pretty much given up on everything. There is no resistance in a person who has put everything down. They're a lifeless being. They get pushed, they get pushed, they get pulled, they get pulled."

Sora opened the notebook next to the laptop and started writing. She took a step back and looked at Maru and Sora. Both of them were doing what they had to. That made *her* think - what am I doing here?

The Maru on the screen was doing an act that the director did not intend for. This meant that he researched just that deeply into the character. The acting club, the drama, and even a film shoot to help his junior. He had such a tight schedule, yet he did not slack in any of them. His gaze and that output might have been a coincidence, but his acting definitely was not. If she showed something like that during the sitcom shoot, would the director have told her something other than just 'cut'?

"Maru-seonbae. I want to try doing this scene as practice. Do you think you can do it?"

She returned to her seat and sat down after looking at Sora and Maru looking at the script together for a while. Her mind felt complex again. Now that she thought about it, she felt like this when she saw Maru's acting for the first time when they were 1st years. Maru, who went on stage, had a force that

attracted people's gazes. A power that made the viewers keep looking at him. That was an incredibly important talent for an actor. Talent - she erased that word from her mind and shut her lips. It wasn't that she denied the very concept of talent. People definitely had their differences. There definitely lived a person who could reach heights she could never reach in her life very easily. That was the difference in talent. However, wasn't it so sad to just use that single word to accept all the differences in this world?

'And it's not like talent is everything.'

To show off a character outside the director's intentions was not in the realm of talent. Analyzing and understanding the character to bring out a new face of that character should be the result of countless repetitions. Trying this one, then that one - a character's depth and variety was only completed after numerous trials and errors.

She looked at Maru, who returned to his seat with the script. She had seen Maru's script a couple of times in the amateur acting class. It was filled to the brim with text to the point that she subconsciously exclaimed, nay, groaned. Maru analyzed the character in so much detail that it made her wonder if it was really necessary to go that far. No, that was no longer in the realm of analysis. It was in the realm of creation. A character that existed in the script didn't have a date of birth, height, or even a precise appearance. Maru came up with a few possible characteristics based on the clear facts stated in the script, and based on those characteristics, he made new false truths. Under the main points, numerous trivial traits came about, and those traits multiplied to the point that there was no blank space on the script. Maru completed his character by listing a countless number of varieties that a character could be and then selected what he thought was right among them. If the character he completed didn't receive a good evaluation, he brought out a different combination, and after two or three tries, he got a good reaction from the coach - Yang Ganghwan.

Maru's method was well-known among the people that were a part of the amateur acting class. Everyone knew about it, but they did not imitate him. There were a few people that tried, but they soon gave up. At a glance, selecting a few traits to create a character might look efficient, but the path to that efficiency stage was way too difficult. Analyzing a character was definitely not something fun to do. Listening to the history of a real person was boring enough, so there was no way it was fun to create a false history of a character. The more traits there were, the higher the possibility of two traits conflicting with each other, and one couldn't just increase the possibilities endlessly because of that.

She also tried to analyze in depth the character she played in the play for her school acting club, but she wasn't able to do it like Maru. When she spent hours, or even days increasing the number of traits, the thoughts 'this should be enough' and 'is there a need to go this far for a character that I will never see again after this?' filled her mind and she immediately let go of her pen. The moment satisfaction poked its head up, she couldn't find a reason to continue.

She wondered what Maru's script was like right now. She wanted to have a look but decided not to. She felt like she would fall into despair the moment she saw the script filled with text in all of the gaps. He kept forging his way forward, while she kept shaking on the spot. The unease stemming from that difference made her tremble.

More earnestly, with more effort, harder - she clenched her fist. She suddenly felt as though Maru was infinitely far away from her. Acting had always been something fun for her, but it pained her right now.

Even though she knew that Maru's acting wasn't good because of talent, she felt jealous when she thought about the eyes she saw just now. She remembered something she saw in a book.

-I feel the most tragic when a genius says 'I tried my hardest'. I don't feel tragic while looking at the genius, but when I realized my subconscious attitude to devalue his effort.

She brushed her hair upwards with both of her hands in order to shake off the line from a book that echoed in her head. She suddenly felt sorry towards Maru. She also felt frustrated at herself for not being as honest as Maru. Maru sometimes said that there's nothing that ruins a relationship more than being too honest, however, Maru always showed the right amount of honesty, and relieved her with non-fancy words.

She looked at Maru's back. Before she came here, she had made a resolve. She made a resolution to not complain while telling him about her worries. She made a resolution to overcome this by herself.

The shoot continued. They shot the classroom scene from multiple angles. When about 40 more minutes had passed, Sora said that they should try shooting the next scene. It was probably the scene that Sora asked Maru whether it was possible.

She sighed a little before standing up. Since this wasn't a group scene, there should be no need for her to keep sitting down. She wanted to get some fresh air. She should calm down once she left the classroom and cooled her head a little - she thought such as she walked towards the back door when Maru grabbed her hand.

"Help me out a little."

"You want my help?"

"Yeah. Let's do this scene together."

Maru gave her a script. She hesitated a little before slowly opening the script. Just as she had expected, it was filled with text everywhere. Words filled every corner of the page as though they wouldn't allow the tiniest bit of blank space. She felt a little dizzy as she read the script. This was the scene where delinquent 1 bullied the main character. She had to press on Maru's head and say words that she would usually think three times before saying.

"But Aram was supposed to play this role."

"Aram went up to practice."

Now that she thought about it, Aram couldn't be seen anywhere. Well, there wasn't a spare school uniform, so she couldn't exactly participate in the shoot. However, she couldn't easily give the okay. She was afraid. She felt as though she would be overwhelmed with guilt if she acted with Maru right now.

"Can't you... do it with someone else? You just need someone to say the line, don't you?"

Maru stared at her. She did not avoid his gaze. She wanted to, but she felt like Maru would misunderstand if she did so. She wanted to portray to Maru that she simply didn't want to do it.

"I want you to do it."

“Uhm....”

Just as she was about to shake her head, Maru winked at her.

“I know that my handsome face is giving you a lot of trouble, but it’s about time you got used to it, don’t you think?”

“It’s not like that.”

“Then what’s the problem?”

“It’s not that there’s a problem but....”

At that moment, Maru took a step closer to her before looking her straight in the eyes.

“Then do it. You can do it.”

It was a declaration. It wasn’t a request nor an offer. It was just a one-sided proclamation. She felt her heart thump loudly when she heard those words. While she was a little angry at Maru’s overbearing attitude, she also felt his boundless trust in her, which made her laugh. She didn’t know whether to get angry or laugh, so she decided to grab the script.

“You know what will happen to you if you tell me I’m bad, right?”

“It hurts when you say something like that to someone who was trampled on several times by Myunghwa High. Well then, please take care of me, my actress.”

She bit her lower lip before opening the script.

‘Fine, I’ll do it. I just have to do it, don’t I?’

She decided that she would become a really scary delinquent.

Chapter 538

“Oh my word, ‘my actress’? Maru-seonbae, I didn’t hear wrong, did I?” Sora asked as she looked at Maru.

“You want me to say that to you too?”

“No. I wouldn’t be able to sleep at night if I heard something like that. Because of all the goosebumps.”

“Dating is half being childish and half lying.”

“I had my guesses, but you were dating after all?” Sora awaited confirmation as she looked at the unni sitting at the front.

Maru nodded.

“No wonder.”

“Isn’t it strange that you didn’t know about it before? Where can you find another couple that suits each other more?”

“Wow, where did the serious Maru-seonbae on this screen go? Why is there a cheesy man in front of me?” Sora asked as she pointed at the monitor.

Maru winked before walking towards that unni. Sora laughed and then started getting ready to shoot.

“Ando-seonbae.”

“Yeah?”

Ando, holding the camera, came towards her. It now looked natural for him to support the camera with his right hand. She was very worried when she first gave him the equipment, but now he handled the camera better than anyone else in the film production club.

“We’re going to shoot this scene.”

“I thought you were only going to do the group shots and some tests.”

“Yes. This is one of the tests. I want to try capturing more of the main character that Maru-seonbae is acting out. For now, please shoot it from the front since it’s important to get a look at his facial expression.”

“I just need to focus on shooting Maru?”

“Yes. We aren’t going to use this cut, so don’t worry about the angle and just try to get as much of Maru-seonbae’s expressions and gestures that you can.”

Ando said he understood before walking in front of Maru with the camera. Sora also walked over to Maru with the script.

“Unni, you need a script too, don’t you?”

“No, it’s fine. I memorized it already.”

“Already?”

“It wasn’t long.”

Sora exclaimed in surprise before taking back the script. She managed to learn several lines in just 15 minutes?

‘The people from the acting club couldn’t do that though.’

Sora thought back to the audition at the acting club that happened a while ago.

“Do you have anything specific you want me to do?” Maru asked.

Sora broke out of her contemplation before explaining what was on her mind.

“You said that the main character should be in a lifeless state, right? Please act based on that for now. After that, I want you to express the mental state of the main character that I originally had in mind. Of course, I understood that the character you showed through the camera was much more appealing, but I want to be safe. A person’s charm isn’t something that you can know about before you see it in person. I want to go down the route where you bring out the stereotypical bullied kid more tastefully.”

“Alright, I’ll do that.”

She didn’t say anything to unni. Since she was here to just fill the role for now, there was no need to ask her to do anything.

“Then please get ready, the two of you. We’ll start as soon as you’re ready. The rest of you, please sit down on your seats and act. Show me how you would act when you see someone get bullied. Of course, you can’t try to stop the bullying. Either you just keep watching or you enjoy it. Choose one of these two.”

Sora watched the acting club members sitting down before returning to the laptop. The camera held by Ando was turned on and then a video appeared on the laptop. She hadn’t given the cue sign yet, but everyone had fallen into their inner worlds and were doing their own acts. The acting of the 1st year members of the acting club looked awkward when looked at up close, but that wasn’t a big problem since they were just there to fill the background. It would be fine as long as they polished themselves up later. What she had to focus on right now was Maru’s facial acting. She decided to do everything else after setting the main character perfectly.

‘I also need to test the transfer student role.’

The main character, who was a target of bullying, would escape being bullied by bullying the transfer student. Stepping above the transfer student, who was a target of sympathy at first, allowed him to escape his old position. The role of the transfer student, who had to be the most gloomy and depressing until the last moments of the movie, was like the second main character of this movie. Since he was a projection of the old main character, the standards of choosing that person had to be quite strict as well.

“Are you ready?” Sora raised her voice and asked.

She saw Maru and unni nodding in the front of the class. Sora inhaled shortly.

“Then let’s begin the shoot. I really wanted to do this, so allow me to do it.”

Sora rolled up the script before pointing at the ceiling.

“Lights!”

She then pointed at Ando.

“Camera!”

She then scanned the actors.

“Actors!”

She sat down and shouted.

“Standby, action!”

* * *

She looked at Maru, who buried his head in his arms on the desk. Usually, she would have patted his head or something, but she couldn’t do that right now.

Ha - she uttered a laugh mixed with a sigh before standing up. She walked up to Maru's desk before kicking it.

"Hey, you asleep?"

There was no reaction. A sneer appeared on her face. She erased the image of Maru she had in her mind and drew a really wimpy boy in that place. This kid didn't speak, was slow, and would stutter whenever he talked, making anyone who talked to him feel unpleasant.

"Hey, hey."

She kicked once more, and after seeing that there was no reaction, she kicked it hard. The desk made a loud noise and moved, making Maru, who was pretending to be asleep, flinch. Oh?

"Wow, ignoring me, huh. Are you being sexist? You aren't answering me because I'm a girl? You're total trash, aren't you?"

She laughed as she bit on her thumb slightly. She looked at the others in order to get their agreement, but they were all looking at her in a daze. For a moment, her desire to look down again was broken and her heart flinched, but she soon returned again. An excuse like 'I couldn't keep my emotions properly because of another actor' didn't work on a shooting set.

She clenched her teeth slightly before kicking the desk even harder. The fear that Maru might get injured flashed past her mind, but she ignored it. Right now, she had to put everything into acting. If she still had any consideration left, that would show in her acting as being awkward. She wanted to test herself against Maru and see how far she could keep up with him, who seemed so distant from her.

Immersion. That was the only answer.

The desk jerked up and down and books started falling out. Maru flinched and stood up before picking up the books. It was an uninteresting reaction where he just swayed if she kicked him like a roly-poly toy. She laughed to the point that it resounded in her stomach before pushing Maru's head with her palm.

"Hey. Say something. If you're so afraid of me, what does that make me? Hey, do you want to get hit by this noona? Should I strip your pants and chase you out to the corridor like last time?"

She laughed before pushing on Maru's forehead relentlessly so that the head of the roly-poly toy didn't return to its original position. After swaying, Maru's body eventually fell on the ground.

Crash - the chair that fell over made a loud noise.

"Putting on a show huh? Someone might think that I beat you up. Hey, you got a lot better at acting, you know that? Are you going to tell the old dudes that you got hit?"

She looked at Maru who slowly stood up. He dusted his clothes and set the chair straight before politely placing both of his hands in front of his stomach. His clasped hands didn't look like they had any energy. Those two powerless hands would fall apart the moment she tapped on it. She pushed Maru's shoulders in annoyance. Maru, who was lowering his head, staggered as he was pushed back towards the window.

She crossed her arms before walking up to him.

“Why don’t you raise your head, huh? Or are you going to make me bend down like this?”

Hearing those words, Maru slowly raised his head. He looked expressionless. There was no happiness, no sadness, no joy, no anger, no hate, no love. There was simply nothing in that expression. She felt angry when she looked at that face. She felt like this - let’s see how long you last.

She chewed on her inner cheeks before taking a step forward.

* * *

Maru looked at her standing in front of him. No, he didn’t even know if he was looking at her, the window to the corridor behind her, or Chihwan, who was dazedly standing in a corner. Since he started acting, no, even before that, he had let go of all of his emotions. Since something might pop out if he tried to suppress them, he just let them all go. The keyword here was to be lifeless. A stone does not feel pain or react.

The main character, who now took bullying as a part of his everyday life did not react to any external stimulus. That was the only way. Becoming angry, crying, and resisting was something that was possible with energy. The main character, who has gotten used to powerlessness, was just pushed around. He would get hit, get hit again, and then again. Once he thought that getting hit was the norm, it allowed him to endure. He could endure if he wasn’t conscious of the pain, the gaze, and even the sympathy.

Maru was not afraid of her. In fact, she was a target of admiration. She was the prettiest in the class, the mood maker, and was also loved by the teachers. It was unthinkable for him to get angry at her, who was practically a figure of worship. The only feeling he had towards her was jealousy, but he didn’t express that either.

He was just a stone.

A stone’s duty was to stay still.

Still, still - he felt his weight disappear as his consciousness sunk deep inside. The girl in his vision, the classroom, as well as everything else, started to lose their meaning. Tick, tock, tick, tock. The sound of the clock could be heard amidst the mocking laughter. That was the sound of the powerful gallops that led him to his salvation. 5 o’clock was when regular classes ended. He had to continue as a stone until then.

A hand flew at him. His shoulder was pushed back. She had an arrogant expression on her face. That was natural. She was the idol of the class. It was natural for her to put on such an expression. Compared to her, he was just a small stone by her foot. A stone that did nothing but stay still.

“Sorry.”

He cautiously uttered the only word that was allowed to him. In this classroom, where rules of bullying applied, he was only allowed to utter two words. Okay and sorry. Refusal wasn’t an option. He felt as though his vision turned blurry. He kept repeating the word ‘sorry’ several times. He was immersed in the character, but there was no worry of forgetting his lines. There was another self of him that was watching the situation from behind after all.

Unlike the main character who had turned himself into stone, the Maru observing everything rationally from a step behind looked at everything in front of him in a cold fashion. He observed the acting of his juniors and checked the position of the camera through the corner of his eyes. He let his self that was immersed in acting, be, and turned around slightly. He moved, but his emotional state did not break. The more he acted the clearer the distinction between his two egos became. Unless his observing self intentionally disrupted the emotional state of the immersed self, the continuity of his acting did not break even if he thought about something else.

‘Does she have any worries?’

She was focusing on this too much to the point that it looked like she was being chased by something. There was no hesitation in her actions when she tapped his cheeks, but he couldn’t erase the feeling that she was forcing herself to act.

There was no flaw in the way she expressed the character or the mood itself. She was really good. However, for some reason, the joy he could feel from the stage play couldn’t be seen. Just because an actor or an actress played a cruel delinquent, it didn’t mean that the joy of acting couldn’t be felt from them. He knew this even more clearly because he was looking at her from up close and not through a screen. Her acting was filled with hastiness. An act that stormed forward without any leisure was something to be applauded, but to Maru’s eyes, she looked like she was avoiding something rather than being passionate about acting. She seemed as though she chose acting as a method to intentionally avoid something she didn’t want to be conscious about or was too afraid to admit.

If it was someone else, he wouldn’t have felt this. However, he knew because this concerned her. The one he loved, respected, and relied on the most was making such an expression, so it would be strange if he didn’t notice.

Along with a loud slap, his head was turned away. His cheek felt numb. The script said that she slapped him with the back of her hand, but she used her palm to slap hard. Perhaps due to being so absorbed, she didn’t notice the strangeness of this situation.

The juniors, Sora, as well as Ando who was holding the camera looked towards him with panicked expressions. Maru looked into her eyes. Was he supposed to break out of his emotional state and tell her the mistakes she made?

Maru stood still. Her next lines continued and Maru replied with his own lines.

After the lines were over, she took a deep breath and took a step back. Just as she felt relieved that the acting was over, she looked around her.

There was a dry silence before she looked at Maru in confusion. Maru stroked his cheek before speaking,

“Man, you hit me properly.”

“Maru, I uh...”

“Director. Did we look good?” Maru asked as he looked at Sora.

Sora, who had a dazed expression, clapped and cheered before approaching them. The other juniors also exclaimed loudly.

"I was so surprised. I thought it was real."

"Acting is always about being real. Rather than that, how did it look?"

"Awesome. It was totally awesome. Unni, can't you just keep shooting the movie with us?"

Sora requested as she grabbed her hands. She put on a dry smile.

"Wait a minute. I'll have a talk with her. You can look forward to it. I'll get you something surprising."

"Of course!!"

Maru smiled at Sora before grabbing her hand.

"Let's get some fresh air, shall we?"

"Ah, okay."

Maru left the classroom while holding her hand after telling everyone that they'll be gone for 10 minutes to come up with some ideas.

Chapter 539

"This is a popular item at our school."

She received a cup of hot chocolate from Maru. She was supposed to be relaxed by the warmth coming from her hands and the sweet smell, but she had no choice but to focus on Maru's cheek in unease. It was red. There was a clear trace of her hand. She slowly reached out to touch Maru's cheek and she sighed bitterly when she felt the skin that felt a little rough like it had rashes.

"Sorry."

"About what? Oh, this?"

Maru pointed at his cheek and laughed. She couldn't just take that laugh as a joke. She was immersed in acting with the sole purpose of concentrating. She became absorbed into the character and managed to act in a way that didn't look embarrassing. However, from some time onwards, she was unable to control her emotions. As a result of that, she injured Maru. Even after she hit him, she did not realize that what she had done was not in the script. Only after the shoot stopped did she realize that her hand felt a little hot, and after looking at Maru's cheek, which would hurt even more than her hand, she gulped.

"How's the hot chocolate? The cafeteria lady manages the machine, and she puts a generous amount of powder in it. That's why it's better than the hot chocolate from most cafés."

She kept looking at Maru's swollen cheek. It had become even redder than when they were in class. It suddenly came to her that it was irresponsible of her to just say 'sorry'. This was clearly something that shouldn't end with just an apology.

"Why do you look so dark?"

Maru walked up to her before sitting down. Having a hard time looking down at the gaze coming from below, she turned her head away a little. She felt sorry just looking at him.

"If you're going to keep avoiding me, please tell me, so that I can keep looking at you."

"I'm sorry. I really mean it."

"Do you feel that sorry?"

"I do."

"Will you stop feeling sorry if I say I'm okay?"

She looked at Maru when she heard those words. Maru was smiling as though nothing had happened.

"It happened while we were acting. Anyone can do that if they get absorbed. Also, it didn't hurt that much."

"It's still red."

"That's because I don't have good skin."

Maru smiled nonchalantly. She faintly smiled back. She couldn't help but smile because she didn't want to put Maru even more at unease. She had to smile it over and put an end to it here. She just had to joke with Maru like usual and apologize to him refreshingly before returning to the class. Then, she would finish the shoot as though nothing had happened. As for worries and regrets, she could just go home and deal with those by herself.

"What the, it didn't hurt? I was really worried because it looked really painful. Looks like I was worried for nothing."

She drank the remaining hot chocolate in one gulp.

"Let's get going now. We need to finish the rest of the shoot."

Even though it had to be quite painful for him, Maru worried about her more than he did about himself. She couldn't keep things awkward. Maru would only be at ease if she was as well.

Just as she was about to throw the paper cup into the trash can and leave the cafeteria, Maru grabbed her hand.

"It's still break time."

Let's go back to the shoot - she couldn't utter those words. The moment she looked at Maru's eyes which were calmly looking back at her, she realized that her lies had been exposed. She sat down as she felt her pretentious smile break apart.

"How was the afterparty? It's too late to ask now, huh. Sorry for being an inattentive boyfriend."

"...Why are you sorry?"

"Because I thought saying sorry was the trend these days. Rather than that, how was it really? Was it fun?"

She looked at Maru again and thought that he was really unpredictable. Until just a few seconds ago, he was like an adult who looked like he could accept anything, but right now, he was excited like a child. It wasn't a pretense nor acting. It all felt real, which made her curious.

She tried to clear her messy mind up before giving up. When talking to this guy, sometimes it became meaningless to keep thinking about something. At times like this, it was much better to just speak what was on her mind.

"It was both refreshing and a bit disappointing. When I first started the shoot, I was wondering when it was all going to end because it was hard, but just as I feel like it's doable, it's the end already. I don't know what I did, nor whether I did well or not."

She sighed.

"I don't want to be grumbling in front of you. Can we stop here today? I feel like I'll say something really depressing if I keep talking."

She meant it. It would be easier on her mind if she consulted Maru about it, but she couldn't always rely on him for everything. This was a path she had chosen to walk. She wanted to arrive at an answer herself with her own philosophies when it came to acting.

"You're being really unfair. Some Mr. Han-something-Maru from somewhere bawled his eyes out in front of you. I know that I'm not reliable, but...."

"It's not like that at all."

She cut off Maru's words. When she did, Maru made a sneaky smile and asked,

"So I'm actually very reliable?"

Maru shrugged and spoke in an annoying way. She buried her face in her hands. Would she ever win against this boy with words in her life? Looking at that nonchalant smile of his, it felt like she was stupid for worrying about this by herself.

However, she soon realized that it had always been this way. Maru never urged her to speak. He did not tell her to speak about her worries, nor that he'd solve all of them. He just kept watching after placing the foothold for her to speak first. That process was so relaxing, which made her talk about what was on her mind, while Maru just listened to her. For some reason, most of her worries no longer became worries when she put them into words, which made her finish her conversation with Maru with jokes.

He looked immature, but he was more serious than anyone. However, she knew. She knew that even such a person suffered by himself endlessly and cried. She did not know Maru's worries nor could she solve them, which caused her to be disappointed in herself because of that. She found herself pathetic for not being able to support Maru like he did for her. That was why she didn't want to rely on him this time, but when she looked at this nonchalant consultant, the lock on her mouth opened by itself.

At school, she was mostly on the listening side when it came to consultation. For some reason, a lot of people came to her to discuss their worries since she was young, and through those people, other kids came to her to listen to their worries. You're relaxing for some reason - those were the words from the people that talked with her. That was probably because she inherited the warm eyes from her father.

'But in front of him, I just...'

She closed her eyes before opening them again. Maru was still smiling in front of her. She lost. She could just turn around and run away, but it was likely that he would chase her all the way to her house if she did so. No, she was 100% sure of it. Han Maru's specialty was to come to her house all of a sudden, wasn't it?

She talked about the story she had wrapped up inside her heart. The mood at the set, the distrust towards acting she gained because of that, and the connected college admission problem. After listening, Maru spoke.

"I don't think it's too bad."

"My situation?"

"Yeah. Especially the way you hit my cheek."

"Are you going to make me feel sorry like that?"

"It's not a joke. I mean it. Normally, people only say that they're desperate but they don't take action. Something's hard, something's not working right, big trouble occurred, or things like that."

Maru shook his head slightly.

"Let's say that your house is on fire. What would you do?"

"Get out of the house of course."

"But there's 1 billion won in cash in the room next door."

"1 billion? Wouldn't I have to bring that with me?"

"Of course you do. 1 billion isn't someone's kid's name. But what if the fire is really strong? What if you might get engulfed by flames if you didn't leave immediately?"

"Abandon the money of course. Survival comes first."

"Yes, that's what desperation is. If you're desperate, you only see one thing. In the face of desperation, there are no excuses. That's because there's no room to think about anything else because the problem in front of you requires solving. This is also why desperate people are more prone to scams - because they're desperate."

Maru shrugged once.

"But being desperate isn't always a bad thing. It means that you're very sensitive. I got the feeling that you were concentrating really hard when I acted with you before. It scared me a little."

"Me?"

"Tell me honestly. You didn't realize what was wrong when you hit me, did you?"

She nodded honestly. Back then, she had forgotten about the script. She was so absorbed in the delinquent character and only thought about toying with the weak toy in front of her.

"I couldn't find a flaw in that acting. Do you remember everyone falling silent when you hit my cheek?"

"Yeah, a bit."

"That's because your acting was real, at least for that moment. Everyone felt shivers run down their back despite knowing the fact that you were acting. Your acting had the charm to attract everyone to the point that they stopped their own acting and looked at you. The motivation for that acting was probably, desperation."

Maru grinned before stroking his cheek.

"Though, you'll probably run into trouble if you do this elsewhere."

"It still hurts, doesn't it?"

"I think I might become okay if you kiss me to heal it."

"Should I?"

When she brought her face closer, Maru leaned backwards.

"Looks like you regained that leisure."

"Thanks to you."

"I won't tell you to always tell me about your worries. You probably won't like that either, based on your personality. However, if it's something that drives you into a corner to the point that you can't look at anything else, I hope that you can tell me about it. Talking about it with me doesn't mean that you'll always arrive at an answer, but you know what they say. Happiness is doubled when shared, and worries are halved when they're shared."

"Isn't it supposed to be sadness?"

"Same thing."

"I don't think it is though?"

"Then we'll just add it. Sadness and worries are halved. You shouldn't think that you're burdening me by sharing your worries with me. It doesn't make you irresponsible if you do so. We're going to see each other for the rest of our lives, so it's a shared worry in the first place."

"See each other for the rest of our lives?"

She pouted.

"Didn't I tell you that I already booked the wedding hall?"

"You really don't get tired of that joke, huh."

"I'm not joking though?"

"You're really going to marry me?"

"I told you the first time we met. I'm going to marry you."

His face didn't contain the slightest bit of pretense or falsities. She felt her face heat up. If he was just joking, she could just joke back, but she didn't know what to do if he talked about such a thing so seriously.

"Why do you think I'm working so hard? It's so I can take the position of your husband before anyone else does."

"This is killing me."

"Think about me and keep living."

"Go away."

"Weren't you going to kiss me? Is this how you're going to treat me?"

"That's separate!"

"Then this is separate too."

"You won't lose a word against me huh."

"I am going to once we get married, so don't worry about that."

"Who's marrying you!"

"You are."

"I am?"

"You aren't?"

"No, well... we'll have to see that later...."

"I can guarantee you that there's no better husband material than me."

"Why do you sound so confident?"

"Why? Because it's fate."

"Fate?"

She looked at Maru. There probably wasn't a word that didn't suit him more.

"You believe in something like that? You don't look like you do."

"I didn't, before anyway."

"When is before?"

"Hm, I don't know. Maybe my previous life?"

"There you go again with that. Previous life?"

"You don't trust me? It's true, you know? You confessed and proposed to me in my previous life."

“Forget it. I’m going to consult you about every single worry I have, so stop. Now it’s about previous lives. Sheesh.”

She pushed against her knees to stand up. It was about time they returned. The problem was still there, but she didn’t feel troubled by it. She gained courage when she heard that desperation could become motivation. Make some room and walk forward - Maru probably wanted to tell her those words.

“You should finish what you started.”

“Finish what?”

Maru stuck his lips out in a cringy fashion. She frowned and stepped back before sighing.

“Fine, this is the consultation fee.”

But aren’t my lips chapped at the moment? - she had some trivial worries as she put her lips closer to his.

“Maru-seonb... uwaaaak! No, nothing!”

She looked at the tall boy standing at the entrance of the cafeteria. His name was Ahn Chihwan if she remembered correctly. Maru grinned before walking over to Chihwan.

Let’s creep everyone out - Maru said those words.

She looked at the two people before bursting out into laughter.

She suddenly thought that it was the right decision to come here today.

Chapter 540

“Thank you for your work!”

Sora clapped as she announced the end of the shoot. It was 9:40 p.m. It was pretty late, but everyone attended the shoot without a single complaint.

“I really got a lot out of today. This is going well even though it’s the first day. I’m sure that the film will turn out great.”

“Aren’t you being too optimistic?” Ando asked as he put away the camera.

Sora shook her head and pointed at the laptop.

“Can you still say that after looking at this?”

Tap - she clicked on the play button. The paused video resumed. The unni pushed Maru and glared at him fiercely. She focused on Maru but was distracted by Unni’s acting. Both of them did better than she had expected, no, they were perfect. She had played this footage back several times during the break. Their expressions, postures, voices - everything was exactly like the ideal scene she had pictured in her mind, so she wanted to put this into the movie without editing it at all.

“If the acting of the people around was a little more decent....”

Compared to the two, the acting of the 1st year acting club members left a lot to be desired. When the shoot just began, they dissolved into the film without looking awkward, but their emotions were broken the moment unni slapped Maru. The first year actors had become audience members.

“But we can’t use it because *she* is in it.”

Ando looked at the unni on the screen.

Sora was dissatisfied with that. She found the most ideal actress, but *she* just had to be from another school.

“Can’t we do anything about it?”

“About what?”

“I want to shoot with this unni. Aram-seonbae said she was okay with it as well.”

“I thought *she* went to another school.”

“That doesn’t really matter actually. It’s not like I’m handing this film in under the school’s name.”

“I guess that’s true.”

“The problem is whether that unni wants to help out or not.”

“*She* appears on TV. Wouldn’t *she* be busy?”

“That’s what I mean. Oh, but I should at least ask, right?”

Just then, unni came back to the classroom after changing *her* uniform. Sora ran up to *her* without hesitation.

“Unni. You really were the best today.”

“Thank you for saying that. I was feeling sorry because I felt like I was bothering you.”

“Bothering? Of course not! I got a good picture thanks to you today. Want to have a look?”

“May I?”

“Of course. You were in it. Let’s have a look at it together.”

Sora brought the unni to the laptop. The 1st year members of the acting club had all returned to the 5th floor, so the classroom felt rather desolate. She raised the speaker volume and played back the video in full screen. The two people on the screen became vivid and started moving again. Sora looked at unni’s expression through the corner of her eyes. As expected of a pro, she was focused on watching her own acting.

‘It feels like I’m about to get my grade card.’

She felt nervous for some reason. Eventually, the loud slap could be heard from the speakers. It was a scene that took away her breath no matter how many times she watched it. The unni’s eyes that were captured by the camera were, as much as she felt sorry about putting it this way, like those of a bad bitch’s. Meanwhile, Maru-seonbae was listening to unni’s words like some organic lifeform without free

will. Sora decided to add the slapping scene after watching that scene. From still, to dynamic, to dramatic - she liked that sequence. If she could capture the other classmates looking at that scene in surprise, or perhaps even joy, it would be a dream-like classroom. The kind where it was hell for just one person.

"How is it?" Sora asked cautiously.

"Not bad. I thought it would look strange."

"Of course not. You did so well. Especially this part. I really liked this part where you kept staring at Maru-seonbae. It felt like you were really treating him like a toy. It's a malicious scene, but the person doing it didn't seem to think that it's a serious thing. I had a Eureka moment the moment I saw it."

"My acting was okay?"

Unni didn't sound confident for some reason. Sora firmly spoke,

"It was the best."

Unni stopped talking and started tapping on the keyboard. She pulled the slider forward to look at her own acting before putting on a faint smile. For some reason, Sora felt relaxed when she looked at that smile.

"Thanks. This is the first time I got complimented by a director when I acted in front of the camera."

"No way."

"It's true. I have never heard anything on the shooting set. Even if it wasn't a compliment, I wished I could hear something about my acting, but I didn't get to hear anything."

"You didn't, unni? The shooting set you're talking about is the sitcom one, right?"

"Yeah."

"That's strange. I watched that sitcom often too, but your acting was really good. The cute girl that's hungry all the time. You were good to the point that I thought you were actually such a person. Though, you're actually really snappy in real life."

Sora looked at the laptop. An unni who could act so well didn't get praised for her acting? Sora spoke after she slightly scrolled the slider.

"Isn't it like this? A shooting set for a TV program must be the world of pros, right? And it's natural for pros to do well. So what I'm saying is that the fact that the director of the sitcom had no comment about you should mean that you are doing really well as a pro. I might be wrong, but if I was the director, I would be like that. I would leave the people who can take care of themselves alone and take care of those that need care."

"Are you consoling me?"

"No, I'm not good with things like that. Do you know what my nickname was in middle school?"

"What was it?"

“The cocky girl. Everyone who hated me called me that. But I don’t care. There are a lot of people in this world. I’m busy enough already taking care of the people that like me, so there’s no need to suck up to the people that hate me, is there? Also, I honestly liked the nickname. When you call someone cocky, you do that because you envy that person, right?”

“It’s cool of you to think that way.”

“You’re cool too, unni.”

Sora grinned.

“Uhm, unni.”

“Yeah?”

“Can’t you keep shooting this film with me?”

“This film?”

“Yes. I was touched after seeing this scene. I have a really good feeling about it. All I can think of now is that it has to be you.”

“I’m thankful to you for telling me that but....”

“You must be busy, aren’t you? I can understand that, you’re on TV and all.”

“It’s not that I’m that busy....”

“Really? Then can you do it?”

“But Aram was supposed to play this role.”

“No, the only character we decided on for sure was Maru-seonbae. As for the others, we decided that I will decide the roles after a test. Seonbae, I’m not going to do something like ruining my good work because of formalities. I saw Aram-seonbae’s acting in the acting club. She is not that awkward with the role, but you go far beyond that.”

Sora stomped her feet in unease. She had a feeling that this unni wanted to do it. If she wanted to grab her, now was the right time. She might change her mind later.

“Please wait a moment.”

Sora ran up to the 5th floor. She knocked on the door to the hall before peeking inside. The people from the acting club were resting. It seemed that they were just about to wrap up practice and go home.

“Uhm, Daemyung-seonbae.”

She greeted Daemyung-seonbae before walking up to him.

“What is it?”

“Are you practicing right now?”

“No, we just finished. We’re going to take a small break and then do some stretches before going home. Why do you ask?”

“Can I borrow Aram-seonbae for a moment?”

“Aram?”

Daemyung called for Aram. Aram hopped her way over.

“What is it, seonbae?”

“Sora seems like she has something to say to you. Go with her.”

Sora thanked Daemyung before grabbing Aram’s hand and running towards the stairs. Aram started speaking when she stepped on the first staircase.

“What? What is this about?”

“Aram-seonbae. How desperate are you in wanting to appear in my movie?”

“Actually, not that much. I just went because Maru-seonbae told me to.”

“As expected of you. You’re so clear-cut when it comes to this. I didn’t expect you to say that you wanted to do it even for etiquette.”

“That’s how I roll. Aren’t you similar?”

“Yes! I am.”

Having returned to the 3rd year classroom, Sora put Aram in front of the waiting unni.

“Aram-seonbae. Please watch this for now.”

She played the video she recorded. Aram quietly looked at the screen. After the short video was over, Sora spoke,

“Aram-seonbae. If you do play the role, can you do this much?”

The answer came immediately.

“I can’t.”

Aram looked at unni.

“Unni, you were going to refuse this role? It’s fine if you refuse it because you have something else to do, but - this shouldn’t be true but - if you are refusing because of me, I’m going to feel hurt.”

Then, Aram watched the video again after asking if Maru was hit for real. Sora looked at unni. At that moment, Maru-seonbae came through the back door.

“Maru-seonbae!”

“What?”

“Do you like Aram-seonbae more or unni more?”

“Are you asking about my taste in girls?”

“No! I’m asking who you would prefer as a partner in the shoot?”

Maru made a ‘hm’ sound before looking at Aram.

“Aram. Do you think you can hit me like what happened in that video?”

“If it was real life, I would gladly do so, but acting? I don’t think I can do that.”

“Don’t you want to try shooting this movie?”

“You’re asking the same question she did. Hello, seonbae? You know? I always had my way with the things I wanted to do since I was young. Do you think I’m the kind of girl who would try to read the mood and say pleasing words?”

“No.”

“There you have it. That’s cleared up now, right? I’m going back up. I just got an earful from the club president for my pronunciation. I have my hands full solving my homework right now.”

Aram waved her hand before leaving the classroom.

Sora’s jaws gaped slightly as she watched Aram leaving. So cool - she wanted to chase Aram.

“But are you okay with time? You have practice at your own club, don’t you?”

Maru asked that as he looked at unni.

“3rd year students don’t go every day. The stage is usually created around 1st and 2nd year students. Only then would we keep the trophy even if we graduate.”

“That’s just like Myunghwa High. Why don’t you do it with us then? I think it will be good if you do it.”

Nice, Maru-seonbae - Sora inwardly shouted. Since there was support fire, she just had to get an answer from her.

“Unni, please help me. We’ll really get the grand prize if you help us.”

“Are you really okay with someone like me?”

“It’s not about being okay. It has to be you!”

Sora stared holes into unni. Unni closed her mouth and looked around the classroom before speaking,

“Alright, I’ll try.”

* * *

“The night’s still cold, huh.”

“It still feels like winter.”

Maru reached out his hand. She grabbed his hand with a smile.

"It's getting late. I'll take you home."

"Forget it. Also, 10 isn't that late."

"You don't know how scary the world is. You should always be careful at night."

"It's so bright here. You're being needlessly worried."

Her lips twitched before she took out her phone. She seemed to be texting someone. A moment later, the sound of a message arriving could be heard from her phone.

"She's still drinking?"

"What's that about?"

"It's my mom. She left around lunchtime to meet a friend, but I think she's still drinking. She's not coming back tonight."

"Maybe she went to attend a funeral?"

"No. She said that she was going to get something good to eat. I got a couple of texts after that, but I can't understand anything. She is suddenly saying that writers are shit, that her little sister is pitiful, and now she's asking me if I know the pains of a writer...."

"I guess she did send such texts whenever she got drunk."

"Hm? What was that?"

Maru smiled faintly and shook his head. From the content of those texts, it seemed that she was consoling a friend of hers who was complaining about life. It shouldn't be anything major.

"Since it's like this, should we go over to your house?"

"Forget about it."

"You're disappointing."

"Do you know that you sometimes have a really perverted expression when you speak?"

"Do I now?"

"There! You're doing it again!"

Maru shrugged before walking. When he pulled on her hand slightly, she sighed before following him.

"It's good to walk together like this."

"Is it that good?"

"It is. It's even better now that we have a public reason to see each other."

After walking wordlessly for a while, she spoke in a small voice,

"The film, do you think I can do it?"

“Why are you suddenly running out of confidence?”

“I wonder about that too. I was never worried when it came to acting until now. Maybe getting paid for it really does make a difference.”

“Opening someone else’s wallet isn’t easy, whether it’s through acting or anything else.”

Maru looked at her walking by his side. She had stopped speaking and was looking up at the sky. There was only a half-moon in the sky without any stars.

“I want to continue acting in the future.”

Maru tensed the hand grabbing her hand as he heard those words. He would make her. He would pave the road for her so that she could do everything she wanted in life.

“Then I guess I’ll do the housework. You can earn the money, with your acting.”

“Hey, you’re the man.”

“Hey, men and women are equal in this era, aren’t they?”

Maru placed his lips on hers when she kept staring at him. Their lips touched before moving apart again. She looked at him with widened eyes before making an expression as though she had remembered something.

“Ah, right. Dinner. You were supposed to treat me.”

She looked at him with dissatisfaction.