

## Once Again 611

### Chapter 611

A result derived from deduction was always just a probability. It was possible that it was right, and it was possible that it was wrong. If there was clear evidence of a result, regardless of whether it was right or wrong, he could come up with a more concrete plan, but since that was impossible, he could only act according to a broad spectrum. Currently, the thing he had to be wary of was the disappearance of his memories. It would be possible to come up with countermeasures if he knew what part of his memories was being erased, and from what point onwards.

‘But the problem is that I can’t know that.’

Maru looked at his shaky right hand. He looked at the busily moving Sora and Ando before putting strength into his right hand, which was gripping a pen. What he was doing now was pretty simple. He was trying to organize the memories of his previous life into a few words. It was a very simple and even abstract process, but the god did not even allow that. If he tried to leave behind any records of his previous life while his consciousness had the slightest bit of control, his entire body refused to do it. He couldn’t write the ‘m’ from ‘memory’ because his hand was shaking like a patient’s. This was something he knew since before. He already knew that recording the disappearing memories was impossible.

If it was before his personality changed, he might have thought that he could accept the penalty of disappearing memories as a form of compensation for coming back to life, but after experiencing the influence they had on his personality, he could no longer treat them lightly. He tried to leave behind the minimum amount of recorded information that he needed for Han Maru to stay as a Han Maru, but the cruel god did not allow that. He couldn’t take any action when he possessed the will to create records. He tried changing the medium just in case, but it was the same regardless. PC, phone, electronic dictionary... even the school field, which was made of sand, and would leave behind nothing after the wind blew, did not allow him to leave behind records.

What a petty god - Maru muttered with a voice filled with the uttermost ire that a human could muster.

“Though, if they disappear cleanly, this will be meaningless too.”

Maru looked at the corner of his script, which was riddled with illegible fragments of text. Even if he could leave behind records, if he read them after his memories disappeared, they wouldn’t leave any impressions on him. Even if he left behind the most important moments of his previous life in the form of words, once his memories disappeared, he would think ‘what novel is this?’ when he read them.

What good was information about memories without himself to confirm it? Maru clicked his tongue and put down his pen. The god was definitely smart. Even if he used some unimaginable method to successfully leave behind memories of his previous life, it would become the records of a stranger the moment his memories disappeared. Even if he read the records after he changed, it would be impossible to gain the same emotions as before.

Was there really no way to avoid the god’s radar? He thought about it for a while before he gave up on it. He wouldn’t be able to do anything to a transcendental entity who could bring the dead back to life, even if it didn’t mean omniscience and omnipotence.

Maru took out his wallet. He opened the half-folded wallet and took out a card from it. It was a tarot card with a crease across the middle. He stared at the masked clown who was standing on the edge of the stage with a necktie on. For some reason, he started carrying this card around like a good luck charm. Even though it was supposed to be destined to go into the trash along with some other receipts, he kept it because it strangely bothered him.

When he first showed it to Daemyung, Daemyung gave him this interpretation: challenge and adventure. He experienced the existence of the god personally, so there was no reason for him to not believe in fortune telling. It wasn't that he had blind faith, he actually did think that it was somewhat reasonable. He thought that it was perhaps the god's tip for him to strive towards challenges and adventures.

However, the meaning behind the tarot card that Gaeul told him after that was something completely different.

"The foolishness of knowing nothing. Ignorance."

Was that talking about the current him? Maru looked at the man on the card. It felt as though the man on the card was looking at him. It was strange. The man in the picture, who was supposed to feel like a stranger, felt very familiar to him. Of course, it might be possible that he felt familiar because he saw the man in a dream a few years ago. However, the emotions he currently had didn't indicate that. It felt as though he had met the man on the street just a few days ago.

Perhaps he met this man in a dream. Maru flipped the tarot card several times.

"Seonbae, we're ready. Oh, what's that?"

"This? A tarot card."

"You believe in stuff like that?"

"I guess I'm on the believing side if you have to put me on one side. I'm not a blind follower though."

"You've been acting really unexpectedly today. I thought you'd never believe in something like that, seonbae."

"Why?"

"Just a feeling. No, your actions expressed that, too. If someone said that a god exists, you're the type of person who would tell that person to bring god in front of you."

Sora made a slightly fed up expression. Maru smiled and put the card inside his wallet.

"Well, that's a pity. I believe in god too."

"Really? Do you go to church? Or a temple? You're definitely not catholic though."

"I believe in something similar to reincarnation, so I guess it's related to a temple?"

"Reincarnation!?"

Sora narrowed her eyes before going over to Ando and whispering into his ears. Even Ando, who had pretty big eyes, narrowed his eyes and stared at him. Was it something that whisper-worthy? Maru took out his phone and his wallet and placed them on a desk before picking up his script and walking over to the two.

“You’re going to start shooting, right?”

“Yes, I am. But are you really a Buddhist? I think I saw you eat meat.”

“There are many different branches to Buddhism. Also, I’m not a Buddhist.”

“But you told me that you were.”

“I said I believed in reincarnation, not Buddhism. The cycle of reincarnation is something I have great faith in. Call me a fanatic if you want.”

“Seonbae, you know that you’ve been really strange today, right? Can’t you just act like before? I feel like I’ve done something wrong because you’re smiling all the time. Why don’t you just act like the first time we met when I showed you the scenario and look at me like this?” Sora asked as she stretched the corner of her eyes upwards.

Maru laughed loudly. Sora made a flabbergasted expression before sighing.

“Let’s begin shooting.”

Sora walked over to the laptop. Maru placed the script on a desk before sitting down. A junior from the acting club approached him and sat in front of him.

“Hochul, think of it as playing.”

“Ah, yes.”

“Are you nervous today as well?”

“A-a little.”

“Nervousness is not something you can consciously suppress, so if you’re nervous, just take that nervousness with you. Thinking that you should calm down will make you even hastier instead. Once you keep doing this, you’ll become a lot more immune to it. It’s fine even if you make some NGs. It’ll be weird if we don’t get any.”

“Yes, okay.”

The junior, who played the character of the transfer student, controlled his expression and looked forward. This was the first time this junior was placed in the center of the frame after being in the corner all the time. He had to express the despair the character felt when the transfer student’s only friend, the main character, ignored him and turned his back on him.

Sora gave a pretty difficult request. She wanted compressed emotional acting. The most efficient way to express ‘anger’ was to act like he was ‘angry’. The stereotypical ‘being angry’; shouting and breaking every item in reach while crying and saying out loud the name of the target would make anyone feel that the character is angry. Sora didn’t want an act like that, she wanted an act where anger was

expressed through the lack of expression. That is, through the eyes. Of course, expressing anger through the eyes didn't consist of eye movements. Hochul had to describe the inner state of the character with the minute movements of his facial muscles.

It was pretty difficult. Maru tapped the junior's shoulder before looking at Sora. Sora, who was giving instructions to the other juniors who were playing the characters in the rest of the class, pulled her chin inwards before speaking,

"Actors, please get into your standby position. The camera will be moving according to the same line as the practice. This is the final decoration of the film, so please bear that in mind. Be cheerful and happy more than ever, okay?"

The actors slowly nodded.

"Also, Hochul, I'll say this beforehand, I've completely made up my mind today. I'm willing to retake it as many times as we need, so don't get timid on me."

"Don't worry about that," the junior replied resolutely.

Maru slightly closed his eyes and pictured the scene in his mind.

A child who has regained 'normality' after escaping being bullied. The character would be touched beyond words. The streets that looked monotone until just days ago were now colorful, and the rice that he ate like he would grains of sand became so tasty and did not lose out to the best delicacies in the world. The only thing that changed was his position, but his lifestyle, and going further, his view on life itself had changed.

The taste of friendship that he had tasted for the first time in his life was so sweet that he didn't want to give it up. Back when he didn't know about it, he gave up easily thinking that it was something too distant from him, but ever since he entered the realm of 'normality', he felt afraid of falling out of that normality more than anything. The classroom, which was a place of disdain, contempt, and complete disregard was now filled with joy. It was a power - in a sense - that he could never lose hold of. There was a trial that he had to take in order to maintain that lifestyle.

It was to create a bait. In order to consolidate the bonds in a group, an enemy was necessary. An inferior enemy that was weak enough for them to toy with. He was going to turn the transfer student, who was his only friend until just days ago, into the bullied kid. It wasn't that he didn't have a guilty conscience. He felt incredibly sorry to the point that he felt afraid of it. However, his own misfortune was more unbearable than his friend's despair.

Maru took a deep breath in. He had finished consolidating the character a long time ago. The only thing left was to throw that character to the 'other me'.

He dug deep into his mind. The noise around him became distant until he met another Han Maru that existed inside him. 'He' was someone who he couldn't feel the presence of normally, but whenever he began acting, 'he' always cried out, saying that he wanted to stand in the front.

'A stage?'

Maru could see a stage in his heart. Before, the ego was in an immaterial form that just floated around in the darkness, but right now, he saw another instance of himself standing on top of a proper stage.

It was a peculiar experience. It felt too clear to the extent that he felt it was real. Could that ego be talked to? When he came to himself, Maru realized that he was on the stage. There was another 'me' less than 3 meters away. The face couldn't be seen because of the thick shadow, but he had a strong feeling that it was 'me'.

Uhm - he tried talking to that figure. However, there was no response. Like that, a few seconds passed before the 'me' on the opposite side reached out towards him. Maru looked at that hand before giving that 'me' the script. Many questions appeared in his mind, including since when he was holding the script, if such a process wasn't necessary since it was his imagination, and how he knew what the 'me' in front of him wanted despite the fact that they couldn't communicate; but even all that melted into nothing the next moment. The 'me' that accepted the script made a satisfied smile. Maru smiled back in response as well.

He didn't know why, but he felt like the distance between the two had shrunk. Before, that ego felt like a beast that he couldn't tame. 'He' was under the control of the leash known as reason, but it was impossible to have total control so he always went about it like he was suppressing a wild animal. Reason would stand close watch and suppress the beast immediately whenever it thought that the beast was going too far. Until now, this kind of method posed no problems. However, he did have a feeling. During his acting with Ahn Joohyun, Maru unleashed the acting ego. The result of that was compliments from the staff.

He definitely had the thought that he might be able to show better acting if he had more complete control, but looking at that smile just now, he realized that his entire assumption was wrong.

There was no need for control. He always called that 'another me', yet ruled that 'me' out as a different person. After all, it was a difficult thing to feel close to an ego that only showed its face during acting.

Also, since he only had one body, he couldn't help but be cautious of potential conflicts between egos. Weren't there numerous stories about big trouble occurring because of the disregard of the dangers of another ego within oneself? He couldn't help but consider the possibility of split personalities.

However, the moment he saw the other 'me' smiling brightly with the script, he realized that that 'me' wasn't a target to be wary of.

Evidence?

There was nothing like that. Funnily, it was just his instinct and intuition. Normally, he would never trust such a thing, but for some strange reason, they felt strangely trustworthy right now.

It was as though that ego was a long-time friend of his.

'Well, that too is me after all.'

Lights shone down on the other 'me' that stood in the center of the stage with the script. Maru opened the script, which just appeared in his hand, as well.

It was just like a director looking at the best possible actor.

“Seonbae! We’re starting.”

“Okay.”

Maru opened his eyes.

‘He’ that coexisted with him, also opened his eyes.

## **Chapter 612**

The easiest way to emphasize a white color was to make the background black. Acting was the same. There was a limit to showing emotions. There was no limit to emotion itself, but there was a limit to the methods of expressing them. No matter how varied one made their facial expressions, there was a limited range for the facial muscles to move, and that was the same for voices as well. After expressing stronger and stronger emotions, acting would become bland after one point. The character would become very flat. That was why the beginning was important. What was more important than the explosion was to keep the fuse lit.

“I am going. What’s today’s lunch again?”

Maru smiled and looked at the actor in front of him. For this moment, the guy in front of him was not a junior from the acting club, but his friend in another reality. Actors needed to accept falseness as reality. Acting could only begin after that.

“Doenjang soup and fried pollacks.”

“That’s terrible. Wanna go buy something instead?”

“Are you treating me?”

“Yeah, well, I’ll buy it. We’re friends after all.”

The most obsequious thing was to try to act like the other side. Maru hung his arms around the people who bullied him until just a while ago. Inside, he created an endless number of excuses to justify himself.

It wouldn’t matter even if he went about acting while thinking ‘I’ll do this kind of acting’. Even if he did not synchronize with the character, the majority of the audience would accept the film without feeling anything strange even if he just went about acting while listing the objective facts in his mind. That was because there was a limit to expression, and the audience would also take the film in while acknowledging that it was fiction.

In one sense, acting was an occupation where effort did not correspond to matching results. Unless it was something blatantly obvious, like losing an extreme amount of weight or acting as a character with a disability, the audience would have a hard time noticing what kind of effort the actors went through in order to act. If it was possible to get just as many results as the investment, anyone would try their utmost best, but if it was unknown if people would recognize their efforts at all, was there any need to practice acting so hard?

For Maru, he could neither say yes nor no. A veteran actor would probably give a meaningful answer based on experience or statistics, but he himself was just a newbie at the foot of the mountain. He wasn’t in a situation where he could say which path was the best in order to reach the peak.

Despite that, if he had to give an opinion, he was on the side that yes, they had to repeat the arduous and boring task to the best of their efforts even if it was highly probable that no one would recognize them for it. With acting, efficiency wasn't a part of the equation. If it was a college entrance exam, an efficient acting method might exist. That was because the professors at those colleges would have a preferred form of acting. However, an actor didn't face just one individual. They had to target numerous people that might exist in front of the TV screens at home. Among them, there might be some people who would overlook the awkwardness of their acting, and there might be some who would discover a flaw in their acting that even the video editor couldn't find. It was impossible to satisfy the entire audience when they ranged across such a broad spectrum.

In the end, actors were creatures that challenged the impossible. Talking about efficiency in front of such a task was meaningless. The only thing anyone could do was to increase the probability by just a little. Broadening the spectrum of acting and adding depth to it in order to be loved by many viewers and used in many pieces was the only way to keep the title of an 'actor' for a long time.

After all that, it came down to effort in the end. Maru had to join a game that had a random result and everything was based on probability with chips that had the word 'effort' engraved on them. If he succeeds, he would become a named actor and land himself on riches, and if he failed, he would become dirt poor and have to leave the field altogether.

As despicable as the word was, he had to embrace effort in the end. There definitely existed a systemized way of acting, but that method was definitely not the formula that led to success. Taking the path that everyone takes and then taking the path that no one takes - this has to be the source of energy for most actors.

However, just counting on effort alone was too risky. That was why Maru wanted a safety measure in this bet. A minimum safety net where he could receive compensation for his work. Even if he could not survive as a main character, if he wanted to keep his lifeline of being supporting characters, there was a need to increase the variation of his acting. He needed to put in an effort not to become the best, but in order to NOT become the worst.

If he didn't notice the change in his nature, it might have been detrimental to him. He might have turned into an optimistic fool and challenged unnecessary things. Or, he might have gone about his career with a challenging mindset before being broken down the line. Fortunately, Maru noticed the change. Rather than rejecting this bright personality that eroded his nature, he decided to make use of it. In retrospect, his acting that received compliments until now were all ones that asked him to leave behind a deep impression. A delinquent, a young murderer, a beggar, a bullied student. Even in the drama, he played a character that opposed the teacher. No one proposed that he should play a tenderhearted character. Likewise, he did not look for such roles either. Perhaps he might have felt it without knowing it - that he, who possessed extremely negative emotions due to his experience of death, suited characters that poked out of the story rather than the calm ones.

Before he played such characters though, there was something else that he received great compliments for from the audience. From an audience who paid money to watch a play, even.

The bus driver role. When he played a character for a filler skit prior to the main play, he always received applause from the audience due to his one-man act. Thinking about that time, being a bus

driver didn't require any sort of rough acting. It was something where he just calmly looked back at his own memories and touched the hearts of the audience. There was no violent expression of emotions, no frowning faces, and no angry voices, but the audience who had seen his act back then all looked like they were fully immersed.

If he used his past to act, then showing off such soft emotions wouldn't be too hard. However, what if his memories disappeared and the 'fact' that he 'experienced' those things disappeared with them? He would probably never be able to show off something like that ever again. Moreover, the him before the change would be riddled with distrust towards mankind, so it would be even harder to play a softer role.

'It's different now.'

Something fundamental had changed. The self that always placed suspicion and distrust in front had been weakened. He believed that he would continue living his life in that way, but if he had laid them down, he might have become a soft man who believed in others.

Being poisoned without any preparation would put life in jeopardy, but being poisoned with proper preparation might become a medicine that strengthened the immune system. His now-positive nature should allow him to have a more flexible mindset in the future, and it would help out with the acting side as well. This meant that the frame of his acting spectrum would broaden from just being able to act out characters with deep impressions to being able to act in such a way that he blended in with the rest.

He had to be sensitive to change but he also had to proactively make the most out of the properties. That way, he would be able to form a different kind of relationship with people other than the ones he made until now. He would be able to gain new opportunities and new things to learn through them. A fish that could live in both clean and dirty waters would have a much larger advantage surviving than a fish that could only live in clean waters.

He didn't have to play a character that received attention. It would be fine as long as he and Gaeul made enough money to live. Of course, saving up additional money for their future child might be good, but that was for the future. After all, having a child was something unimaginable right now.

For a brief moment, he wondered if it even made sense that they didn't have a child even though he died at 45, but he shook off his thoughts when he heard Sora's voice enter his ears.

"Let's insert more laughs this time. Also, Maru-seonbae, it was good."

"Tell me anytime if you're dissatisfied."

"Of course. But that really was good just now. I don't have anything to add. Let's go over to Hochul's cut now."

The camera moved over to the junior's side. This junior digested the role of a lead supporting character splendidly until now, but he seemed under rather high pressure today. Normally, he would say something before he started acting, but right now he was staring holes into the script with his mouth shut.

"Well then. This is the scene where seonbae looks at Hochul with pity before turning around. Hochul, you know that expression, right? You have to express the despair as though you just lost your foothold. I know it must be difficult, but please do it."



Maru exchanged gazes with his junior before starting to act.

“Uhm...”

Maru looked at the transfer student, who reached out to him just like always to eat lunch together, before swiftly turning around. The original plan was to turn around with hesitation, but they changed it to turning around in a hurry in order to express the main character’s desperation to not return to the days when he was bullied. He turned around and stayed like that until he was no longer in the camera frame before turning around to look at his junior.

The junior was making a very gloomy expression in the middle of the camera frame. Maru walked over and looked at the monitor that Sora was looking at. He could see the face of his junior, which shook a little inside the frame. His eyes shook slightly as he licked his lips. Maru looked at Sora’s face from the side. She was looking at the screen with a serious expression, but her lips did not utter the word ‘okay’.

After a while, Sora shouted cut.

“Let’s just try Hochul’s part again. Hochul, are you okay with that?”

“Yeah.”

“We’re going to keep rolling the camera. Express everything you want. Don’t worry about the time.”

They started shooting without hitting the slate. Maru crossed his arms and watched the monitor. His junior was repeating a few facial expressions and was playing the role of the slate himself by sighing every other beat.

“What do you think?”

“Since you’re asking me that, you must not like any of them, huh?”

“They’re good, but I feel like it’s lacking something.”

“Turning that something into words and telling the actor about it is the director’s job.”

“I know that. That’s why I know that the deficiency is on my end. If it was clear, I would’ve told him properly about it, but I’m asking you since even I don’t have a full grasp on it. What do you think about his acting?”

“Like you said, it is good.”

“So not very good?”

Sora frowned before clapping.

“Hochul, you can stop for now.”

She called Hochul over to the monitor. Ando also put down the camera and came over. The four of them looked at the video which was recorded without sound. The junior’s face continuously played out for a pretty long period of 8 minutes.

“Do you feel anything?”

Sora asked a question to the actor in question, but Hochul only shook his head. Maru understood how he felt. There were actors who felt confident about their acting, but there were also many actors who relied on the okay sign from the director rather than their own confidence. The director was asking a question with suspicion on her face, so an actor would rarely say that something was good. Not only that, Hochul just started off acting.

“Should I do that again?”

The only thing that came back was the dejected voice of the junior. Sora also made an apologetic expression. Continuing the shoot without a proper direction from the director signified the incompetence of the director. Relying on the actor for everything should also be a difficult matter for Sora, who had a very high self-esteem.

“How is it?” Maru asked Ando.

Ando’s camera movements looked really good. He didn’t feel like a newbie with the camera. This meant that he had pretty good eyes.

“This one is confusing me too. They all look okay, but they all look not okay.”

Maru nodded. This was one of the most crucial cuts in the film. No, since this was the scene where the conflict was brought out to the extreme, it was no different from the face of the film itself. The reason everyone refrained from answering was probably because they knew that their opinion might influence the quality of the whole outcome.

Maru looked at the three, who stayed quiet, before speaking,

“Let’s get your heart rate up.”

“What?”

“I’ll go for a jog with Hochul for a bit.”

Maru pointed at the school field with his chin.

“If your head doesn’t know, you should make your body feel it instead. Run until you feel like your heart will burst. If you hold your breath in that state, you’ll know a little more about what desperation is.”

“Ah, yes.”

“Director, take a break with the others. We lowly actors will make use of our bodies for a bit.”

Maru pushed the junior’s back outside the classroom.

## **Chapter 613**

A monitor reflected the world. A whole new world existed inside of that small and rectangular frame. Even ordinary life without anything special would become a film if a certain part of it was sliced out in a rectangular fashion. Slicing. Direction was the act of creating a world unto itself by slicing from another world to create a story.

“Uhm...”

Sora became silent and looked at the monitor. The close up of the camera was taking in the full view of Hochul's uneasy face. The droplets of sweat on his face reflected the light off the ceiling lights, and the dry lips uttered an even dryer voice. The hand he raised with difficulty lost its trajectory and returned to its original place as the expression turned darker by the moment. As the expression turned darker and darker and was about to disappear completely, Sora barely shouted 'cut', while holding back the urge to shout hooray.

"Good!"

There was nothing else she could say other than that. Adding any adverbs would undervalue the 'goodness' of it. It was simply good. That was enough.

Despite the 'cut' sound, Hochul's expression did not loosen. Just like how it was impossible to stop suddenly after a full sprint due to momentum, his expression, which was approaching full nervousness, was maintained as though his face was waxed.

"Good job."

It was Maru's voice that broke that wax. Hochul shut his eyes and sighed with complex emotions. The backrest of the chair supported him and stopped him from falling over. Hochul became limp and chuckled.

"That was really hard."

"Thanks to that, the director was able to shout cut with pleasure. Well done."

Maru patted Hochul on the shoulder after saying that. Sora immediately called Ando over and played back the video.

"What do you think, seonbae?"

"Let's go with this. Honestly, I don't have the confidence to take something better than this."

"Right?"

Sora bit her lower lip and quickly saved the footage. She copied the file and created a file specifically for editing before moving it to the editing folder. As soon as she saw the copied file, it finally felt real that they were past the 90% mark. There was still a lot of work to do considering that they had to cut, prune, join, and even tamper with the sound, but she could sigh in relief from the perspective that she had finally gathered all the ingredients.

"But running really was effective, huh," Sora said while looking at Maru.

When Maru took Hochul to the school field, Sora was honestly half-doubtful. Wasn't expression acting something that came out from inside a person? Yet Maru was exhausting the body instead. The cut take they took immediately after returning from the run was utterly terrible. Despite wiping off the sweat, Hochul was still drenched with sweat. Furthermore, his shoulders were heaving heavily, his breath was unnatural, and his lines were stretching out. She thought that it was actually better before the run. Just before they started the shoot again, Maru approached Hochul and told him a few things. After that, Hochul blocked his mouth and nose with his hand and held his breath. Maru did say before running. He said that Hochul would find out what desperation is if he raised his heartbeat and held his breath. Sora

thought that he was joking, but it was actually happening. Hochul held his breath for a while before frowning and letting go. He panted heavily to the point that it made her wonder if something went wrong.

The cut take they took after that was what she was looking at right now. It was surprisingly close to the picture she wanted. It did look a little hurried, but it was much more satisfying than the previous ones, which lacked character.

“It was sort of a last resort, and I guess it worked. You don’t have any dissatisfaction with that, right?”

“I don’t. Would you like to have a look? Hochul, you should come too.”

The other staff members, who helped out with the production, also gathered in front of the monitor. Sora turned up the volume and pressed the play button. Hochul’s line could be heard alongside the noise that the microphone captured. Then, his face was zoomed in on. His eyes exuded unease, which made everyone exclaim.

“Can I watch that again?” Hochul asked.

Sora quickly moved the progress bar to the front and played it again. She smiled proudly no matter how many times she watched it.

“Remember that feeling, so that you can use it later. If you can’t, then I guess running like we did just now is not a bad idea either,” Maru said.

“It really is different huh. I can tell after looking at the video,” Hochul said.

“Would you like to compare it side by side?”

Sora put up the two videos and played them simultaneously. Even though it was acted out by the same person, there was a clear difference. The Hochul on the left was clearly ‘trying’ to express the desperation. There didn’t seem to be anything wrong with his acting method, but Sora couldn’t help but feel that it was lacking. Meanwhile, the right side exuded desperation. There was even a sense of pressure that made the viewers stop breathing for a brief moment. It was not that different in an overall sense, but the atmosphere created by the minute differences completely changed the character in the video.

“You can’t bring out something you entirely don’t know. That’s why many people say that the most important thing to complete your acting skills is acting experience. However, that doesn’t mean that you can experience everything, so you have to experience something similar and leave the rest to your imagination to bring out your emotions. Exhausting your body is only a temporary measure. In the future, you’ll have to use your head to do it.”

Those were Maru’s words to Hochul. Sora perked up her ears and remembered those words. She had gained footage that she really liked, but it wasn’t thanks to her own ability. In the end, it was something directed by a veteran actor. This made her embarrassed as a director. That was why she had to learn. A director who could only look at the bigger picture would never be full-fledged. Looking after actors who were lost - this was also one of the qualities of a director.

“Thank you for your work everyone. But we aren’t done yet, so please work hard for just a little more. We have to shoot the transfer student’s last moment, and the main character’s changed ‘going to school’ scene.”

“You’re going to do it right now?”

“We have to strike the iron while it’s still hot. Well then, we’ll keep going without taking a break! Take the equipment and move outside!”

Sora shouted in a loud voice.

\* \* \*

“First, I’ll ask the graduate seonbae while editing. I did learn a bit, but I’m not entirely sure about the sound part yet.”

“Alright, work hard. I can’t help out with editing even if I wanted to.”

“I know. Then we’ll be going first. You’re going to come by after visiting the acting club, right? Don’t say that you aren’t coming.”

“I’ll be there soon. You’re going to the restaurant in front of Lucky Mart, right?”

“Yes. I’m treating everyone today, so you have to come, okay? I got a credit card from dad. Anyway, we’re off first.”

At that moment, Hochul and the rest of the juniors from the acting club stepped out from the group.

“Should we also visit the acting club?”

“Nah. I’ll be fine by myself. You guys all worked hard so go ahead and start eating. I’m sure you must be hungry,” Maru said as he looked at his watch.

It was just before 9 at night.

“Then we’ll be going.”

“Please come soon!”

He stared at the group before returning to the school. When he went up to the 5th floor, he heard some loud noises. Now that he thought about it, Miso was here today. He slightly opened the door and looked inside. He saw his juniors voicing out a low pitched-tone with all their might. Behind them, Miso was watching them with scary eyes.

It seemed that Miso was out for blood. Maru greeted Miso with a nod before going inside. The moment some of the juniors tried to greet him, Miso shouted.

“I’ll kill you for real if I hear you roll your eyes one more time. Focus on the sound. There are only two months left until the competition! I’m fine with you doing things half-assedly if you want your voice to be shit on the stage, but I will not let someone like that on stage. Don’t think about doing things moderately just because you’ve been picked as the members to stand on stage in the summer competition. You weren’t picked because you were better than the others. You can be switched out at

any time. The moment you forget the fact that there are more than thirty people who are just as good as you, you'll have to step down from the stage and repeat basic training over and over again. Understood?"

"Yes!"

She was as harsh as ever. Maru smiled awkwardly before standing next to Miso.

"You're quite savage."

The faces of the 1st year juniors he saw from where Miso stood were quite a spectacle. Maru thought that they might make such faces on the edge of a cliff. From how they were sweating heavily, it seemed that they started the vocal exercises right after intense physical training.

"This is normal."

"Don't you usually start rehearsing at this point?"

"These little shits are mumbling their lines. I could clearly see that they were only practicing the basics in the practice room, so I scrapped the rehearsals and started polishing their basics. Hey, Kim Inho! Don't squeeze your neck to make the voice; push it up from your stomach!"

"You can hear that from here?"

"I can."

"You're a total machine."

"What, you wanna join them?"

"I already shout on the local mountain every single day whether it's raining or snowing, because I'm afraid of losing them."

"Yes, you should be afraid. If actors just dig into emotions, then they'll become trash. Basics are something you have to practice your entire life."

"That's true. But hey, aren't you going to give me a wedding invitation?"

"A student doesn't need an invitation. You should just come."

"I don't need to pay congratulatory money?"

"Who do you take me for? The acting club should just visit and eat all they want."

"How generous. But hey, you look good. Is it because you're a bride of May?"

"Would you like to try my training after all this time?"

"I'll keep my mouth shut."

Miso twitched her nose before walking around and adjusting the voicing of some of the juniors. When she placed her hand on their stomach and below the waist and said a few words to them, the ring of their voices would become a lot better. Teaching wasn't done by just anyone after all.

After giving out instructions, Miso looked at the juniors with serious eyes. Was there someone she didn't like? Just as he was thinking about such things, Miso turned her head to look at Maru.

"It dries my blood."

"What?"

"It dries my blood. Was it always this annoying? Now that I finished preparing, I'm starting to get nervous instead. I think about all sorts of things."

"Are you talking about your marriage?"

"Why? Should I stop?"

"No, I didn't mean that."

Miso was on edge. She widened her eyes in a glaring fashion before sighing and turning around. It seemed that she didn't want to show her weak side to everyone else. Maru looked at his juniors. They were absorbed in their vocal exercise, so no one took notice.

"You're nervous now that your wedding is finally approaching?"

"Me? Haha? Me, nervous?"

Miso laughed as though it was absurd and spoke after a while.

"Am I the problem?"

"It's always like that. No matter how much you like a person, living together is a different problem after all. Don't think about it too seriously. If you get stressed out already, you'll probably start planning to escape before you even get to throw the bouquet, you know?"

"You're quite knowledgeable. I'm thinking about running away now too."

"You aren't actually going to do that, are you?"

"I'm not sure."

"Don't feel too much pressure. Once the wedding begins, time will flash by with you greeting everyone. Once you get yourself together, you'll probably find yourself on the plane."

"You sound like you've experienced it yourself?"

"I heard about it from someone I know. She told me that the wedding isn't all laughs and smiles. You'll have a lot of worries and think about trivial stuff."

"Taesik-oppa will probably laugh at me if he finds out I'm like this, right? He'll say that it doesn't suit me."

"Tell him about it. What good is having a husband? He's there to listen to you at times like this."

"Is that how it is?"

“Actually, I was thinking that teacher Taesik might be even more nervous than you. If anyone asks how he met his wife with all of his family members around, whew. Just thinking about it makes me shiver.”

“It’s not a crime for a teacher to get married to his student.”

“Did I say that? I’m just saying that many people will feel jealous.”

“What am I even doing with you....”

“Cracking light jokes is the best when you have a headache.”

Miso chuckled.

“If you’re so uneasy, just declare that you aren’t going to hold the wedding.”

“Are you crazy? I’ve already handed out all the invitations.”

“Then you know that you’re past the point of no return. Just bear with it.”

Maru put his thumbs up.

“If you need someone to sing a nuptial song, then just tell me. I’m quite good at singing, you know?”

“Lee Jinmo’s coming, you know?”

“You mean the singer? Wow, you’re in a different class alright.”

“Hey, rather than that, you should just get going. I feel pathetic talking to you. Why are you here in the first place?”

“I’m here to see everyone else, and to see if they’re doing well or not.”

“You? Of all people? Looks like the sun will rise from the west tomorrow. You never showed up on days you didn’t have to.”

“I decided to passionately give more love to my juniors now.”

“So you’re trying to screw with them, huh?”

“I wonder why everyone’s taking my intentions the wrong way when I say them.”

“Like hell they are. If you don’t have anything to do, just get going. Don’t bully them.”

“Hey, I never....”

He just shrugged towards Miso, who glared at him, before turning around. He waved his hand at Daemyung, who was practicing with the others on one side before leaving the hall. He could hear Miso’s shout through the closing door. Who’s bullying who? Maru chuckled before climbing down the stairs.

## **Chapter 614**

“It’s killing me. I thought I would be able to touch up the sound with a few clicks, but it wasn’t like that. I have to extract the sound from the video, edit that, and then overlay it over the muted video. It kills me to see it rendering on my junk computer. So I decided to buy a computer at this opportunity.”



Sora spoke as though she was buying a bag of snacks on the way home.

“I’ll help out. It’s not like a computer costs pocket money.”

“It’s fine. I’ve saved up for months now.”

“Oh, you’re buying a computer with several months’ worth of pocket money?”

Sora nodded. Maru did have a suspicion when he found out that she lived in a wealthy apartment, so he decided to stop worrying about the wallet of a rich kid.

“You’re also doing the editing, right?” Maru asked Ando.

“I’m helping out from the side, but almost everything is done by her. I just give her my opinions from time to time.”

“When do you think you’re going to finish?”

“Today’s the 8th, so let’s see. The estimate is the 15th. Of course, we’ll have to do finishing touches after that until we hand it in.”

“So you’re going to edit it until the last moment, huh.”

“Looking at all the footage we took, it really made me want to do better. Isn’t that right?” Ando asked Sora.

“Don’t even start. Some of the footage I thought I was never going to use because it was an NG during the shoot was actually so good. If it was just me, I might have thought that I was overthinking, but Ando-seonbae said the same thing. It’s haunting me. Even though the take was supposed to be no good, it looked better than the original.”

“That sounds like I’ll have to do better in the future. If you need me for any additional shoots, then tell me about it. I’m free except on weekends.”

“You said that the drama schedule returned to normal, right?”

Maru nodded. The drama shooting schedule, which was messed up thanks to writer Lee Hanmi overhauling an entire episode, finally got back on track. He was now pretty free except on Saturdays and Sundays, and sometimes Fridays.

“Alright. I’ll see what I can make before contacting you. Ando-seonbae, let’s go. We don’t have time for this.”

Sora dragged Ando by the sleeve. Ando left the classroom while waving his hand with a tired face.

“So you finished the film?” Daemyung asked as he came into the classroom, looking at the two that just left.

“You can say that the actors’ job is almost over. Editing is not an area I can help out with.”

“A film huh. I want to make one too.”

“Why don’t you write a short scenario over the summer holidays?”

“Summer holidays?”

“You’re gonna have some time left over after the summer competition, won’t you? From what I see, Aram seems to be doing well as the club president. Are you going to go on stage during the winter competition?”

“No. I didn’t go up this time, so I’ll just look after the juniors in the winter too.”

“That’s why I’m saying it. Try making a scenario about 5 minutes long. And try drawing a sketch too.”

“5 minutes?”

“What, is it too short?”

“Yeah, a little.”

“If you try, it won’t be that short. In fact, it might be even more difficult than longer ones, you know? You will only be able to put in the most crucial parts.”

“Now that you say it, that’s true.”

“I heard that writers for publications prepare short stories first. Wouldn’t the film industry be similar? You need to start off with writing a proper short film, and only then will you be able to write longer ones later.”

“A 5-minute film huh.”

“Once you finish the scenario, show it to me. I’ll act in it for you if I like it.”

“Y-you weren’t going to do it without any conditions?”

“If I don’t get paid, I’ll have to see what it is like. If you pay me, I’ll do it without any conditions.”

“Ha, haha. Alright, I’ll try to come up with something you’ll really like. But five minutes huh. I’m not sure how that’s going to work.”

“Try looking things up on the internet. There’s actually quite a lot. There are especially a lot of videos made by people our age. You can refer to those.”

Daemyung nodded before asking.

“What kind of topics do you like?”

“The topic? That’s the director’s job to come up with.”

“There are joint projects, you know? I want to try looking for topics in the range that you want. Acting something you’re good at is good too, but I think acting something you want to do is going to be better.”

“Something I want to do, huh. What about a deep romance?”

The reason he made a joke was because nothing came to mind. He had his hands full digesting what he was given, so he never thought about such things. He chose acting as a way to earn money, and he adapted his acting to the roles he was given just like a factory stamping out items on order. In such a

situation, asking things about the labor itself, rather than the benefits of it, was something quite difficult for him to answer.

“You have a talent to put people in a fix.”

“M-me?”

Daemyung blinked with a dazed expression. Maru put his bag on the desk before sitting on the window sill.

“I wonder what kind of acting I want to do.”

“You never thought about it?”

“Have you ever thought about the reason you like math?”

“No, I just do it because I’m told to.”

“It’s the same thing. I somehow stumbled on it, and there are people telling me to do it, so that’s why I’m doing it. Of course, I’m not saying that I dislike acting, or find it not fun. I find it really fun to the point that I can’t think of anything else to do as a job at this point. However, if you ask me specifically what kind of acting I want to do, then it becomes quite difficult to answer.”

“That’s plausible. Hm, then what kind of acting do you find yourself comfortable with? I think this will be easier to answer.”

“Something I can go all out on. I mean like something where I can burst out with all of my emotions. I’m still quite lacking when it comes to restrained acting.”

“Then I guess I should try creating a calm and relaxing scenario.”

“I thought I just said I’m not confident in doing that?”

“That’s all the more reason you should try shooting a film with fewer fluctuations in emotions. Don’t you think it’s gonna be really fun?”

“Sheesh, you really have a knack for putting other people in a tight spot. Don’t you feel that the juniors are avoiding you these days?”

“N-now that you mention it, maybe.”

Daemyung grinned.

“Oh, how are the videotapes coming along?”

Daemyung asked as though he just remembered. Maru jumped off the window sill.

“Thanks for asking. I just entered 1988 now. I should start seeing the changes soon.”

He finally reached the point when Jung Haejoo’s acting would become more polished. What Maru looked forward to was that the conversations between Haejoo and Junmin behind the scenes might be recorded. Yes, watching a good actor’s acting will allow him to learn many things, but if he managed to

get his hands on the teachings of the mentor that nurtured the actor, then he would have even more things to learn.

He could go to Junmin and learn from him directly, but he now vaguely understood what kind of meaning Haejoo had to Junmin. Perhaps the woman named Jung Haejoo might be an irrecoverable wound for his lifetime. He didn't want to get on his bad side by poking that wound.

"Can I watch with you as well?"

"Come over to my house on Saturday. I don't have a shoot that day."

"Can I?"

"Can you not?"

Maru picked up his bag.

"Let's go up. Everyone must be waiting."

\* \* \*

"Should I say my words more strongly?"

"Do you find them lacking?"

"No, it's not like that, but when I see how the others are doing it, I feel like I need to do more."

"If you think that way, then it's not a bad idea to put more energy into your lines. However, what you need to think about more than that is the harmony on stage. Having one person receive all the spotlight doesn't complete the play after all. Try doing it differently in the next rehearsal. Daemyung and I will have a closer look."

"Yes!"

The junior returned to his original position after a short reply. Maru opened the script and picked up his pen. This was the first time he saw a full rehearsal run. He did watch it during practice, but he wasn't fully paying attention because he was busy making props.

"Well then! You should have had enough rest. Let's begin shall we?"

Aram shouted the moment the second hand on the clock hit the number 12. The first year students groaned before gathering in the middle.

"It really was unexpected. I thought Aram was more of a whimsical kind," he said to Daemyung, who sat next to him.

"Maybe it's because she's someone who does sports, but she finds it natural to keep things on time. You haven't seen her bring a stopwatch to do the stretches, have you? If anything, she's even more strict than Miso-seonbae, not less."

"I guess we picked a good president."

Daemyung smiled.

“But hey, what have you been writing on your script this whole time?”

“Their habits and stuff like that. I’m just writing down what I can see for now.”

“You’re going to tell them about it?”

“I thought I’d act like a senior for once.”

“Everyone will like it.”

“I’d be thankful if they do.”

Practice began under Aram’s lead. The juniors split up into two sides of the imaginary stage and went up on the ‘stage’ one by one.

Maru spoke in a small voice as he looked at the juniors who were acting.

“Isn’t the topic of the play a little too heavy? It’s about just before the independence, isn’t it?”

“I thought so too, but the script is created for young people. I think it’s also made as educational material, but the content is good. I think everyone likes the tragic beauty too.”

“Miso-noonim had everyone go over the basic vocalization because of the pronunciation a while ago, right?”

“Yeah, she did.”

“I can definitely tell that their voices are a little weak. If they can’t fill this small hall, then their voices will be eaten up by the audience’s clothing on an actual stage.”

“We’re increasing vocal practice before and after practice, but it’s not something that improves in a short time.”

“That’s why practicing outside this hall is important. Do you think they’re practicing at home?”

“They’re all doing their best.”

“Do you really think so?”

“I believe them. They aren’t the type to lie about that.”

“Well, I wouldn’t be so sure about that. I don’t think Miso-noonim got angry over something they couldn’t do. It’s also true that she has better eyes and ears than us, and she definitely told everyone to practice outside of practice sessions.”

“Everyone’s fired up. They should be putting in just as much effort.”

“If you think so, then I guess that’s fine.”

Maru stopped talking and looked at his juniors. He might be asking for too much from students who had started learning just two months ago. However, Miso never asked people to do the impossible.

After thinking for a while, Daemyung spoke.

“You know? I sometimes think about this, but she... Gaeul, I mean. You trust her fully, right?”

“Why do you ask?”

“It might sound strange coming from me, but I found it a little curious. I admit that your attitude towards the juniors definitely changed after you decided to change. However, you still sometimes choose to be doubtful instead of believing in them, don’t you? I’m not saying that it’s a bad thing. I know that it’s your way of doing things. Sometimes, I even want to try living like you. Not that it would work out. That’s what an innate nature is, right?”

“Maybe, maybe not. I think that human nature can be changed after being born. People change according to what they experience too.”

Maru paused before continuing.

“So the point of your question is, why am I so blindly faithful to Gaeul when I’m so doubtful of other people and like to make use of others?”

“You always put my words like that. Of course, you’re not wrong.”

“Aren’t couples all like this?”

“Probably not, I think? Normal people aren’t like that. That’s what makes me curious. Honestly speaking, I like Jiyeon, but I don’t think that everything about her is good. Jiyeon should be the same. When I look at you two though, no, when I look at how you treat Gaeul... how should I put this... I’m not sure if saying it like this is right, and I might be being rude to you, but I can only think of it like this.”

“What is it?”

“I think you’re afraid of her. And you look unstable.”

“...Really?”

“Sorry. I think I went too far. I’m sure it’s not like that.”

Daemyung quickly apologized with a complex expression on his face. Maru could only chuckle.

“Looks like everyone must be doing their best with their practice at home.”

“What do you mean by that so suddenly?”

“What do you mean, what? I’m saying that you’re right. Also, try to refrain from telling someone your honest words. People generally get angry, not embarrassed, when other people find out what they’re thinking.”

Maru closed the script.

“Maru.”

“I’ll go get some fresh air for a while. Also, don’t think about it too deeply. I am a little angry, but I also feel thankful. It’s quite interesting, you know? When I think about the fact that I have a friend who knows me better than I do.”

I’m off - Maru slapped Daemyung’s back before leaving the hall.

## Chapter 615

The relationship between lovers was a tug of war in the end. It was a fight to see who pulls the rope stronger, and who gets pulled. A relationship where one side is one-sidedly pulling, while the other side is being one-sidedly dragged will make the involved parties fed up eventually. Only when a change of power happens regularly, so that neither side knows who was in the lead, can a relationship between lovers continue without both sides losing interest. This is why many people think about making changes to their relationship when they find out that they're scheduling the next date out of habit. They say love will eventually turn into an agreement and a duty, but anyone would want to maintain the 'love' in their relationship while they were still lovers. A relationship that's stimulating and new every time they meet - in order to maintain such a fresh relationship, Maru knew that there needed to be a tug of war with a balance of power, but he couldn't do that.

He bought a cup of coffee from the cafeteria before walking a lap around the school field. He could hear vocal exercises from the 5th floor of the main building from where he was.

"I am afraid."

Maru looked down at the half-filled coffee. Daemyung was very adept at observing others. What was surprising was that he didn't just see the surface; he noticed the underlying meaning behind each of those actions. He might have been born with it, but he probably learned to notice what other people were thinking when he was being bullied, so that he could avoid getting injured, which improved his talents even further.

Daemyung's words were true. He hit right on the bullseye, rendering Maru unable to retort with a joke like he usually would. When someone got hit on a part that really hurt, that person would not have the leisure to counterattack and would lose strength before avoiding that place altogether.

I am afraid - Maru smiled bitterly as he looked at his eyes reflected in the deep brown surface of the coffee. A relationship always had to be fresh, otherwise, both sides would get fed up. Time did not consolidate relationships. It wasn't that there was a special reason for long-time lovers turning their backs on each other. Maru listened to his long-time friends whining about breaking up. He couldn't remember their names, faces, or the specific details of their situation, but he could remember their words to a certain extent.

They... just didn't have a reason to keep meeting.

There was no grand reason for breaking up. This was especially true in a romantic relationship.

A partner bound by business is generally continuous unless the monetary agreement is broken. For an employer and an employee, as long as there's a clear employment contract, neither side can break it one-sidedly. However, friendship and romantic relationships didn't have such clear-cut contracts. Friendship would sometimes mature on its own even if left alone sometimes, but for lovers, that definitely wasn't the case.

Love, it was such a vague word. No literature anywhere in the world had a clear definition of love. Some called sacrifice the essence of love, while some called devotion the essence of love. Some called overcoming hardships together love, and some called mercy and forgiveness love.

Perhaps the reason why the reasons for lovers breaking up were so bland was precisely because of the vagueness of love.

That was why Maru decided to fit himself into that context. Maru was playing tug of war with Gaeul. However, he never pulled too strongly. He always readied himself to be dragged, and sometimes he would pick up the rope and walk over to her side on his own accord. He knew that the exciting tug of war of love was the route for their relationship to not become worn out, but Maru knew the downsides of that tug of war too well.

A tug of war could only occur when both sides are grabbing the rope. If either side lets go of the rope, it's no longer a tug of war. It's just playing with the rope by oneself in a lonely manner.

The reason he showed her a side of him that he did not show others was a way for him to show his struggles. Yes, he was revealing his honest feelings, but at the same time, he was acting cute in front of her. Don't abandon me - that might be his honest feeling.

Maru emptied the rest of the coffee in one go before crumpling up the paper cup.

Sometimes he thought - why does it have to be her? Rationally speaking, it was definitely strange for him to be so hung up over Gaeul. Indeed, Gaeul was definitely a charming woman. She was lovely, and he thought that he could give her his everything. However, it wasn't that people were matched 1 to 1 like a puzzle piece. Even if it wasn't Gaeul, if he looked closely enough, he might find another woman who's more lovely and would make him want to endear more.

However, from the moment he came back to life, he only thought about Gaeul and wanted her.

Thinking about it closely, it was definitely something strange. Why did he try to regain Gaeul? Was it because he hadn't given her enough things in his previous life? If he had to come up with a reason, that was the most plausible one. After all, his wife quit doing the plays that she so loved in order to take care of the housework. It wasn't that he couldn't understand the compensating mindset, but was that really all? Was that the only reason he did all the things he did in order to meet the woman who was his wife in his previous life and became lovers with her?

"If that's the case, I guess this is more like redemption, not love, huh."

It became vague. The thoughts that never came to mind when he pursued blind love and wanted a return of the same love, gained weight with Daemyung's words and dug into his mind.

Of course, it wasn't like he was dissatisfied that she was the only woman in his life. It was just that he found it strange, now that he thought about it. What made him want Gaeul so much? Strictly speaking, it was all a matter of the past, so why was he so hung up on her?

Why would there be any reason to like someone? - he tried to think that way and start walking, but the iffyness in his mind still haunted his thoughts. As he climbed up the stairs from the 1st floor, the 2nd floor, and then the 3rd floor, his thoughts ended up taking root in a completely unexpected place.

"Is it fine as it is now?"

He thought about it carefully. For Gaeul, this was her first romantic relationship. Until now, they had met up with each other without anything bad happening, but there was a possibility that it might go



wrong in the future. No, that moment would definitely arrive. After all, he had multiple quarrels with her in his previous life before they got married.

The problem was his actions. Weren't his actions driving her emotions one-sidedly into one corner? A person matured as they loved and had their heart broken by others. This was the same for both men and women. That was why many people asked the question: Is it really a happy thing to get married to your first love?

Gaeul dated others before she met him in his previous life. The same thing could be said for him as well. They met each other while looking for their lovers, and happened to have found a partner that matched their styles in each other.

In his previous life, his wife was a woman in society who worked in a theater troupe, and was over 20 years old. The man known as Han Maru liked the Han Gaeul who had walked her own path in life. They shared their own ups and downs that they've experienced, cherished the different parts about each other, and sometimes quarreled but held on with the love they've experienced before to heal themselves with it to give rise to new love.

It was because there was a Han Gaeul that he didn't know of; that he couldn't understand, that he could love her existence.

"I look unstable."

Was he perhaps making a tailor-made doll?

He had that thought. Wasn't he perhaps blocking Gaeul's own path forward and changing it to his own tastes by imitating a destined meeting?

His actions of giving up on the tug of war and matching her every wish might also be quite pressuring in her perspective. She didn't feel it now, but the moment she realized the ordinariness of their romantic relationship, she might begin to doubt their current relationship.

'Am I really an idiot?'

Writing the period in a novel that was still unwritten in order to reform the ending of a novel that he already once saw should be wrong. Perhaps him asking her to get married might be a net that shackled her.

Maru leaned against the wall.

Wasn't that too irresponsible? - he was at the epitome of ignorance to the point that it made him wonder if it was really his own doing. What right did he have to approach her and force her to take action? What right did he have to make her like and love him?

At that moment, Maru felt as though something very important escaped him. He felt like there was a magical word that made this messed up formula make sense, but he couldn't think of it. The reason he was so blindly faithful to Gaeul, the reason it couldn't be anyone but her - he had a strange feeling that the reason lay apart from her.

But, that was only just a feeling. Maru shook off those emotions by shaking his head. He had to base his thoughts on facts. There was a possibility that he might have lost something he absolutely must not, but such an assumption would only leave behind meaningless results.

If he endlessly dug into the 'what ifs', he might as well come to this conclusion -

That his memories were manipulated.

However, that shouldn't be the case. That was why he had to think based on clear facts.

"What do I have to do now?"

He wished to continue the current relationship where he matched her. He would reform himself into the ideal man that Gaeul wanted. They would be able to continue their relationship as long as he changed himself to freshen things up whenever their relationship hit a habitual routine.

It was fine as long as he acted like he was doing now.

Maru was reminded of a well-crafted doll walking. That doll's face looked similar to Gaeul's.

Was he in love with the current her? Or was he in love with her of the previous life?

There was one thing that was clear.

His actions will continue to restrict her options, and as a result of that, she might become a completely different person from the her of the previous life, in a sense.

When he looked at her, who coexisted between two different memories, he honestly couldn't give a clear answer to which one of her he would eventually end up liking.

'I'm a total coward.'

He was afraid of being abandoned; he was afraid of losing her, so he approached her first and planned out everything from A to Z. Perhaps he should not have done that. Perhaps he should have let her live her own life and stand in front of her with confidence once she matured.

Perhaps the fear that she would be taken away, and that meager confidence of his have ruined her life? Perhaps she was destined to meet a man incomparably better than Han Maru in this life and live the rest of her life in happiness, but a dude who got a second chance at life might have ruined her future out of his own greed.

"It had to be ordinary love."

Maru put his forehead against the wall and sighed.

Perhaps the reason he was thinking like this was an influence from his change. Now that his thought process changed, he felt like his own philosophy had been twisted as well.

'But I still don't want to give her up.'

Perhaps the god might think of him as an underhanded man.

At that moment, he heard some voices from above. It seemed that the door to the hall was opened. They were probably taking a break from practice.

“Maru-seonbae?”

“Yeah. You guys finished?”

“Yeah. We got a 10-minute break.”

“Would you like to drink something? I’ll treat you.”

“Really? Guys! Maru-seonbae’s treating us!”

Maru looked at everyone rushing down. You’re really good at deceiving your own emotions - he felt like someone was saying to him from within.

## **Chapter 616**

-We got an audition scheduled for you, so prepare for that. The reason I’m telling this to you directly is because I have big expectations from you. Team leader Han will tell you the details, so you can hear that from him. This drama is something heavily marketed by YBS. You’ve made your name known through the sitcom, so don’t you think it’s about time you make your face known to more people? You should row while the water is still flowing. If you make your name known to more people with this opportunity, you’ll have an easier time later. Your acting is pretty decent, so you have the potential to become big. Also, your heart is really okay, right? Tell me if you have a problem later. Don’t suffer by yourself and make other people worried. If necessary, we’ll introduce you to a good hospital.

Jiseok reminded himself of the words he just heard as he left the president’s office.

“Since he’s caring about me, does he think that I’m worth it now?”

He did not hide the smile that crept onto his face as he walked. It was well-known that the president of Yellow Star was quite cold to actors without any fame. Jiseok also only talked to him a couple of times when he signed the contract, and never talked to him after that.

“What, did something good happen?”

“Oh, noona.”

Jiseok waved his hand at Chaerim, who stood in front of him. She was wearing slightly tall shoes, a blue shirt, and beige cotton pants. She also seemed to have become taller, but he did not say that out loud. Anyone in the company knew that Chaerim was sensitive about her height.

“Didn’t you go to Japan?”

“The plan was to have a relaxing rest, but my schedule was leaked on the internet. So I postponed it to next week.”

“Popular people have it hard. What brings you to the company?”

“To see the unnis.”

“Unnis, you say....”

“What other unnis are there in this company other than them?”

“I knew it. What is it this time?”

“Blue’s farewell concert.”

“What concert?”

“They want to do a farewell concert. They asked me for my opinions about doing a farewell concert even though it’s been half a year since we officially split up, and gee, I can only say that the president is amazing. He’s the kind of guy who would dig out a body from a grave before selling it to someone else.”

“Ha, haha.”

Seeing Chaerim with a glare on her face, Jiseok couldn’t do anything but laugh. Jiseok was there when Blue had a press meeting. Camera flashes baptized the girls, and those girls hugged each other warmly in front of the journalists and cried as they declared the last moment of Blue. As soon as the press meeting finished though, they wiped their eyes off with some tissue, got on their respective vehicles, and split up without saying goodbye.

Seeing the five fairies of Blue, who split up as though they were refreshed, Jiseok and his manager talked about how the entertainment industry was nothing magical. An idol group, who split up with tears in front of the fans - regardless of what was actually happening - is going to hold a farewell concert after half a year.

The more he thought about that, the more flabbergasted he became. Leading a company really wasn’t something anyone could do.

“So, are you going to do it?”

“Would you do it if you were in my shoes? After all that trouble?”

“How about the others?”

“I wouldn’t know. Minji-unist and Dayoon-unist are doing well as actresses, so they have nothing to lose, but the other two aren’t. They haven’t done any activities ever since Blue split up, and from what I heard, they invested into some franchise and miserably failed.”

“You don’t seem to contact each other, huh?”

“We’ve had enough of each other, so why would I? I just assume that they’re living their lives well. Honestly, I didn’t want to see them today either.”

“You really don’t hold back, huh. Are the other noonas coming now?”

“Probably? Why do you ask?”

“I thought I should watch.”

“Watch if you want to. It’ll be quite interesting.”

“I-I was just joking.”

“Rather than that, what happened to you to be coming out of the president’s office?”

“He told me to do an audition for a drama.”

“You should get yourself together then. You’re quite soft, so it’s likely that people will push you around. Especially that president. Don’t listen to his words fully. He’s not totally trash, but he’s definitely not someone who can be called good.”

“I’ll keep that in mind.”

“Keep raising your worth. If you don’t want to get backstabbed later, you will have to do that.”

“Aren’t you being too pessimistic?”

“I’m just saying. I found out that the only things you can trust in the end are money and your own skills. I’m twenty and I’ve realized that already. Aren’t I amazing?”

“Yes, you are.”

Charim made a self-loathing smile before sighing. Although she spoke in a relaxed manner, she probably wasn’t that comfortable with meeting people from the group she split up with.

At that moment, a person wearing training clothes appeared behind Chaerim. From the figure, it seemed to be a woman. She was covering her face with a hood and was yawning as she walked over. She stopped after seeing Jiseok.

“What are you two doing?”

“Oh, it was you, seonbae-nim. I was wondering who it was,” Jiseok said as he looked at Joohyun, who took off her hood. Chaerim turned around.

“U-unni. Hello.”

“Haven’t seen you in a while, Chaerim. How have you been?”

“I’m doing okay. How about you, unni?”

“Well, I’ve just been resting ever since The Witness finished. It’s been a while since I came to the company too.”

“Wow, it must be my lucky day today then. Meeting you here and all.”

Jiseok slightly walked over so that he could see Chaerim’s face from the side. The way she chuckled in embarrassment made her look like a completely different person. Chaerim, who was looking at Joohyun with a slightly flushed expression, suddenly turned around.

Aren’t you going to get going? - she seemed to say with her eyes. Jiseok smiled awkwardly before moving a step away.

“Then I’ll take my leave. Have a nice talk, you two.”

“Jiseok, wait.”

Joohyun stopped him.

“Eh?”

“Aren’t you doing a drama soon?”

“Ah, yes. The president just told me to do an audition.”

“I knew it.”

Joohyun smiled.

“Are you perhaps playing the lead character, seonbae?”

“Yeah. I was originally planning to take a one-year break, but this one looked interesting. That’s why I decided to do it. Plus, I know the writer as well so I have faith in the work.”

“I was just a bundled product then, huh. I did find it strange because I was told to audition for a mini-series on public TV.”

Chaerim interfered after listening to the conversation.

“What’s so bad about being a bundled product? Products that don’t have value can’t even be put in a bundle.”

“Chaerim is right about that. I’m not saying that it’s the right thing to do, but that doesn’t mean that it’s not an opportunity. Don’t feel disappointed and do your best. I’m looking forward to it because I think that it’ll be quite interesting to do it with you.”

Joohyun waved her hand and walked to the president’s room.

“Now that’s what I call a superstar’s leisure. It’s amazing that she can meet the president wearing something like that.”

“Joohyun-seonbae will probably wear things like that even if she’s not a star, though. She has a strong character after all.”

“That’s true, I guess. You have it good. You get to shoot with Joohyun-uni.”

“It’s a lot of pressure on me. Everyone will probably think that I was cast simply because I’m in the same agency as Joohyun-seonbae. If I end up doing badly or something.... Urgh, that’ll be terrible.”

“What’s not terrible? Everything’s terrible when you work in this field. Look at me, I’m going to talk about holding a concert even though I’ve disbanded.”

“You told me you weren’t going to do it though.”

“That’s what I want to do. However, you know that work doesn’t always go the way you want to, right?”

“I just want to live my life while acting the things I want. Using my brain and measuring things out isn’t my style.”

“If you want that kind of life, the only option is for you to become a famous actor. If you become an actor who gets work prepared for you even if you stay still and have everyone wanting to scout you, then you’ll be able to do that. Heck, I want to be like that too.”

“Are you going to quit singing? I quite liked your singing. You know that I have every one of Blue’s CDs, right?”

“Thanks for that. As for music, I want to try it again later. I want to do emotional ballads instead of dance music though. I don’t want to be a singer who runs around on stage; I want to be one that just stands on the stage with a single microphone and a single light. But I like being an actress for now. I think I’ll remember bad things if I sing now.”

“Tell me about it if you ever decide to sing later. I’ll go watch you.”

“Alright. I guess I’ll be eating at the cafeteria until the other unnis come. I should consume company food since it’s been a while. It’s still terrible, isn’t it?”

“It’s not like the terrible taste would go anywhere.”

Chaerim smiled and turned around. Just then, she stopped as though she was reminded of something.

“You were friends with her, weren’t you?”

“Her?”

Just as Chaerim was about to say the name, she chuckled before changing what she was going to say.

“Gaeul, I meant Gaeul.”

“Ahaha, Gaeul, I do.”

“Do you know that calling her Gaeul in front of her makes her really embarrassed? She was so cute. I met her two days ago, and I kept calling her Gaeul for the whole day. Even though it was her who told me to call her that, she was really embarrassed when I did. She’s really cute.”

“I haven’t seen her face since I only called her, but her voice was a little shaky. It seems like she’s not used to it.”

“What can she do? She can only get used to it. Just like how I’m Chaerim.”

“Ah, right. You changed your name, didn’t you?”

“I became more used to being called by this name after all. It’s a name with a lot of terrible memories attached to it, but there’s no other name that expresses me as well as this one. Are you going to keep using your real name, Yoo Jiseok?”

“Yes. No one’s using the name, and the name isn’t that bad either.”

“I guess it’s fine as long as you’re ok with it.”

Later - Chaerim started walking across the corridor as she said that.

Jiseok stretched out his arms and climbed down the stairs. When he was shooting the sitcom, all he ever wanted was a day of rest, but now that the series finished and there was nothing for him to do other than going to school, he was filled with the desire to shoot. Luckily, he was given some nice work. He was a little disappointed that he was being sold as a bundle, but thanks to Joohyun and Chaerim’s words, he realized that he wasn’t in a position to be complaining.

“Rather than that, I wonder what he’s doing these days.”

There was a name that came to his mind when he talked about Gaeul. He wondered if he should try calling and took out his phone. Just then, he saw the cleaning lady, who was cleaning the stairs.

“Hello, ma’am.”

“Ah, yes. It’s been a while.”

“I haven’t had any work recently, so I didn’t need to come. Give me the mop.”

“Oh, no, it’s fine.”

“Just give it to me. I don’t have anything to do anyway. I have to come down from the top, right?”

“It’s my work though.”

“We can finish it earlier if there’s two of us. Have you eaten yet?”

“Not yet.”

“Then eat with me after finishing this. I have a spare food ticket.”

“Oh, no, I’m okay.”

“I just don’t want to eat by myself. I mean it.”

He went up to the 3rd floor with the mop and came down while wiping the stairs. He also cleaned the banisters with a rag. When he put his strength in it, the stairs and the banisters were sparkly. Jiseok looked at his own work with a satisfied expression.

“You’re doing that again?”

It was Chaerim who said she was going to the cafeteria. She was holding a canned drink and a sandwich in her hands. It seemed that she didn’t like the company food after all.

“Do you want to help too, noona?”

“Don’t bring me into it. I’m not that kind. Also, hey, that’s a bad habit you have.”

“We should help each other out.”

“Like that, you’ll get scammed by a fraudster someday, you know?”

Chaerim glanced downwards before going over to the cleaning lady and handing her the drink. She forced the can into the lady’s hands even though she tried to decline, before returning.

“That’s it for me. You can do the cleaning.”

“Okay.”

“Geez, you’re too kind for your own good.”

Chaerim went up the stairs while taking a bite from the sandwich. Jiseok shrugged before finishing the rest of the cleaning.



“Ma’am, let’s go eat.”

“Thanks every time.”

“Don’t say that. Oh, can you go ahead? I’ll make a quick phone call before catching up to you.”

“Alright. I’ll get your portion as well.”

After sending off the cleaning lady first, Jiseok took out his phone and pressed some buttons. After a few signal sounds, the signal suddenly cut off before a lady’s voice could be heard.

-The number you’re trying to reach is currently unav....

“Oh, is he in a shoot right now?”

Jiseok remembered that the shoots for New Semester were on the weekends. He nodded before putting the phone inside his pocket. They should also eat around 1 p.m. so he decided to call after finishing lunch.

“Ma’am! Wait for me!”

Jiseok quickly went down the stairs.

## **Chapter 617**

-Uhm...

Hochul’s face was zoomed in on. The classroom in the background became narrower and narrower, but the sound given off by the surroundings became louder and louder. The creaking of the desks, the sound of footsteps, the laughter of the students, and somehow, the sound of faith crumbling apart within a certain character, even though it should not be something that could be heard.

The close-up slowly fell back after it was changed to the next cut. Maru rested his chin on his hands and focused on the monitor. This cut was originally taken as a single cut. The camera had first zoomed in on Hochul’s face, then zoomed out before the scene changed to the classroom. Sora, however, scrapped the original finished cut and took another shot. She did not control the sense of distance by manipulating the lens; she put the camera on a cart and moved the whole thing backwards, in other words, she used a dolly shot. Thanks to that, Hochul had to run another lap in order to bring back the desperate emotions.

“It has a much bigger sense of space now that the camera is moving.”

“It’s good that I changed it, right?”

He could hear Sora and Ando having a conversation. It seemed that they were satisfied with the result. He turned around. He could see Hochul looking at his own figure passionately acting on the screen. His expression was somewhere between pity and satisfaction, and seeing as how he sighed in relief when the cut was switched, it seemed that he wasn’t entirely dissatisfied.

“Looks good.”

“Yes. I was worried, so I’m very relieved.”

Maru patted Hochul on the shoulder before looking at the monitor again. Sound from the surrounding space reached the level of being noisy. The scenery of the harmonious classroom was captured as the camera distanced itself from Hochul. Hochul, who seemed isolated in his own area, tried to wave at the camera before lowering his head and turning around.

-That couldn't be helped.

Maru's voice could be heard from the speakers. His voice was recorded later and overlaid on top of the video. Maru looked at his own figure laughing and playing with the others. He tried his best to insert some uneasy expressions throughout the scene to express that he was afraid of losing the peace he managed to painstakingly get, but it seemed that it wasn't enough. It would've been better if he secretly expressed the wariness that he might lose this joy from time to time. It was such a pity, but Sora said that it might look too artificial to go that far and used the first shot they took.

'I got a lot of benefits thanks to the director being so clear cut.'

Since acting was a field where he could only be subjective, an actor couldn't help but aim for the ideals. Perhaps the thought that he could do better if he tried more might be a mistake on his part or was him being arrogant. Being able to give strict evaluations to actors that couldn't be satisfied with their acting should also be one of the qualities of a director. While Sora might be a tomboy, he had to give her acknowledgment in that regard.

The film now headed towards an entirely different direction from the beginning. The main character, who chewed on rice as he would sand at the beginning of the film, now texted his friends and looked forward to going to school. He joked with the friends he met on his way to school and talked to them without restraint. The main character, who sought out dark alleyways, now raised his head up high and walked on streets where students, who were wearing uniforms just like his, were everywhere. Finally feeling a sense of belonging that he was now the same as the rest of them, the main character entered the classroom, and the camera slowly followed the main character's back. After greeting his friends cheerfully, the main character sat down and took out textbooks from his bag. He talked about trivial everyday life stuff with the person that sat next to him as he prepared for morning homeroom. Meanwhile, the camera separated from the main character's back and approached the blackboard in a slow fashion.

"We got a lot of NGs on that part, didn't we?"

"That was the 19th take. Everyone seemed a little overly excited because it was the last part. I actually held myself back from snapping. I too was excited after all," Sora said with a smile.

Maru also remembered that part. Even Ando, who always carried the camera seriously, shook the camera up and down because of the light-hearted atmosphere. Perhaps because of the sense of leisure that arose since it was the last part, no one complained about it. Thanks to that, the classroom scene just before the last cut was harmony itself and was at the epitome of ordinariness. The camera, which captured a scene that could be seen in just about every school, slowly turned to look at the desk right in front of the teacher's desk. There were students sitting at thirty seven desks in the classroom, but that desk alone was empty. The guest appearance, Taesik, who should be on his honeymoon at this moment, opened the door and came in.

-Everyone, sit down. Class prez.

The camera now shot from the teacher's point of view. Gaeul, who played the role of the class president, and was standing up, stopped talking with the person next to her and smiled.

-Stand, bow to the teacher.

-Good morning, sir.

The camera scanned the bowing students before stopping at the empty desk.

-Don't chat and do your best during class. Don't cause trouble. Understood?

-Yes.

Even while the teacher had a conversation with the students, the camera shot the desk which was now without an owner. Taesik left and chatter erupted from outside the frame once again.

-What's for lunch today?

-Did you do that homework?

-Wanna go to the PC bang after school?

The scene faded out amidst the ordinary conversation. As the screen turned dark, silence fell on the film production club as well.

The film wasn't over yet. There was still a cut left.

Breaking the silence, light appeared from in the monitor again. Maru saw himself in the film. Someone called out to him, who was standing in front of that empty desk in front of the teacher's desk.

-Hey, the teacher said to take that desk out and put it in the storage room.

-Really?

The camera, which was shooting from the back of the classroom, slowly moved around to the side of the main character and shot his face; the same face that was smiling in happiness after being freed from shackles.

"What a bad guy," Maru said after checking that the video stopped.

It was definitely something satisfying since he was moved when he saw his own acting, but it also made him feel bitter because he felt as though a facet of the character in the screen also existed inside of him. Considering the rule that one could only express what they know of, that child who was fleeing from reality on the screen was undeniably a part of him.

"That goes to show how good your acting was. Now then, that concludes the premiere. Give a round of applause, everyone! For the actors, the staff, and lastly, to me, who fought until the end on the computer!"

Sora stood up first and started clapping. Everyone laughed and followed suit.

“Now, I can’t edit it anymore. The day after tomorrow, the 23rd, is the deadline after all. And honestly speaking, I wouldn’t know what to edit at this point. I’m confident now. This will definitely win a prize.”

“Isn’t it a little too early to be happy?” someone from the film production club asked.

Sora shook her head.

“A sports player who plays a match expecting to lose will not win the prize. That’s why, we should all think that we will definitely win a prize. Now, the only thing left is to hand it in properly and pray to god.”

“What are you going to do about the prize money?”

“We should gather everyone up and have a blast!”

“Sounds good!”

The juniors from the acting club, who also helped out in the production, cheered as well. The film production clubroom, which was half the size of an ordinary classroom, was filled with cheers.

“Well, then. You know I like speeches and things like that, right? Before we eat the stuff we bought, let me say a word or two as the director. Is that alright with you all?”

Go on - everyone replied.

“Thank you for trusting in me and helping me, despite my lack of skills. I hope that we can create another one next year, or if possible, this winter. Of course, I’m going to get help from the acting club at that time too. Why don’t we make this an annual event or something? The film production club and the acting club should become sister clubs.”

“Talk to our club president for that,” Maru said with a smile.

“I am going to, you know? Anyway! Thanks for your efforts until now!”

Sora bowed. The people gathered inside the clubroom smiled and started applauding. Maru did the same. Now that he heard it from Sora herself, he finally felt like this film was over.

“Next, our lead actor should say a word or two.”

“Nah, leave me out.”

“Why? It’s embarrassing for only me to do it, so you should say some words too, seonbae. You’re supposed to do it on occasions like this.”

Sora pulled on his arm. Maru scratched his eyebrows and stood up. The eyes on him made him feel a bit of pressure. He smiled awkwardly before speaking,

“Let’s just get to eating.”

After a moment of silence, everyone in the clubroom reached out to the food in front of them.

“Let’s eat!”

“Thanks for the food!”

Maru grinned at Sora, who glared at him, before reaching out to some snacks.

“Raw ramyun? This looks terrible.”

“There are uncooked wiener sausages here too.”

“Should we just bring a pot and cook some budae-jjigae?”

“I’m sure the teachers would love to see that.”

Since the food was brought by students who didn’t have deep pockets, most of the items were snacks or cheap frozen foods. Maru checked the time on his phone before calling a few of his juniors from the acting club and leaving the classroom.

“What is it, seonbae?”

“Go to the fast food restaurant in front of the school and buy everything you want. You should buy about 30 people’s worth of food.”

He gave his credit card to his juniors. After accepting the card, the junior hesitated before asking,

“Really?”

“Don’t hold back and get everything you want. I’m going to make you run a lap around the school field if the receipt is shorter than your face, so buy a lot of things. If you want to eat something else, you can buy those too. But you have to hurry.”

“Yes!”

The juniors seemed to have thought that refusing once out of politeness was enough and ran down the stairs without even looking back. Seeing that, Maru was a little scared of the soon-to-be-coming receipt, but he decided not to mind since the bus had already left.

Oh, I had a missed call - when he opened his phone, he saw that he had a missed call. It was from Jiseok. He pressed the call button before waiting a little.

-Are you on break from your shoot?

“No, I’m at school because there’s no shoot today.”

-Oh, really? I thought you were shooting because you weren’t picking up.

“I turn it off completely when I’m shooting. Anyways, what’s up?”

-I was just checking if you were alive or dead.

“You want me to die?”

-If I say yes here, is that a scenario for a movie?

“A third-rate one, maybe.”

-Hey, third-rate is going a little too far. I just called because I was reminded of you. I was talking about Gaeul, and thought that it's been quite a while since I saw you. Do you have time this weekend? Let's eat out together. Of course, you'll be the one buying since you have a job right now.

"But my plan is to stay at home for the entire day tomorrow."

-Even though it's Sunday? Aren't you going to meet Gaeul?

"I have something to do."

-What is it?

"Watching videotapes."

-Wow, so your love has finally cooled down. I was wondering when it would happen.

"It's nothing like that, so stop talking nonsense."

-Haha, but what videotapes are you talking about? Aren't we past the era of watching films on videotapes?

"They're records of old times. It's for studying, mostly."

-Studying acting?

"If it wasn't that, then I wouldn't have a reason to watch them."

-Let me in then. I'd like to visit a friend's house too.

"The seats are already full though."

-Is someone else coming?

"A friend of mine."

-Then let me in as well as one of your friends.

"I'll ask first. He's someone who's not good around strangers, so he wouldn't want a weird guy to be invited all of a sudden. He's a good guy, so he should probably be understanding, but it would definitely not be polite of me to decide by myself."

-I'm a weird guy?

"A maniac is definitely a weird guy. Anyway, I'll call you back once I tell him about it. He'll probably accept though."

-Should I buy some toilet rolls?

"It's not a housewarming party. Just bring some things to eat. If you do come, anyway."

-Got it. I'll be waiting so call me back quickly.

"Hey, why don't you have anything to do on the weekend? Don't you have a shoot?"

-I'm completely jobless right now. I'm going to meet everyone I can before I start working.

Call me back - Jiseok added energetically before hanging up.

“A high school student is not jobless...”

Maru chuckled before closing his phone.

A.K.A (Korean) Army stew. for more details.

## **Chapter 618**

“Seonbae, are you leaving?”

“Yeah, sorry about that.”

“Don’t say that. Do your best, seonbae. Treat us to some food if you become big later. You can’t ignore us, okay?”

Gaeul said yes to the juniors of her acting club before changing her shoes. Although club activities finished at 5 on Saturdays, she notified the teachers beforehand that she would be leaving at 2.

She took the bus and then took the train to Seoul. She grabbed the handle with one hand and held up the script that her instructor gave her in the other to read out loud.

“I like you. I don’t care what you think about me. I’m selfish? I still don’t care.”

It was the line of a woman in a movie who desperately pleaded while grabbing the hands of a man who was in a coma. When she first watched that movie, Gaeul understood what it was like to be at a loss for words due to being touched. She sniffled like a fool by herself and replayed that scene over and over again. The title of that movie was ‘Spring Calendar’.

When she went through the lines, the emotions became vivid again, making her nose tinge. It was a really good movie - just as she was thinking that, she met eyes with the woman right in front of her, who seemed to be a college student. Seeing her turn her head away in a fluster, Gaeul felt her face turning hot. She decided to go through the lines quietly, but it seemed that she raised her voice again while she was absorbed in the lines. She smiled awkwardly before turning away. When she did, she could see another lady looking at her with pity. It’s alright, go on - the lady’s eyes seemed to say.

Gaeul looked around before fleeing to the next car over.

As she stared at the train map, she eventually arrived at her destination. When she sighed and took a step off the train, she saw the college girl she met eyes with before getting off the neighboring car. They met eyes once again, and the college girl nodded in pity. She wanted to grab her and tell her that she was practicing acting, but she made a sad expression instead because she thought that it would make matters worse. She went further and even covered her mouth and pretended to swallow her sobs. After receiving twisted pity for a moment, Gaeul quickly left the station.

“Wow.”

Gaeul chuckled after looking at the script in her hands. It seemed that she was misunderstood because she looked sad. It also meant that she managed to bring out the emotions in the lines pretty well. It made her pretty flustered, but now that she took a breather, she felt good since it was like her skills

were acknowledged. The lines she practiced plentifully while harboring them in her heart managed to stimulate other people's emotions. Gaeul engraved the line she put in her notes once again as she started walking.

As she was walking on the streets that she had not gotten used to yet, she saw a large poster ad on the wall of a large store. A woman wearing a black coat was looking down on the streets. The woman, who seemed to fit so well with the brand-name clothes, looked like she would rip herself out of the poster at any moment.

"Wow."

Gaeul exclaimed softly. Ahn Joohyun, she was such a good actress. She was cool right now, but the act she showed in 'Spring Calendar' was charming to the point that she couldn't forget about it. The line she was studying and practicing as an assignment right now was also her line in the movie. Perhaps it left an even deeper impression because that was the only scene in the movie where strong emotions were exposed.

She stopped and admired the poster for a while before taking out her phone from her bag and taking a photo of it. She was an actress who she wanted to have as a role model. She didn't know if it was possible, but Ahn Joohyun was the type of actress she wanted to be.

She thought that she should hurry. Gaeul pulled on her bag straps before walking quickly. When she walked past the restaurant that she resolved to go to one day, she saw the agency building. She took out her entrance card in order to enter the company. She pushed the glass door open and went inside, walked past the people who were resting, and put her entrance card on the security gate. She stared at the plastic gates that opened sideways before quickly going inside. She came to the company by herself a few times before, but she was still not used to this place.

She took an elevator up. After getting off, she turned left and went inside the door that was right in front of her.

"You're here."

"Hello."

Gaeul greeted Choi Gyeonmi, who was inside the practice room. Gyeonmi was reading a book on a tall chair without a backrest, and spoke while looking at her in a slightly glaring fashion.

"Since you're here, you should do some stretches."

"Ah, yes."

She felt nervous. It was definitely a joyful thing that she got to learn from an actress who she only saw on TV programs, but being alone inside a practice room with Gyeonmi, who seemed slightly cold, definitely placed a lot of pressure on her. Gyeonmi was over 50 years old, but she didn't look like that. The loose-fit black shirt, the contrasting white cotton pants, and glasses with a silver strap attached to it - all of these elements seemed to represent her as a cool beauty.

Gaeul sat on the ground and looked at her own body. Although she had taken good care of her body since young, she felt immensely lacking compared to Gyeonmi.



She wished that she was a little taller. She looked at Gyeonmi, who could reach the ground with her foot even on a tall chair, before calming down and starting to exercise. She did some stretches starting from the middle of her body. Just then, she heard the door open and heard a yawning sound.

“Huh?”

Heewon, who just entered, looked at Gyeonmi and made a surprised face. He quickly looked at the clock in the practice room before sighing in relief.

“Lee Heewon. Personally, I’d like you to come a little earlier in the future.”

“I don’t think I’m late yet...”

When Gyeonmi glared at him, Heewon quickly changed his words.

“I’m sorry. I’ll be early starting next time. I mean it.”

“Do you know how many times I’ve heard that already?”

“Twice...?”

“Twice after another five times.”

“Really?”

Heewon smiled brightly before slowly coming over to her and sitting down. Gaeul coughed softly before speaking,

“You should come a little earlier. You know that teacher always comes early.”

“That’s why I came 4 minutes early today. I wonder why she’s so early this time when she usually comes around 5 minutes early.”

Heewon laughed when he felt Gyeonmi’s gaze. She really couldn’t imagine how this guy would continue living if not for his little brother. Would he even eat properly? Perhaps he would even find breathing too bothersome. While Heewon sweated due to Gyeonmi’s stare, a savior appeared.

“Hello, ma’am.”

Haewon came in and greeted with a clear voice. Gyeonmi, who was sharply staring at Heewon over her glasses, made a gentle smile.

“Yes, Haewon, you’re here too?”

“Yes. May I watch today as well?”

“Sure, you can.”

“Thank you for accepting my request every time. Oh, yes, ma’am.”

Haewon took out something from the bag on his back. It was a brown paper bag, and a savory smell wafted out from inside.

“If you’re okay with this, please eat some.”

Gyeonmi put her hand inside the paper bag. Gaeul also stared at the bag.

“You don’t need to buy something like this for me.”

“I was just walking by and it smelled so nice. I thought it would be great to eat them together so I bought some. I also remembered you saying that you liked them.”

“I couldn’t buy them because I was busy, but I guess I still get to eat some thanks to you. Thank you.”

What Gyeonmi took out of the bag was a slice of baguette which had a rough texture. Now that she thought about it, the bread Gyeonmi always had by her side wasn’t there today.

“Ooh, bread.”

Heewon went over as well. Gyeonmi unwillingly gave him a piece.

“Gaeul, you should come as well.”

“Yes.”

“Thank Haewon for it. Sheesh, I really wonder who’s the real big brother here.”

“Haha, I get that a lot,” Heewon said.

Gaeul laughed inside. This guy really didn’t care about what others thought of him. Being able to say something like that without restraint was, in some way, an ability in itself. Gyeonmi pressed between her eyes and shook her head slightly. She always made that gesture after talking with Heewon.

“So delicious.”

“Hyung, take it slow. No one’s taking it away from you.”

Looking at Haewon reminded her of mothers holding their newborns. Those mothers would console and look after their babies. He would be a kind, caring father if he ever got married.

Gyeonmi shook her hands before standing up. Gaeul also cleaned the surroundings.

“Aren’t you going to eat more?”

Only Heewon stayed seated, reaching out to the bag of baguettes. Just as he was taking out a new piece of bread, Gyeonmi hit the back of his hand with her script.

“We should begin, don’t you think?”

“How about we do that after we fini... nothing.”

Heewon quickly changed his words after seeing Gyeonmi roll her book even tighter. She had seen this several times already, yet she laughed every time.

“Gaeul, you’re laughing?”

“Oh, no, I’m not.”

She ended up laughing when she put her guard down. She turned her head away from Gyeonmi's prickly glare and saw Heewon, who had a big grin on his face. Gaeul groaned since Heewon was clearly greeting a comrade.

"Looks like the both of you have prepared the assignments I gave you perfectly, huh? Seeing as you are so leisurely. Leaving aside Heewon, Gaeul, you seem pretty confident too, huh?" Gyeonmi said as she took off her glasses.

It seemed that the class today was going to be quite strict. Haewon quietly took the bag of baguettes and moved to a corner of the practice room.

"I'll watch from here."

"You can freely move around and watch from anywhere. There are drinks in the fridge, so drink them if you feel thirsty. Make yourself at ease."

"Thank you, ma'am."

Gyeonmi, who looked at Haewon with satisfaction, quickly changed her expression before turning around.

"Well, then. Let's start with Heewon, since you were late, shall we?"

"Uhm, I wasn't..."

"Wasn't?"

"Nothing. I was late. He, heheh."

She moved away from Heewon, who was standing in the middle of the practice room. Gaeul slightly tapped her cheeks to shake off the leisure and prankful nature she had. From now on, she had to be very tense. She especially had to watch Heewon's acting closely. She desperately needed the power of her eyes in order to understand that indescribable thing. In order to not miss an expression or a gesture, Gaeul took a deep breath before straining her eyes.

"Where did you get your lines from?"

"Maskman, the Warrior of Light."

"What?"

Gyeonmi twitched her eyes. Gaeul also perked up her ears, thinking that she might have heard wrong.

"Maskman, the Warrior of Light. He transforms like this and..."

He made a weird posture before shouting 'transform'. Gaeul palmed her face. She never thought that he would bring something like that.

"It's really fun. I have videotapes of it at home, and I probably watched it around five times."

"Is it something like Superman, then?"

"It's different, but it's something similar."

"I'm not sure what it is exactly, but I'm glad that you've prepared something. I actually thought that you would come without preparing anything."

"Oh, no. I'm not that lazy. I do it when I need to."

"Obviously, Haewon probably had to nag you to do it."

"He didn't."

"You still don't get that lying takes skill, huh. It's written all over your face, so stop saying nonsense and try doing it. After acting, summarize what you wanted to show me."

"Okay. But do you really not know Maskman?"

"Do you know Moulin Rouge?"

"No."

"Then forget about it and show it to me already."

Heewon blinked before taking a deep breath and getting into position. He was in the funny posture he made earlier. He stood with his legs wide apart and crossed his arms before putting them in front of his face. A sigh could be heard. Gaeul turned around. She saw Heewon, who was smiling awkwardly in embarrassment.

At that moment, a loud voice could be heard.

"We fight for the peace of Earth!"

Oh my lord - Gaeul had to seal her lips tight in order to prevent herself from laughing. She was reminded of the actions that boys would make during elementary school. What Heewon was doing right now was extremely similar to that. He made a big circle in the air with his crossed arms before jumping. He seemed to be transforming(?) or something. She quietly looked at Gyeonmi. Gyeonmi had a faint smile on her face as though she was wanting to see where he was going to go with this.

"Mask Black!"

Heewon waved his hand in the air as though he was ripping out of something and then raised his head while putting one knee on the ground.

Gaeul had to turn her head away in order to hold back from laughing.

## **Chapter 620**

Perhaps due to her senses having become overly sensitive, the breathing of those around her became annoyingly loud. Gaeul thought that she should focus, but her ears kept receiving useless information. Don't think about anything else - Gaeul said to herself as she tried her best to understand Gyeonmi's advice. What was she trying to say through her acting? This was definitely an important part. In this world, there was perhaps no action that contained no meaning. Even newborn babies express their desire to eat by crying instinctively. They did not cry for no reason; their actions contained a clear objective, in other words, a claim. With that being the case, the fact that an actor did not have such a claim even though they were supposed to stand in front of an audience with their acting was perhaps a

big problem. A well-performing machine - Gaeul shook her head. The word 'machine' also contained the meaning that there was a lack of character. When the words that haunted her came to her mind again, she felt uneasy.

'What was I trying to say through that act just now?'

The fact that twisted love can also be touching is a claim of the director. While twisted, that heartrending love definitely made her touched. There was a deep sense of lingering feelings that she couldn't forget easily causing them to remain behind in her heart, and her desire to express such a scene for herself was projected through this assignment.

In the end, could she say nothing other than the fact that she just wanted to imitate the scene? She looked back on her acting. The warm emotions in the lines definitely were there. The scene she saw from the movie filled up her mind fully, and she even had a feeling that she had forgotten about herself, albeit for a brief moment. It was definitely an act that she could be satisfied with. However, if asked what she was trying to say through that acting, she couldn't give a clear answer.

"Can you show me the next one?"

"Can I think about this for just a little more?"

"Very well. You should ponder when you still can. Then shall we take a 30 minute break? Gaeul, you should get your thoughts organized, and Heewon, you can do whatever you want."

Gyeonmi left the practice room. Heewon lay down on the ground with his limbs out wide the moment the door closed. Gaeul looked away from the joyfully grinning Heewon before looking at the mirror in front of her. She saw a girl who was at a loss in that mirror.

"Noona, you should drink this."

Thanks - she replied to Haewon, who offered her a cup of water.

"Acting is hard. Just listening to it from the side makes me feel dizzy."

"You tell me. Even after all that learning, I still find it confusing every time. I'm not sure what's right and what I should be doing."

"But you are doing well, noona. The problem is my brother over there."

Heewon rolled over when the two looked at him.

"Man, the floor feels nice and cold. I love this company. There's air conditioning, there's food... I wish I lived here."

Heewon spoke like he was a fish as he put his cheeks against the floor.

"See that? He might become one with the floor at this rate. He really sets his mind to doing stuff when he has to, but the problem is that it doesn't happen that often."

Seemingly having heard Haewon's words, Heewon blocked his ears with his hands.

"I can't hear anything, la-la-la."

Gaeul spoke as she looked at the grumbling Heewon.

“But he’s good.”

Laziness was only a problem when one couldn’t bring out their fullest skills because of it. To those that cleanly finish their work, laziness was a facet of leisure. Seeing Heewon dazing out on the floor, Gaeul felt envious. Gyeonmi praised Heewon’s acting. Forgetting about the audience due to being immersed in acting is only a small problem that can be fixed at any time. It was really good - she was reminded of the satisfaction in Gyeonmi’s voice.

Compared to that, how was she? She was pondering because she couldn’t set her aim properly. She only found the lazy-looking Heewon amazing.

“Lee Heewon.”

“Yeah?”

“What did you try to say through your acting?”

“Say through acting? Nothing.”

Heewon yawned after saying those words.

“Nothing?”

“I would crack my head open if I think about every detail like that. Even back in the acting club, I just memorized the script and did what it said.”

“Teacher just said that actors need to do an act that contains their own claims though.”

“Oh, that? Didn’t she mean that we can do whatever we want?”

“No. What did you think about when you were acting before?”

“What did I think about? About acting of course.”

“I’m asking about the kind of thoughts you have when you are acting.”

“Acting is acting, where are thoughts in that? I just do it since I decided to do that. There’s no reason or a thought for that. Isn’t acting about emotions? I really like Maskman and find it really cool, so that’s why I did it. Once I start, well, all sorts of trivial stuff do come to mind, but those things have no relation to acting at all. I just do what my heart tells me to and accept what my body wants to do. If there’s a script, I would follow that, but there was nothing like that today, so I just did it however I wanted to. Well, thanks to that, I heard that I should be more conscious of the audience.”

Of course, I’m a high school student too, so I don’t like it like the kids do - Heewon added, but that did not reach Gaeul.

He did what his body led him to do? If that was the case, she would have had a much easier time answering Gyeonmi’s question. She would’ve replied that she did it because she found it cool.

“You said it too, didn’t you? That you did it because the scene was cool.”

“But she said it was wrong.”

“I don’t think that’s right. I kept listening because I felt like I would get more assignments if I got scolded again, but teacher never said that you were wrong. She just kept asking for your opinion. It was you who kept changing your answer. When she asked if you liked something, you would reply that you weren’t sure. I think that happened a few times. Am I wrong?”

Haewon also spoke as well.

“She definitely said it like this: ‘Of course, if you say so, it might be, but I think there’s something else as well.’ While it does sound like she was inducing you to say another answer, she didn’t say you were wrong.”

Hearing the two brothers say those words made her even more confused. What did Gyeonmi want? If she thought about it, Gyeonmi never asked Heewon that question. Why didn’t she ask? Did she forget? Or was there some other reason?

“Also, I might be wrong about this, but isn’t acting about doing what you want? You need to cry like this, laugh like this - are there rules like that? Well, I might be stupid and might be ignoring those rules, but even if they did exist, I wouldn’t want to follow them. It’s annoying enough as it is already, so what fun would there be if I can’t do it the way I want to? The only fun thing I find in acting is that I can do as I wish.”

“Do as you wish?”

Heewon, who stared at her while lying on the ground, sat up.

“You know? I usually don’t have any energy when I’m talking. That’s why Haewon does it for me most of the time. If Haewon tells me that he’s getting married in the future, I might actually end up crying.”

“Hyung, don’t do that. I mean it.”

Haewon smiled awkwardly.

“Anyway, I usually don’t have any energy, so I don’t want to do anything. But somehow, I ended up in the acting club, right? Moreover, I have to practice according to a set frame. Studying was hard enough, so telling me to learn a script was really cruel.”

Heewon yawned. Gaeul also opened her mouth wide, as though she was infected by that, before quickly closing her mouth.

“If acting was like studying, I would’ve quit ages ago. When it comes to acting, you know, there are things that surge up from your heart, right? Isn’t it fine as long as you express those things? Red as red, yellow as yellow, blue as blue. I think that’s it. Making it complex like what were your intentions or claims or stuff like that - I don’t know any of it. It’s kinda annoying to have an act planned out for me, but once I memorized it, I would just play around to my heart’s content. After all, as long as you don’t derail yourself, there’s nothing ‘wrong’ in acting, right? As long as you take care so that you don’t drive the story up the mountain, I think anything’s okay.”

“Do you really act like that? Do you really not study the character’s emotions, background, and things like that and just act according to what you’ve seen and what you feel like?”

“That’s who I am. Do this, do that - I’m not that smart, so I can’t do stuff like that. Expressing the colors that come to my mind to their fullest - that is my acting. Claims? There’s nothing like that. Honestly speaking, comedy acting is there to make people laugh, and sad acting is there to make people sad. I really don’t get why there’s any grand reason for it. Am I an idiot after all?”

“No, I don’t think so.”

“Then a genius.”

“That’s even more of a no-no.”

Gaeul thought back to Heewon’s words. She didn’t understand why she was so happy when she heard that Heewon wouldn’t have chosen acting if there was a set method to acting. It wasn’t that her mind was cleared all of a sudden, but the halted cogwheels of thought started turning again.

When she first thought hard and uttered the subject of the scene itself, Gyeonmi stated that that was the director’s intention. This was the truth. After all, she thought that that was the director’s intention herself when she said those words. After that, Gaeul carefully mentioned her own opinions, but Gyeonmi kept asking her more questions. Seeing the questions return to the original, Gaeul kept looking for other answers.

‘Maybe there was no need to be so lost?’

Her very first answer - the fact that she acted that scene out because she found Ahn Joohyun cool. Was that a wrong answer?

When acting out an already existing scene, the original creator’s opinions couldn’t be entirely ignored. What that scene tried to tell the audience was that a feeble woman’s pathetic and improper confession can look adorable. The director perfectly managed to express that, and arriving at a conclusion other than that for that scene was something incredibly hard.

Was she overly worried and was avoiding the obvious answer?

“Uhm, when you acted out Maskman, right?”

“Yeah, what?”

“You just did that because you found it cool and you wanted to do it, right?”

“Of course. If it wasn’t cool then I would have no reason to do it in the first place. It’s fun too. Like I said before though, I’m also an adult and it’s not like I truly admire....”

Gaeul raised her hand to stop Heewon. Heewon pouted before lying back down again. Gaeul looked at him before speaking with a smile,

“Thanks. I feel like I cleared up my head thanks to your simple and clear answer.”

“If you feel thankful, why don’t you buy me some hamburgers instead? Haewon’s not allowing it saying that we have to save up this month.”

“Hyung, it’s not that we’re saving up. It’s you who has to lose weight.”



Haewon quickly interjected. As she kept watching the rather cheerful brothers, Gyeonmi returned.

“Gaeul, you look good. Did you get an answer?”

“Yes. It’s my answer. Oh, I did refer to Heewon’s answer though.”

“Really? Referring to that strange kid’s answer makes me worried though.”

“Actually, I am too.”

Gyeonmi sat down.

“Then let’s have a listen, shall we? What did you want to say through your acting?”

“I just found that scene really cool. That’s why I wanted to try doing it. That’s all.”

“That’s all?”

“Yes.”

“Really? Even though it’s just a surface imitation?”

“No, it’s not just the surface. When I act that scene out, all sorts of emotions surge within me. But those aren’t from wanting to express something. I just want to let my acting, and myself fall into that scene. I didn’t just imitate what could be seen on the surface. I might be lacking, but I did my best to imitate everything in that moment, including the emotions contained in the scene.”

After saying that, Gaeul felt that she couldn’t make out any more words. She detected a clear acting philosophy taking root within her, but she also realized that her experiences and ways weren’t sufficient to express it in words.

“If I get a script, and I become the one to act, I might be able to imbue something in it. However, the acts that the seniors have shown me are already perfected. It’s to the point that it’s easy enough to understand what they were trying to say through their acting just by imitating that scene. That’s why I cannot express my words through this one line. I’m satisfied with just recreating it in a cool way.”

After saying those words, she breathed out heavily. It took a few seconds for Gyeonmi to nod.

“Is that what you think?”

“Eh? Ah, yes.”

“Good.”

“What?”

“I said good. I did get the impression that you weren’t getting to the point and were circling around it, but now I get what you’re trying to say. Gaeul, do you know what’s really important to an actor?”

“Emotional expressivity?”

Gyeonmi shook her head.

“No. It’s the boldness that they are the only ones that can do their acting. Of course, they will have to match up to their seniors, because that’s just how society works, but they all have to think like that inwardly. Shout. Han Gaeul’s acting can only be done by Han Gaeul, after all. It’s good that you’re trying to learn. It’s also good that you’re open minded and ready to accept new things. However, actors must have endurance, pride, no, arrogance is a better word. Before you form your acting, you have to form yourself as a person. There is no answer to acting. If someone says it’s wrong, then fight that person. If they ask, ask back. Of course, there are methodologies out there, so you might be wrong, but you can apologize at that time.”

After saying those words, Gyeonmi faintly smiled before continuing,

“Actors aren’t about pride and prejudice, but pride and humility. First, become proud. Form a clear character for yourself. After that, be humble. If you do, people will start saying this at some point.”

- That is Han Gaeul’s acting.

Gaeul energetically nodded while feeling her heart race.