

## Once Again 701

### Chapter 701

He opened his eyes and looked at the time. It was 6:59 a.m. When the digital clock, that blinked red, turned to 7, it made a beeping alarm. Junmin turned off the alarm and covered his eyes with his hand. 2 minutes ago, he was in the past. It was when he was the most passionate and the most pure. The dream didn't feel like a dream and left a long trail as though it happened just yesterday. Junmin sighed and probed the traces of the dream that still remained within him.

He hadn't had a dream in a long time. He was in Daehak-ro and he met Jung Haejoo there. They shared love, promised success, and whispered to each other about the future, but then, everything was taken away by a speeding car. The dream ended there. When he heard the news of her accident through a call, he was consumed by darkness, and that was when he opened his eyes.

He wiped the back of his neck with his hand. It was very damp. He could still hear the nurse's voice ringing in his ears: I'm calling you after looking at her calling history. Miss Jung Haejoo was caught up in a traffic accident.

Junmin went to the living room. The dogs with good ears had gathered by his feet already. He subconsciously took out dog food from the cabinet. When he was pouring the dog food out, he ended up laughing. He never knew that the dogs would be prioritized over quenching his own thirst.

After giving them some food, he drank some water. The lingering sensation of the dream just didn't go away. His body felt like it was still in the past, right at the point when he got the call that she had been in a traffic accident.

He pressed his fingers on the side of his forehead. He prayed that the sharp pain would drag his consciousness out of the sea of his dream, but it was to no avail. The lingering sensation was that dense. He picked up the puppy by his feet and put her on his lap. After sniffing, she curled up as though she found her resting spot and started breathing regularly. Junmin stroked the puppy from head to tail. The soft and smooth sensation from his hand was reminiscent of when he touched Haejoo's arm. Once again, he realized that she was too young to have died.

Why did it have to be Haejoo of all people? Junmin thought of the old question that was by his side for a long time. It would've been great if he died in her stead. How great would it be if he, who chased a vain dream with half-dead eyes, died instead of the person shining brilliantly with limitless potential and talent?

The puppy that had been sleeping soundly suddenly raised her head before biting his finger with her still growing teeth. Junmin put the puppy down on the ground. The docile puppy hid behind the dining table leg as though she was wary. Junmin got up and looked at the mirror he put in the living room. A skinny man in his fifties with vicious eyes. He looked like he was about to kill someone.

He sighed before sitting down on the sofa. Was it the self-disgust perking its head again after calming down a little thanks to all the psychotherapy? He remembered that his friend told him to not push himself and get some rest. If he ended up going to the psychiatrist again, she would definitely become angry. Though, she would still give him consultation.

Junmin slowly turned around to look around his house. This was everything he managed to achieve after her death. The company, this house, the people. Things that he would never have been able to dream of before she died, were achieved way too easily after she died.

Thinking back, it was a series of surprises. Every single new actor that he came across rose rapidly. It wasn't just once or twice. Whenever he nurtured someone, that person would become the icon of the year which made him tons of money. He gained reputation, and that reputation called about even more people. JA Production was the crystallization of everything he achieved until now.

Junmin looked at the sun rising. To him, she was that sun. The one woman who defeated the darkness and shined a ray of light on him. Without Jung Haejoo, Lee Junmin was a pathetic man who would never become successful or strive towards a future. Yet ironically, everything went well after her death.

Just then, he suddenly had the thought that everything around him felt unfamiliar. He suddenly questioned why he was able to become so successful. Right now, he could make a judgment on individual success based on his experiences and the data he had gathered, but this should have been impossible for the Lee Junmin in his 30s. Yet strangely, all the actors he touched back then became hugely successful.

He felt like he found a puzzle piece that was off by a little as he was looking at it proudly after having finished it. It was a pretty big piece as well.

Junmin felt agitated and went to his study. He took out one of the plastic files on his shelf. Inside was a diary that he had been writing for a long time. Among the diaries sorted in chronological order, he took out the diary he wrote in the year she died. The diary was filled with excitement and joy until it was suddenly cut off. That was when he heard about the accident. He started writing again two months after her funeral.

His handwriting was terrible as though he was being chased by something while writing it. The moment he looked at the writing, he could feel the emotions he had back then. It was an obsession that was close to lunacy. His feelings of love towards her had mutated into raising a star that was just like her. Junmin sighed. Back then, he dreamed of committing suicide. He also attempted to do it, but when that moment came, he wasn't able to do anything. He was a coward. That was why - because he couldn't follow her into the afterlife - he became obsessed with things that were similar to her in order to prolong his life. He couldn't understand how he acted back then, but now he did after reading the diary. He sympathized with his past self.

After that, the diary was filled with stories of success. The details weren't written. I met someone in the street. I saw potential so I helped him debut.

More than a dozen actors were written that way. There was nothing about what he saw in them that he saw as 'potential'. Junmin felt a sense of unfamiliarity and started focusing. He went back to the past, back when he was hung up on casting people.

"Why did I cast them?"

It was his own doing, but it made him wonder. His memories weren't complete either. After combining his fragmented memories, the conclusion he came to was something absurd. Junmin took out another

file on the shelf. It was the file that contained the photos and profiles of the people he cast during the beginning stages of setting up JA Production.

Some of the photos had lost color, but most of them had been laminated and were easy to recognize. Junmin had a look at the appearances of the actors he had cast and nurtured, year by year. The first actor he made debut was Kim Seungjin. Although he lived in the US right now, he was a big star just a decade ago.

“I picked such a man?”

Junmin paled as he picked up the photo. The man looked really shabby. He wasn't someone who had a career related to acting either. His profile said 'worker at a construction site'. He probed his memories. Junmin approached him, who was working with cement at a construction site, and told him that he had to become an actor. Junmin felt freaky. Just what did he base his decision on, that made him approach that man and even persuaded him to debut as an actor? He even made the promise that he would pay the man 10 million won if he failed. It seemed like winning money on a slot machine at a casino would be easier than that.

He went to the next one. This time, it was a woman. She received good reviews in dramas thanks to her good acting, and she was called the queen in the advertising industry who took all the commercials that required a high-class, luxurious image. When he had a look at her profile, Junmin groaned because of the massive headache he had. The woman couldn't be called elegant in any sense of the word when he looked at her plump figure. Back then, she weighed 93kg. She worked at a hospital with reversed night and day, which broke her physical balance. She definitely wasn't an item that would become an actress. The current him would have turned her away, telling her to come again after losing some weight. Actresses couldn't make the shoot if they had ramyun the night before. The woman in the photo had an appearance that clearly didn't suit an actress.

Yet in the past, he persistently tried to persuade her and started managing her health. He paid her 3 times her monthly salary and had her take diet and acting lessons, and the result of that was the birth of an actress who stole the hearts of many men.

The other actors were similar. In many cases, he picked actors who already had a similar career, but there were a considerable number of cases where he didn't. What surprised him was that he didn't value appearance when he did his casting, unlike what others would do when they go street casting. He gathered people of all sorts of colors and those that looked like they didn't have a sliver of becoming successful and dramatically made them debut. That was a gamble like no other. Was he possessed by a spirit in the past or something?

Junmin then opened the file that contained his interviews. The title that said 'The Maestro of Finding New Talent' caught his eyes. Junmin quickly skimmed through the interview. Halfway through the interview that talked about his success, the thing he wanted to read finally came up.

-You're known for casting actors without looking at the manifestation of their talent, much less an audition. Do you have a special method? Or is it just your nature to enjoy adventure?

His answer to that question was quite simple. He could see it. He explained that line over the course of several lines, but the point was that he could 'just see' it. What he saw, and what kind of standards he had was asked after that, but his past self finished that interview with vague answers.

Junmin felt like he was going into a daze. For the past 17 years, he came all the way here without looking back after Haejoo died. In truth, he didn't have the courage to look back at the past either. After all, that meant looking back at Haejoo's death. Amidst the wealth that had been piling up as well as the human resources he had, he thought that his success was something that his own skills had brought him, but his past self was definitely not someone who was capable of achieving something like this.

The facts, recorded alongside this interview, were telling him. He achieved success through a very shocking method that was no different from being crude. How was that even possible?

Junmin returned to the living room. He spent 30 minutes, then another 30 minutes trying to bring back the memories, but he couldn't remember the important bits. It was clear that he met those actors, nurtured them, and made them successful, but the answer to the most important question, 'why' he chose those people, did not come to mind.

It was rather weird. He thought about the interview again. He could even remember the face of the interviewer back then, but he couldn't remember why he answered that 'he could see'. It was like someone pulled his memories out from the roots.

"How did I even become successful?"

The doubt that sprung up from his dream did not get solved easily.

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After making Bada wash the dishes, Maru returned to his room. He sat on his chair, turned on the power to the computer, and waited for a little before he saw his desktop screen with many icons on it. He opened an internet browser and went to his blog. Recently, he hadn't been managing it, so it had become a ghost blog, but he was quite diligent at writing them when he was in his 1st year. Among them, the thing he had never failed to write every day was his diary. He clicked on the diary page. He made public the things he didn't care whether other people saw them or not, but the majority of them had been privated so that only he could see them.

Maru scrolled up to the first diary entry that he wrote after creating the blog. Starting with the word 'unbelievable', the diary talked about what kind of mindset he was going to have in the future.

He looked at the next one. He saw a wall of text as though it was a report on his day job. He met someone, did something, and was preparing something. His past self was quite diligent when it came to writing.

Maru scratched his eyebrows. He felt weird after all. His personality was never so meticulous. Rather than planning something out, he preferred solving the problems when they came. The fact that he worked as a road manager without continuing to try and join the employment lines, and the fact that he switched jobs as soon as he was accepted to a mid-sized company, was all because he had the belief that things would go well one way or the other.

However, two years ago, his past self that just came back to life looked like he was a little too worried about the future to the point of obsession. Just like someone who had no second chances.

“I was indeed the one who wrote it, and I even have memories of it, but it feels so strange.”

Was it because he had just come back to life?

Maru narrowed his eyes and kept reading the diaries.

## **Chapter 702**

Can his current self be called the same as his past self? Maru thought that the answer to that question was no. He believed that the accumulated experience would change the nature and tendencies of a person. His current self should be different from his past self of a few days ago, from his past self of a few months ago, and from his past self of a few years ago. However, just like a randomly changing graph had a set standard, he also thought that he had some things that did not change within him; one of them being his challenging mindset. Taking a step forward without fear even when the environment or the circumstances change should be one of the traits that represented Han Maru.

Maru put down the mouse for now. On his monitor was an old diary entry. What was he thinking back then as the person who wrote it? Maru wanted to ask his past self that.

It felt way too different. When he had a look at the diary he wrote in the past, he felt as though it was another person who wrote it. He had the memories of writing such a diary, but he could not remember what kind of feelings he had that made him write something like that back then.

“I tried to focus on studying, but I reached the limits of my concentration too soon. I don’t think I can expect the great concentration I get when I look at scripts during studying. I must look for another way for the sake of a stable life.”

Maru read the sentence on the screen out loud. It was from one of the entries he wrote during his first year. When he grabbed a script, all of his neurons awakened and did their work, but when it came to school work, they became lazy ponies and didn’t do any work. While it was a pity, there was no need to be so disappointed. It meant that he had talent in acting after all. He had a talent that not many people had, so he should have been happy, yet his past self wrote the diary with disappointment.

He picked out some words that the diary entries had in common and wrote them down on a piece of paper. Stability, future, probability, success, profits. These five words were distributed everywhere as though they were the crux of the issue in his diary entries.

“Stability, future, probability, success, profits.”

Maru read those words out loud. They were definitely important elements in life. However, he was only in his first year of high school back then. He also had the wisdom of his previous life to a certain extent. There was no need for him to be so hurried. In fact, that was when he should accept many different forms of experiences in life, ones that he could not experience in the life before this, and broaden his horizons.

So what if he wasted some time because he took the wrong path? So what if he failed and fell down for a bit? He was young and the future was limitless. Rather than going through the same life as the

previous one and aiming for a white-collar job, wouldn't it be better to pioneer the unknown and enjoy his second life as someone who got another chance? The way his past self was looking for a ray of hope at the edge of a cliff felt not only unfamiliar but also like it was to the point of uninterpretable.

"I looked into getting a freight truck driver's license. I looked into the job transfer rate of the sister company to our school. I looked into the wages at the company that my father works at."

Along with those five words, the other information that showed up quite often was about employment. He could still remember right now. He looked into all sorts of jobs. He especially looked into those that had a future for him even if he was employed upon graduation without going to college.

Maru chuckled in vain. Why was his past self so hung up on things like this? Every single action sounded like he was going to die the day after he didn't do so. It was as though he had a wife and kid to feed.

Things that didn't match his own values and ideals continued to occur. As he looked at the remaining entries in the diary and thought about what happened back then, he felt an even bigger sense of disparity. He was unfamiliar with this guy who wrote them.

Maru went to the kitchen and got a cup of cold water before coming back to his room. He felt like all the blood in his body was rushing to his brain. He felt so hot and needed something to cool him down. When he drank some cold water, he calmed down a little. He stared at the monitor for a while before picking up a note and going to sit on the bed.

"Is the drastic difference in nature a result of the memories after all?"

The woman in a white suit said that his memories would eventually become faint. As though to prove that, the memories of his previous life had become faint to the point that he had almost forgotten everything. He could only remember the big events, and he could no longer remember what kind of events occurred between them nor the people he met.

"But it shouldn't change the fact that I died at twenty-nine."

His last memories were pretty clear. While he was working as a road manager, he got employed by a mid-sized company, and not long after admission, he died. The reason for his death wasn't clear. From how he saw the woman in a suit when he woke up, it was likely that it was a sudden death. Perhaps all those drives that were late at night during his manager days ruined his body.

"Then I met that woman and got a new life."

When he opened his eyes after that vain death, he met that woman in a white suit. He walked down a beach with her and talked to her under a white parasol. He heard about the circumstances behind how he got another chance at life. Apparently, an elderly lady had yielded that opportunity to him. He didn't know why that lady yielded that to him, but for some weird reason, the name remained in his mind. Yoo Bokja. It was a rather affectionate name for some reason.

Thus, he started anew and wrote this diary that he was seeing on the monitor. Why did he look at the future with such a narrow vision like that? There should have been many other important things in life, not just stability and success.

He realized the disparity between his current actions and past actions when he thought about what he did in his 1st year. It was when he became the devil's advocate for the unity of the acting club. Back then, he smoothly did the things that he would find unacceptable to do right now. While he understood what kind of intentions he had when he made enemies out of everyone around, he couldn't remember the reason why such thoughts came to mind in the first place. He could have just persuaded them to understand each other, yet under the pretense of 'efficiency', he just solved it in a violent manner. It was good that things ended well. Had it not gone well, he might have left the acting club just like that. Meaning, he might not have met Junmin in the first place. His past self thought nothing of the important crossroad in his life. He could get a glimpse of what he felt back then when he read the diary. Those lines made it seem like the acting club, the people around him, and basically everything didn't matter that much. It looked as though it didn't matter if club activities didn't go well since it wouldn't make him any money.

"That was me, huh."

There was physical evidence here, so he couldn't deny that. He had the memories of it as well. It was just his emotions back then that were missing. It felt like an art gallery had popped up between his current self and his past self. Inside that gallery, the photos of the old times were hung up on the walls, allowing him to look at the past, but he could not understand the emotions and intentions that each of those photos had.

Were memories all like this? Would the passage of time separate the emotions from the incident itself and disappear, leaving behind only the events that could be interpreted in multiple ways? When he discussed transcendental cognition with writer Lee Hanmi a little while ago, he said that there were memories that transcended the physical body. Yet, when he looked at how he acted just two years ago, it made him wonder if he was the same person.

Were memories that shallow? Or was there something beyond his cognitive abilities happening?

Maru thought about all the events that happened from his previous life until now. There were no contradictory things anywhere. While there were some questionable decisions and actions that he took, his actions for the past year were all within his realm of understanding. The problem was 2 years ago, when he just came back to life, all the way until he entered his 2nd year.

He looked at the words he wrote on his note. He found himself avoiding challenges, distancing himself from adventure, and despising the unknown. A rather headstrong man was there.

At the same time, that man looked like he was desperately trying to protect something.

"Just what was it?"

Maru looked at his note before sighing. Right now, there was nothing he could find out. He only felt that there was something that he desired in the past. He didn't know it, he felt it. It was a signal that he couldn't even tell if it was true or just a mistake.

If he could record his current state in detail, it would be good material to reflect on in the future, but god did not allow that. Maru grabbed his pen and tried to write down what happened in his previous life, but just as he had expected, his body didn't listen to him as though his hands were broken. This was probably why the records in his diary were fragmented and abstract.

God prevented him from reflecting on his life. Despite the fact that personal history had an insignificant influence on society or the greater world, god did not allow for recording. What could be the reason for that? His memories will remain behind anyway. Was there an absolutely necessary reason for not allowing him to write down things that were meaningless and unbelievable in the eyes of others? Or was it to simply prevent him from mentioning the past?

“So there’s no way of finding out, even if the memories of my previous life and my current life, have changed?”

The words he subconsciously uttered had considerable weight. He felt a chill run down his spine, and his eyes opened wide. If he had that as the hypothesis, he would have to suspect every single thing. That would be beyond just exhausting, it would be painful and utterly horrific. His memories changing unconsciously meant that he was becoming something completely different from before.

At that moment, Maru remembered the change in his emotions. He was definitely conscious of the fact that he had become more proactively amicable to the people around him.

“Contradiction.”

He was originally very proactive and challenging. The way he focused on harmony with the people around him showed no difference. So then, why was he so hung up on the fact that his personality changed when it happened? That meant that he was a cold, uncooperative, safety-seeking man before his personality changed.

He kept discovering the contradictions in his thoughts.

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“What a busy life.”

“You tell me,” Maru said as he flipped over the script for New Semester.

Byungchan, who was driving, told him that there were drinks at the back.

“But hyung, are you okay with time? You don’t need to give me a ride.”

“It’s fine, I have time now. I’m a team leader not only in duties but in position too.”

“Ah, right. Congratulations on your promotion.”

“Sounds way too late at this point, but thanks anyway.”

Maru grabbed the business card that Byungchan gave him. Externally, he acted as a team leader from a while ago but had a really weird position within the company, and now it looked like he had found his position.

“For it though, I had to quit my dream to become an actor.”

“Don’t. You can always try later.”



“No, I’ve given up now. The president connected me to an audition, telling me to check myself objectively, and I failed that miserably. That’s when I felt that the office suits me better. After I gave up, the president properly supported me as well. It’s a good thing.”

“If you say so. Then since you started, you should aim to be the president of a super agency.”

“That’s the plan. Anyway, the company got a new department to handle the management of youths, and I’m in charge of it. Before, I was the only one in it, but there’s three of us now.”

“So you got two subordinates?”

Byungchan laughed in embarrassment.

“That’s why I’m going to be focusing on you and Sooil only. Thus, you’re going to call me a lot in the future.”

“That’s better for me. But when are you going to treat me since you got a promotion?”

“I was wondering why you weren’t mentioning that.”

Byungchan started slowing down. They had arrived at the middle school, the location of the shooting set.

“I’ll go back to the company and come back when you finish.”

“I can go back home by myself.”

“I was ordered to safely bring you home by the president. This means that you’re on the list of managed people. Doing two dramas at once is not easy. Moreover, there’s school as well. You’ll only have an easier time saving up energy if you don’t spend any on transportation. Once that mini-series drama starts, you’ll probably go to school after shooting all the way till dawn pretty frequently.”

“Yes, okay then. See you later.”

“Alright. Good luck with the shoot.”

Maru got off and asked a question before he closed the door,

“Uhm, hyung, have I changed a lot from before?”

Byungchan stared at him for a while before replying with a smile,

“I guess you did become a bit cheerful.”

Maru nodded and closed the door.

### **Chapter 703**

“Apparently, Kang Giwoo is shooting a movie,” said Seong Dongho.

He enviously looked at Giwoo who was talking to the director.

“Good for him.”

“From what I hear, he has a pretty significant role. Maybe it’s the winner takes all in acting too after all. I don’t think my acting skills are that bad.”

“You should keep trying. Maybe you’ll do well someday.”

“Why does that make me feel worse when you say that? It’s because you got a main character role in a drama, huh? Is that why you’re doing this to me?”

“Dongho, you should have a good heart because only then will fortune come to you.”

Maru patted Dongho on the shoulders before walking over to the assistant director.

New Semester had been getting good ratings with the young romance between Kang Giwoo and Ahn Yeseul, but it had now changed lanes and abandoned the sweetness. Signs started showing up a few episodes ago, and it was going to get even more serious from this episode onwards.

“Director!”

Producer Park Hoon, who was talking to the camera director, walked over. Kang Giwoo and Ahn Yeseul were with him.

“As you know from the script, there will be a lot of detailed emotional expressions from this episode onwards. I’m going to give you as much advice as I can, but things will change depending on how much preparation you’ve done. Giwoo, Yeseul, you two especially should try hard. Just from the script, it’s obvious that the writer has a lot to ask from you,” said producer Park Hoon with a serious face before they started the rehearsal.

What New Semester ultimately aimed to do wasn’t school romance; it was to reflect the ecosystem known as a school in both the dramatic and ordinary aspects. Just as writer Lee Hanmi said openly, New Semester had brought social problems as well as the conflict between the student and the adults in order to escape that cheerful image of youth dramas. This episode was going to be a concentration of all those elements.

“We’re going to be zooming in on you a lot. Until now, we tried covering things up by going with a full shot if your emotional acting was not up to par, but it’ll be hard to do that anymore. If you don’t want to get caught up in acting skill issues, you will have to do your best,” Park Hoon said in a cold manner.

The camera was installed in place. After looking at the boom mic above his head, Maru took a deep breath. Today, he only had one scene, and it was a conversation with Giwoo. He had a line that was more than three sentences after not having one for a long time. Above all, he started his shoot first. He didn’t need to wait, and he would get to leave after this shot.

“I heard Dongho say that you’re shooting a movie. Congratulations,” he said to Giwoo.

Although they couldn’t be said to have a good relationship, he wanted to congratulate him as a coworker at least. Giwoo looked back at him with complex eyes. His trademark smile was gone without a trace.

“I’m just congratulating you. I don’t have any other intentions.”

“What the hell happened to you?”

"I said nothing. Oh, yeah. You aren't up to that childish stuff too, these days, are you?"

"I'm not sure what you're talking about."

"Yeah, who am I to say anything? But let's not bully people who have it hard. It's all karma you know? If you don't want to get into big trouble later, you should do some good deeds too."

"If you're trying to pick a fight with me, why don't you do it after the shoot? Or are you coming at me openly? Are you underestimating me that much? You just won against me once. If you're trying to use that to put me below you..."

Maru shook his hand. Giwoo became quiet.

"You went too far there. That's a bad habit of yours."

Giwoo, who was glaring at him, eventually just sighed. It seemed that he also thought that he was acting too sensitively.

"Standby!"

That signaled work time. Maru tapped on his cheeks before calming down his emotions. Giwoo also put away that arrogant smile of his and loosened his lips.

"Ready, cue!"

He looked at Giwoo while thinking about the line in his head.

"Are you worried about something lately? Why do you look so gloomy?"

Giwoo sighed very softly.

"Lee Chan, I should go to a factory and not to school if I want to earn money, right?"

"What do you mean by that so suddenly? You need money?"

"The thing is... nah, it's nothing."

Giwoo turned around and walked over to the end of the corridor. Maru looked at his back without relaxing his emotions until the very end. When Giwoo turned at the end of the corridor and left his vision, Park Hoon shouted cut.

"Good. We'll flip around and do it again. Keep your emotions together."

The lights, the camera, and the staff all moved. The camera was pointing at the side of Giwoo's face this time. Maru relaxed his shoulders. His face wouldn't show up in this cut. Only his body and his shoulder would appear like a background object.

"Maru, say the same line just like before. And Giwoo, we're going to do a tight shot now. Watch out for your expression. Also, I see something on Giwoo's lip. Let's quickly take care of that before we start."

The make-up artist touched up Giwoo's face.

-I'm a little bored, so why don't you let me?

The masked man spoke to Maru after staying quiet. He looked like he felt restless whenever he was at the set. Maru told him to stay still before doing the same shoot with the same line. The director shook his head and shouted cut. It seemed as though he didn't like Giwoo's face from what he saw when he looked at the monitor.

"Giwoo. I said that's the wrong expression. Giving up education, something that a student naturally receives, and choosing to work over that is something very frustrating and scary. Even though the Kang Giwoo in the drama might be someone who's just and cheerful, he can't stay calm in the face of a gloomy situation like this. You should know that from interpreting the script, right?"

"I'm sorry. I'll do it properly this time."

"I know that it's difficult. That's why I told you that I will be giving you a lot of advice even though I haven't been interfering with you that much until recently. You're going to have to watch out for the minor details. Even the most minute details will be captured by the camera."

Park Hoon looked at the monitor in displeasure. He looked like he was on edge as well. Perhaps the change in the drama exhausted the director as well.

Maru nodded towards Suyeon who was smiling brightly behind the camera. He had to greet her first because she would make her way over and talk to him if he didn't do so.

"Let's do that again."

The shoot resumed. As though to prove that he didn't win the spot of the lead male for nothing, Giwoo managed to get an okay from the director the second time.

They spent 3 hours shooting that short conversation in the corridor. Just like how the director's expectations had gotten higher, the waiting time for New Semester would get even longer in the future.

The staff cleaned up the equipment and moved towards the classroom. Usually, producer Park Hoon would rest for about five minutes before going over to the next scene, but he seemed to have thought that they were short on time as he started decreasing breaks. Quickly, quickly - the line frequently heard in South Korea could be heard from all around.

"Han Maru, wait a bit."

Park Hoon waved at him. Maru folded his script and approached him.

"How is it going with the other drama?"

"For now, there are no problems. I'm not sure if I'm doing well or not. While I'm doing my best, I'll have to see the results to be sure."

"There you are, acting modestly again. You're done shooting for the day right?"

"Yes."

"Do you have anything else to do?"

"I need to go over to the other set later."

“Really? I guess you’ve become a busy person now.”

“No, it just happened to overlap. Oh, was there something you wanted to talk about with me?”

“Rather than something to say, there’s a line I want you to read.”

“A line?”

The assistant director approached them and said that the setup would be done in 10 minutes. Park Hoon replied to him before pointing at the end of the corridor as he looked at Maru. After going there, Maru received a phone from Park Hoon.

“Can you say the stage directions and the line shown there? With your emotions too.”

Maru looked at the phone screen. He gave a cursory glance at the stage direction and the lines before giving the phone back.

“What, you can’t?”

“Oh, I just memorized it all.”

“All of that?”

“You want me to read it out loud for you?”

Park Hoon smiled and shook his head.

“Can I ask why you are having me do this?”

“I’ll just say that it’s a simple audition. There’s no big meaning.”

“An audition?”

Just then, the assistant director called for the director from afar. Park Hoon raised his hand instead of replying.

“I’m just trying to get a feel, so you don’t need to put in too much effort. You just have to show me an image. Just show me the things that came to your mind first after seeing that.”

Park Hoon seemed to be in a hurry. Maru decided to hold off on asking for explanations until later and got his emotions together. The text on the phone was pretty provocative.

- Chulsoo looked at his sister. For a long time, he stared at her as though he was dissecting her with his eyes before he groaned.

“You... aren’t my sister, are you?”

The moment he dissolved his emotions into that line, Maru felt a sense of thirst. His emotions naturally dissolved into the line. As this was practically improvisation, he couldn’t really show any depth. He just stayed true to the text.

“Where’s my sister! Where is she! Tell me!”

A rather agitated voice popped out of his mouth. The raw, unrefined emotions shook his body and the space around it. Maru shouted into the emptiness. Unease, nervousness, and rage. Unrefined emotions surged and took away the unity in his acting. It was something that left room to be desired, but it was also something he couldn't do anything about because of the conditions given to him. There was a limit to acting without knowing what the situation the character was in, his emotions, or the circumstances of the event.

Maru calmed his breath and his shaking lips. He finished off by dragging the fragments of rage that touched his brain inward. He lost focus and when his vision became full again, he saw people staring at him from the other side of the corridor. Maru made an apologetic expression before bowing.

"Is that how it goes?"

"It suits you much better than I expected. I also like how it tingles my back. Good, it's good."

Park Hoon smiled and told him to go. Maru returned to where Seong Dongho and Lee Joomin were, still with questions.

"What was that?"

"I'm not sure either. The director just had me say some lines."

"I thought you were fighting or something."

"I don't have the guts to do that."

The assistant director called for the actors. Maru waved his hand at the two people who started to move.

"Are you done?"

"Ah, yes."

Suyeon talked to him just before he was about to walk down the stairs.

"Good for you, it ended early."

"I have another shoot to attend to."

"Really? I guess I can't hold a busy person back for long. You can go now."

"Good luck with work too, noonim."

While waving, Suyeon spoke after she looked like she thought of something,

"I heard that the acting club got the grand prize."

"Yes. Did you hear the news?"

"Unfortunately, I got the news from Miso-unn. You guys were once my students too. How could you not give me a single call?"

"You're a popular actress, so it's kinda hard to call you."

"It's not that you didn't care about me? That unni, you should've seen how proud she acted in front of me. I wanted to give her a beating."

"Then just come again next year and get the grand prize then. If you do that, it'll be a tie."

"But you would have graduated by next year, won't you? That's no fun. Facing little kids is only good as an experience. Anything more than that would be boring."

"Don't say that and make a visit later. Everyone will love it. A lot of them want to see you again. The 1st year students will probably freak out though. It's Kim Suyeon in person after all."

"What's up with you? You're saying something nice for once. Did you do something wrong to me? Or maybe you want me to do something for you?"

"I'm not that bad of a kid. Anyway, noonim, good luck with work. Treat me to some food later. What good is eating out of the same food pot? You should treat people from time to time."

Maru waved at Suyeon who looked at him with weird eyes. He left through the school gates and took another few steps before looking back at the school.

"It does feel rather unfamiliar."

He started becoming conscious of the fact that his attitude towards the people around him had changed. Something different from before had become distinct. Was he heading in a good direction? Or was he heading down a path of no return?

For now, he had no way of knowing.

"Yes, hyung. I just finished. You can take your time. I'll be reading my script in the nearby café. Okay then, see you later."

Maru called Byungchan before starting to walk.

## **Chapter 704**

Gaeul grabbed onto the hem of her one-piece dress. She couldn't believe that this rather fluttery yellow dress cost 700 thousand won. It looked like it would only cost 30,000 won at the shopping mall in front of her house.

"Models, please get ready," said the woman, who she saw when she just arrived at the studio, with a clap.

"I think I'm going to suffocate if I keep wearing this," Heewon grumbled.

He was wearing a gray check-patterned shirt and indigo overalls. He kept touching the blackish-red bow tie around his neck as though he found it uncomfortable. Whenever he did so, the stylist next to him told him not to touch it.

"Looks good on you."

"Don't laugh."

Gaeul pouted. As Heewon usually wore similar-looking t-shirts and trainers usually, overalls and proper formal shoes would feel like nothing but annoying pieces of cloth and leather.

“Should we start with you, Mr. Heewon?”

The photographer told him to stand in the middle of the set. There were two old tables and three chairs without backrests. One of those chairs had fallen down.

“You said that this is your first time modeling, right? For now, please stand in the middle like that. As for your face, keep it expressionless as much as possible. However, don’t tense or relax your eyes too much.”

Heewon stood upright. Gaeul covered her mouth and chuckled, but the photographer didn’t say anything.

“Can you push your right leg outwards from that position just a little? Yes, that’s good.”

Heewon did exactly what the photographer told him to do. He reached his hand out when he was told to, and he turned his head when he was told to. Heewon’s awkward-looking body eventually dissolved into the set naturally.

“Mr. Heewon. Can you sit down on the chair?”

Heewon sat upright on the chair with his hands clasped by his lap, and his knees were together like a goody-two-shoes waiting for a graduation album photo. Gaeul crossed her arms. When she looked at him along with the bookshelf behind him, she felt like a smart child had entered his father’s study. It suited him, but whenever she thought of how he acted usually, she couldn’t help but chuckle.

“Can you do a pose that you want to do? Anything is fine. If that’s too difficult, try using your arms first. After that, your legs, then your expression. There’s no need to be so confused about it. You just have to do things one by one.”

The photography set, which she thought would be very strict and would only be filled with shutter sounds, was filled with laughs and light jokes instead. The photographer, who was in his mid 30s, was very witty to the point that he might as well switch jobs to being a host for a TV program. Heewon made little changes to his expressions and posture as he heard his words. His awkward-looking pose gradually became better. His hands, which would usually be placed awkwardly by the side, would point at objects or be placed naturally on his body, and his eyes, which only looked at the lens, eventually looked everywhere around the studio.

“Good. It’s fine to become daring. You can smile, and crying is fine too.”

“Can I take off this tie?”

“It looks good on you, is it too suffocating?”

“Yes. I just want to throw it away.”

“Hm, that sounds good too. Wait a moment.”



The photographer approached Heewon with the camera. He kneeled before getting a side view of Heewon.

“Can you try throwing the bow tie on the ground with all your might? I’ll give you the signal.”

“Can I really throw it?”

“Yes, put all your strength into it!”

When the photographer started counting from three, Heewon grabbed the tip of the bow tie and took it off before he eventually threw it on the ground after the count of one. Heewon smiled as though he felt refreshed.

“It’s good, but we did style you so that the bow tie completes the picture, and taking it off blurs out the overall atmosphere. Miss Minjeong, please put it back on him.”

The stylist, who had been waiting on the side, quickly rushed over and put the bow tie around Heewon’s neck again. Heewon jerked his shoulders, as though he was a dog that didn’t like being put on a choker, before he eventually became docile.

“This is so exhausting.”

“That exhausting expression is good too.”

Regardless of what Heewon did, the photographer did not say a single bad thing. The camera motor kept moving relentlessly, and shutter sounds filled the space.

“Can you make a drowsy expression now?”

The photographer, who was talking with Gyeonmi while looking at the monitor for a while, gave a new request. Heewon’s face immediately turned into a daze. It was a drowsy expression that would make anyone yawn just by looking at him.

“That looks good. Can you lean on the wall and sit down? Think of it as getting a rest after a long work session.”

The shoot gained speed. The shutter sounds became a lot more frequent. It looked like the camera was definitely on burst mode. Heewon seemed to have adapted, as he slightly reacted at the shutter sounds and changed his body. Whenever his arms waved out, the photographer excitedly shouted out ‘good’.

“Finished. Can you come over?”

Heewon walked over to the monitor. Gaeul stood next to him. The photographer dragged a few files with the mouse and organized them before he pressed down on the keyboard to show them in order.

“In the photos taken at first, your eyes look unstable, and your body looks inconsistent, but you can see the change as time goes by, right?”

Gaeul exclaimed as she looked at the photos. The later photos made her wonder if it was the same Lee Heewon. When the photographer pressed a few buttons on the keyboard, the photos turned monochrome, and they gave off a dreamy sensation that was in tandem with Heewon’s drowsy-looking eyes.

“How are they? Did you find any photos you like?”

“I’m not sure.”

“Choose some anyway. It is important for you to discern which photos are good and for the photographer to find out about your preferences. In the future, you’ll be working with other people a lot, so the more professional you become, the less good it is for you to be so vague. This is the case for both the photographer and the model.”

“Then I like this one and this one. It makes me happy just by looking at them.”

Heewon picked two photos. The first one was where he had his eyes closed as though he was sleepy, and the second one was where he was leaning against the wall with his arms crossed and looking slightly down.

“Why do you like these two?”

“Because I look like I’m sleeping.”

The photographer put on a thick smile. He selected a few photos including the ones that Heewon chose before moving them into another folder.

Gaeul started getting nervous. She wasn’t aware of the passage of time when Heewon was shooting, but as soon as she realized that it was her turn, she wondered if she could do well. On top of that, Heewon managed to bring out his unique traits and finished the shoot successfully. She now felt pressured to do well.

“Miss Gaeul, shall we start?” The photographer said with a smile.

Gaeul nodded and stood in the middle of the set. There was a black piece of cloth covering the giant lights on the side, and the heat from that light was quite intense. It felt like it could be used as a heater. Now, she found Heewon amazing for being so calm in front of it. It was on a completely different level from the lights she saw when she helped out Maru.

“There should be some heat. Don’t get conscious of it though. If you keep thinking that it’s hot, you might really start sweating.”

“Yes.”

“Miss Gaeul.”

“Yes?”

“What did you eat for lunch today?”

“Lunch? Four pieces of kimbap.”

“Oh, my. You must be hungry then. Don’t you want to eat a lot of things?”

“There are a lot of things I really want to eat.”

“For example?”

“Fries! I like anything fried.”

“Fries, huh. I love them too. There’s nothing that tastes better than fries during the late night.”

“Right, I feel you.”

“Becoming an actress is hard after all, right? Sometimes, you have to skip your meals, and you have to ignore it even if there’s something tasty in front of you. Sometimes, you have to smile even though you feel sad.”

“There’s that, but I enjoy acting, so it’s fine.”

“So you’re an adult already, Miss Gaeul. I still can’t shake off such temptations.”

The photographer kept talking to her without holding the camera. He asked what she liked, what her favorite animal was, if she could differentiate between different dog species, and things like that. Eventually, Gaeul felt like she had become used to the heat and the air inside the studio, as well as the gazes of the people. At that moment, the photographer picked up the camera. She was inwardly a little startled. It felt like the photographer was saying ‘I see you’re ready now’ just at the right time.

“You can put your eyes on anything you want. But looking at empty air must be quite difficult, right? There’s a poster behind me right? Can you have a look at that one for a sec?”

Just as the photographer told her to, Gaeul looked at the poster on the wall. That poster, expressed with a violent mix of gray and white, showed an elderly with cloudy eyes was looking right ahead. Gaeul felt a chill. She felt as though the elderly on the poster was about to pop out at any moment.

“That kind of feeling is good. The disparity between your colorful clothes and your expression is good to look at. But your expression does look a little stiff.”

“Oh, I’m sorry about that. I was focused on the poster so I subconsciously...”

“Oh really?”

The photographer turned around before laughing awkwardly.

“I see. That poster is definitely quite burdensome to look at for a long time. I might sound like I’m flattering myself, but I actually felt really proud after shooting that poster. It gave me the chills the moment I saw it.”

“Yes. It really does give off that feeling.”

“Do you recognize who it is?”

Gaeul squinted. She was overwhelmed by the elder’s eyes that she didn’t have the chance to look at his whole face. When she looked at the elder with more leisure, Gaeul exclaimed,

“Isn’t that Sir Yoon Moonjoong?”

“Yes, it is. Do you perhaps know what Twilight Struggles is?”

“Yes! I do.”

Gaeul replied loudly. How could she not? It was Maru's first appearance in a film.

"It's one of the posters for that movie. But it wasn't used. Apparently, senior Yoon's eyes are too much to bear. Actually, I felt rather frustrated. The photo turned out so good. Miss Gaeul, how is it? Do you like that photo?"

"Yes," she replied without hesitation.

While she felt scared, she was able to see that the photo was a really good one. It was a photo that shook one's emotions subconsciously. There was no way she didn't like it.

"That kind of expression isn't something you can make with just a good camera and a good photo editing program. Honestly speaking, that senior will probably look like that even with a disposable camera. That's because that's the power he himself possesses. Of course, you can shoot photos like that too."

"Me?"

"People all have their unique atmospheres. Of course, it'll get deeper with experience and time, but there are definitely characteristics you can only show at that certain moment. Miss Gaeul, can you try smiling?"

Gaeul hesitated before smiling. It was something she did numerous times when acting, but it was quite hard to maintain a static smile.

"Miss Gaeul, you can feel that the smile is a little awkward too, can't you?"

"Yes."

"It might be because it's your first time, but it might also be because you're only moving your muscles. When you're acting, your expressions aren't separate from your emotions, right? It's the same when it comes to photos. It might be more static and more momentary compared to a video, but emotions definitely do get captured in it. I want to see your pure smile, Miss Gaeul. What might make you smile in comfort? Family? Friends? Or maybe a lover?"

Gaeul had a look at a few of the images that swirled inside her head before smiling. The photographer started pressing the shutter.

"It looks okay, but you do seem rather uneasy."

"Is that so?"

Gaeul was startled because she felt like he found out what she was thinking. What she thought of just now was Maru's face. She wanted to be with him, but she kept thinking about her lack of qualities and how she decided to put some distance between them for a while. It was true that she liked him, but whenever she thought about him, she subconsciously ended up comparing herself to him. Did she have what it took to stand on the same stage as Maru right now?

"How about something else? I want to see you more relaxed."

A relaxed smile, huh. Just then, she saw Heewon yawn like a frog behind the lights. He looked like he would actually go to sleep if there was a blanket nearby. Seeing his goofy attitude, she felt like a fool for being so worried. Just then, a smile crept onto her face.

“That’s it, that one’s good. Remember that feeling and let’s have your right arm grab your left for a moment, shall we?” said the photographer.

Gaeul did what he said and smiled according to her memory.

## **Chapter 705**

“Have a look. Sometimes, you might feel embarrassed and don’t want to look at your own photo, but you already know that actors and actresses are always on the side of being shot. You should find out what kind of photos make you look good. It might not seem like anything much, but it’s pretty important.”

The photographer showed her a photo after it went through some processing. Just as he said, it was quite embarrassing and unfamiliar to see her smiling face through a screen. Gaeul endured the ticklish sensation rising up inside her and looked at the screen. The feelings of embarrassment eventually dissipated, and she started focusing on her expression and the composition of the photo. Now that she was able to look at the whole picture, she found things that weren’t to her liking.

“Veteran actors can play around with their atmosphere like professional models. That’s because they know how they would look through the camera. The more frequently you stand in front of the camera, the better your eyes will become at discerning things like that.”

“Would we be able to shoot photos like that in the future?” Gaeul asked as she pointed at the poster for Twilight Struggles.

“As I said before, you will be able to do it once you find out what your charm is and how you should express it. Of course, that won’t be easy. If it was, there would be no reason for professional models, photographers, or actors to exist.”

Gaeul nodded after hearing that.

“Let’s finish choosing the photos for now, shall we? Pick those that you like as well as those that you don’t like. You might have overheard me saying this to Mr. Heewon before, but I’ll say it again - vague answers aren’t good here. In fact, a clear expression of like and dislike would be preferred. A clear opinion would make the final product much more distinct. That is regardless of whether that’s in a good way or a bad way.”

The photographer flipped through the photos. Gaeul selected the photos while thinking about what the photographer said. There wasn’t a photo to her liking, but there were things that she didn’t like.

“Then I’ll do my work based on these. Senior Choi, we’re all done here.”

While the photographer had a conversation with Gyeonmi, Gaeul looked at her photos that were hung across two screens.

“Uhm, sir, can I take a photo of this one with my phone?”

“You aren’t going to use it commercially, are you?”

The photographer had spoken with a smile. Gaeul said yes.

“Then take as many as you like. Mr. Heewon, there’s a folder next to hers too, so you can open it if you want to take photos as well.”

“I’m okay.”

Heewon looked like he clearly couldn’t be bothered. Gaeul took photos of the one that emphasized yellow and the one where she was looking into the distance while sitting in a diagonal position. Although the resolution wasn’t that clear since she was taking a photo of the screen, it was enough for her to discern that the model was herself.

This was her first time modeling. Although any information about her or her interview wouldn’t go alongside it, as the photo was for a concept page, she still felt rather excited that her face would be going on a magazine. She felt like she was definitely making progress, albeit little by little. She also had the small expectation that she might achieve what she aimed for in the future.

-But this isn’t enough.

The rabbit in her heart had spoken.

-You’ll have to be strict in the future. As you know, what matters is your actions after you declare your resolve. If you call Maru just because you feel a little lonely or tired, you’ll stay where you are forever.

I know - Gaeul inwardly replied. She was still far off from facing Maru boldly when he had won the role of a main character in a drama with his skills.

-It might be hard right now. You might want to see him. However, if you meet in that vague state you are in right now, you’ll obviously feel even worse. You have a dream, don’t you? A dream to stand on the same stage as Maru. You’re going to endure everything for the sake of that. You might feel rather tragic right now, but you’ll be able to stand up straight in front of Maru without feeling embarrassed once enough time passes and you have grown up properly. You’ll be in a splendid relationship where you both acknowledge each other. You’ll be standing on the same level, and you’ll love each other without differences. You want that, don’t you?

An equal relationship, the ring that term brought had filled her body. Just as the rabbit said, it might be a little hard right now. However, she would be able to see Maru with more leisure and more confidence if she won against that temptation and practiced and improved herself. By then, her confidence would come back as well.

-If you want your relationship to be smooth, you’ll have to become perfect first. So that you won’t lose when compared to him.

Gaeul listened to her words. The rabbit living inside her heart sometimes made her sad by telling her sharp words, but objectively, it was all advice in the end.

Why are you looking out so much for me? - Gaeul asked her.

-I said this many times before, but allow me to say it again. I'm the one person who wishes for your happiness more than anyone in this world. Han Gaeul, you're an adult now, aren't you? Not a little child. Adults should learn how to look into the far future. You have to suppress your desire and receive an achievement in the future; that's what being an adult is about. You are an adult, aren't you?

Gaeul nodded faintly. She didn't want to be a stubborn little child. Whether it was for her mother's sake or for those around her, she wanted to become an independent person as soon as possible. By then, she would be able to stand up in front of everyone else with confidence.

-Yes. Preparations are good when it's perfect. Starting off recklessly and continuing on without a plan is something that only little kids do. Gaeul, you are an adult, aren't you? If you are an adult, you should plan ahead. You are doing really well right now. You've suppressed meaningless temptations and impulsive emotions, and you are focusing on what matters. You're an adult who's rational. Don't be shaken. For now, just look forward. Bring back results and achievements. Who knows? Maru might fall in love with you even more. Become a capable woman and start off with a perfect love. Not something trivial and immature, but a perfect, flawless love. I don't think that dating someone when you aren't completely prepared is being respectful to the other party. Don't you think so too?

Gaeul looked at her own figure reflected by the monitor. For now, it was time to focus on this. Picturing an ideal environment where she started off everything in a perfect condition made Gaeul tense her eyes.

-Yes, you should put more effort in like that. Forget about Maru for the time being.

\* \* \*

The radio notified him that it was 7 p.m. Maru, who was inside the car that was driving at a slow speed, realized that he was almost at his destination.

"Hyung, I'll walk from here. It'll be difficult for you to get in there with the car."

"I'll give you a ride all the way. It won't take that long."

"It'll be a pain to bring the car back out later. There are a lot of people since it's the weekend. Also, the alleyway where the pojang-macha is is a one-way road, so it's quite complex. It'll be better for me to walk from here."

"Really?"

Byungchan nodded and stopped the car. Maru opened the door and got off.

"I'll come over once I park the car, so go ahead."

"You're coming?"

"Of course I am. The actor is doing his job, so the manager can't leave his side."

"You should go back and get some rest. I can get a taxi if there isn't any public transport."

“I told you, didn’t I? It’s going to be a war of stamina from now on. You should just listen to me and let me give you a ride. Plus, I’m trying to do my work here, so I’m going to feel sad if you don’t let me do it. Are you trying to make me feel unemployed?”

Byungchan smiled and drove the car in reverse. Maru picked up his bag and entered the alleyway on his left. The street that was covered with all sorts of fancy lights disappeared from view, and he eventually came across closed shops. He moved according to the streetlights that were placed far apart. This place still smelled of sewers.

While he was walking across the asphalt, he started hearing some murmurs. A bright light that was a contrast to the dark alley, shone down on the pojang-macha in front of a shabby shop.

“Hey, new guy! Bring a Jem Ball and a tungsten focus light. Yes, the one with four lights in a row. Director, I think we should change the position of the lights in the pojang-macha a little. Like this, it’ll cast shadows on the actors’ faces.”

“Okay, go ahead.”

The staff were moving busily in and around the pojang-macha. The last time he came here, the pojang-macha was like a silent isle in the middle of the city, but right now, it was just as bustling and noisy as any other part of the city.

“Hello.”

Maru greeted producer Yoo Jayeon who was watching the lights director.

“Oh, you’re early. Did I look at the schedule wrong?”

“I came early because I finished early for the other one. There wasn’t anything to do for me.”

Maru looked at the pojang-macha. It looked different from before. The signature dropping orange curtain had been rolled up and tied at the ceiling. It seemed to have been done because it would be hard for the camera to capture the actors as the pojang-macha was a small one with just six seats. The lights installed on either side gave off some light similar to that of the streetlights, brightening up the surroundings.

“Now that I look at it like this, it looks really small. Even smaller than last time.”

“It’s not surprising with this many people around. But when we’re shooting, we’re going to have a maximum of 7 people in the set, so it doesn’t matter.”

“You took out two of the stools too.”

“I wanted to emphasize that it’s cozy.”

Jayeon approached the staff who was placing the props throughout the pojang-macha. The two steamers, the container for fishcakes, as well as the basket for boiled eggs. The interior was mostly the same as before.

“Han Maru.”



Producer Jayeon waved at him. There was a person holding a camera below the streetlight next to the pojang-macha.

“This is our stills photographer, and this is one of the main characters in the drama.”

Jayeon briefly introduced them to each other. Maru immediately greeted.

“Hello. My name is Han Maru.”

“Yes, nice to meet you. I’m Kim Joon.”

Maru shook hands with the photographer.

“Can you take a photo of him? We’re going to put it in the making film, so let’s get a single shot of him since he arrived first.”

The photographer smiled and nodded.

“Do I have to pose?” he asked as he looked at the camera lens since he had never experienced getting a stills shot.

“Just act naturally. It’s no fun if it looks too artificial.”

Maru nodded. The photographer didn’t immediately press the shutter. After a few minutes, the camera no longer bothered him. Maru picked up his script and looked around inside the pojang-macha while saying his lines. There were about 30 minutes until the appointed time.

Just then, he heard the photographer call out to him. His head turned left. He saw the photographer checking the screen on the camera.

“They turned out pretty good.”

Maru walked over to him when the photographer waved at him to come. He showed Maru the back of the camera. On the screen was a figure of himself who looked like he was muttering something while holding the script.

“I’ll shoot you a lot. I like cold images like this. Of course, I’m not saying that your impression is desolate.”

“It’s fine. I get that my eyes look nasty a lot.”

The photographer looked at him in a daze for a while before laughing out loud.

“Which one among these do you like the most?”

The photographer showed him several photos while pressing some buttons. He had shot nearly 30 photos in that short time. The composition, the colors, and the intensity of the light were all different. Maru looked at the photos and picked the one where a shadow was cast on his face because of the light from the streetlight.

“I like this one.”

“Really?”

“Yes. I’m not knowledgeable in photography, but I feel like this suits the mood of this alley quite well.”

“How about this one?”

The photographer showed him another photo. That one looked okay as well, but Maru liked the one he picked a little more.

“I like this photo better.”

“Haha, alright. I like people with clear opinions like you, Mr. Maru. I don’t like vague things.”

The photographer started walking around again with the camera in hand. Maru looked at him for a while before moving his eyes onto his script.

## **Chapter 706**

Maru sat down on the chair given to him by the staff. When he was part-timing as a background actor, the shade and the uneven ground was his shelter, so it did feel like his treatment had changed. When he was a supporting actor, he could sit down on a chair, but he had to find his own.

The preparations were almost done at the set, and the staff was mostly waiting for the actors.

As he was looking at his script, he saw a motorbike coming near. The man got off the motorbike after parking it against the wall before taking his helmet off.

“You’re here,” Maru greeted as he stood up.

Ganghwan came over with a faint smile as he rustled his hair.

“It feels really strange to be doing something outdoors.”

“You should get used to it. You’re the main character of this drama.”

Ganghwan brought a chair and sat next to him.

“Where are the rest?”

“Yuna should be here soon. Mira-noona and Byungjae-hyung will be a little late since their scene isn’t until later.”

“I can’t get used to things like this. I mean, the main characters arriving at different times and shooting separately.”

“It’s not a play after all. Also, don’t you need to go through makeup?”

“I do.”

Ganghwan went over to where the makeup artist was. As he was supposed to be a writer living alone in a shanty town, it didn’t seem like it would take a long time. After watching Ganghwan getting his makeup done for a while, Maru found a white sedan slowly entering the premises. As the alley was narrow and had become even narrower thanks to the various vehicles of the staff, it wasn’t able to come that far. Yuna got out of that car after it stopped in front of a small building. She started running over.

“You’ll fall over. We haven’t started yet, so take it slow.”

“But I feel nervous when I see you all together like this.”

“You can’t feel nervous already. We haven’t even started the shoot yet,” Maru said as he looked at the car that was turned off.

“Wasn’t it hard getting here? It should’ve taken ages since it’s the weekend.”

Yuna sighed.

“I might as well have walked. We tried to come into this alleyway from the main street, but a fight broke out in front of us. It suddenly turned into a fight between two groups, causing total chaos. I was going to get off and walk here, but mom said it’s dangerous and told me to stay.”

“You did well to do that. If you got off and got injured or anything, it would be very troublesome. Is your mother over there?”

“Yes. I told her that she doesn’t have to come, but she told me she wanted to give me a ride.”

“She’s sending her daughter to a shoot that’s done late at night. I’m sure she must be worried.”

Maru saw that white sedan for the first time when he went to the audition for ‘Apgu’. That day, Bitna was in the passenger seat, but today, it was Yuna instead. Both sisters were debuting on TV. It seemed that their mother’s business senses were exceptional. Yuna’s mother got out of the car. She, wearing casual clothes, walked over to where Yuna was.

“Hello,” Maru greeted first.

After Yuna’s mother looked at him for a while, she smiled back at him.

“I did see you quite frequently during Apgu, but this is our first time talking like this, isn’t it?”

“Yes. Is Bitna doing well?”

“Of course. I’m troubled because she’s doing a little too well. How can she be so mature? I’m her mother, but I feel like there’s nothing I can do for her. On the other hand, our Yuna is an airhead and is a little too cautious with things, so I have to watch her nervously whenever she does something,” Yuna’s mother answered with a smile.

Yuna became startled and tried to push her mother away. Just from looking at her back, Maru could imagine what kind of expression was on her face right now.

“You don’t have to be so polite with me.”

“Then shall I? We might see each other often in the future.”

“Yes.”

After smiling, Yuna’s mother spoke again as though she thought of something,

“Now that I think about it, did you meet Yuna a little while ago? Bitna told me that Yuna wanted quite a bit to see you.”

“Mom!”

Maru could see that Yuna’s face had turned red even in the darkness.

“We did, and I heard a lot of good things from her.”

“From Yuna?”

“Yes, she’s an honest fellow, so there’s a lot to learn from her.”

“Then I guess that’s good. I was worried that she might have troubled you or something. Anyway, I hope you can take care of her from now on. She’s someone who does really well if people look out for her just a little.”

“I think so too.”

Yuna, who had been causing a ruckus on the side, eventually managed to push her mother away. Only after checking that she had walked away did Yuna sigh powerlessly.

“Sorry.”

“Don’t be. She looks like a good person. She seems cheerful too.”

“She’s way too cheerful, that’s the problem. She’s not like that around Bitna, but she always treats me like a kid.”

“It’s because you are a kid. It’s true that Bitna is a little more mature, isn’t it?”

Yuna, who looked at Maru in a daze, shut her mouth before sitting down. She looked at her script without even looking up.

“You mad?”

“I’m not. I’m just reading my script like how an adult would.”

“You know, I thought of this a while ago, but even now I think that it’s quite fun to tease you.”

“It’s not!”

When he first met her on Bitna’s introduction, he thought that she was a docile little girl, but after seeing her cry on the spot, he realized that she was someone who was honest about her emotions. She probably showed her emotions to those close to her without holding back.

“You know? It’s a good thing to be so close to your parents. There are many people who are worried because they can’t do that.”

“I know. I know about it too, but she teases me like this from time to time.”

“Pranks only work if there are people to receive it. Honestly, I don’t have the confidence to play pranks on Bitna. When I make a joke, I think she would just stare at me and ask ‘is that supposed to be funny?’ with a straight face. That’s really scary, you know?”

“Bitna is smart after all. Unlike me.”

“That’s why your mother is playing jokes on you. Just take it with a smile.”

“Fine, I get it.”

Yuna pouted as she closed the script.

“What do you get?”

Ganghwan had appeared behind them after finishing his makeup. Yuna immediately stood up and greeted him.

“Hyung-nim, don’t tease her in the future. Yuna really hates it. Okay?”

“N-no! Senior, I’m okay. Maru-seonbae is saying strange things.”

Ganghwan chuckled after seeing Yuna, who retorted immediately, for a while.

“I’m not sure what it is, but Han Maru, don’t tease her too much. You’re supposed to be looking out for her.”

“Looking out for others is supposed to be the job of the great senior, don’t you think so?”

“But I’m not a great senior though. Also, I have my hands full taking care of myself. Standing in front of the camera does really feel weird.”

Ganghwan walked over to Jayeon. Yuna glared at Maru and stayed standing up.

“Really, Gaeul-seonbae must be an angel.”

“Why is this suddenly about that?”

“She is an angel! She accepts your teasing, doesn’t she? You really are a bad person.”

“Hey, can you say that when you put your tears, snot, and even makeup all over a person’s shirt on their first meeting?”

“Th-there was no snot!”

Now, even her ears had turned red. Maru covered his mouth with his script and chuckled. He decided to stop there since she might actually get pissed if he teased her anymore.

“How is Gaeul doing these days?”

“Gaeul-seonbae?”

Yuna became calm. Maru remembered that change.

“Well, I guess she’s doing good. She comes over to the acting club once every two days because she’s busy with work, but she looks out for us whenever she does come by.”

“Looks like she’s doing well. Does she look like she’s hurt or has a problem?”

Yuna’s voice became lower.

“Gaeul-seonbae is always cheerful. That’s why the juniors like her. It didn’t look like there was a problem with her.”

“Then I guess that’s good.”

“Don’t you have any more to ask?” Yuna asked grumpily.

“You don’t like the fact that I asked you about Gaeul?”

“That’s... not it.”

Even though she said that, her eyes were on the ground. Her words and her body were moving separately. Maru no longer spoke. It looked like she hadn’t put aside her feelings yet.

“Sorry. I didn’t intend for things to go this way,” Yuna said after a long time.

“I want to have a comfortable relationship with you. We’re going to be working together for over a month from now, so it’s somewhat iffy to stay awkward all that time.”

“Yes, you’re right.”

Yuna, who flipped over her script meaninglessly, spoke again only after a long time.

“But you’re quite mean too, you know? You didn’t have to ask me that.”

“About how Gaeul is doing?”

“Yes. I’m sure you must know well since you’re dating. Even without asking me, you can call her about it too. Don’t tease me like that. It was you who told me that I’ll put away my feelings soon, wasn’t it? But it hasn’t happened yet.”

After saying those words, Yuna bit her lips slightly. She then shook her head and looked like she was full of regret after realizing that she said something she shouldn’t.

Maru tapped on his script and spoke,

“I had no intention of teasing you. First, I was too short-sighted, sorry about that. I thought you were over it after seeing your expression.”

“Then why did you ask me about Gaeul-seonbae?”

“Because I really don’t know.”

“What?”

“I don’t know, so I asked you. That’s all.”

“You can call her up though.”

“Unfortunately, dear Miss Gaeul doesn’t pick up my calls.”

“Why doesn’t she pick up your calls?”

Yuna’s face was colored with a questioning light. Maru didn’t explain and kept staring at her. After looking at him for a while, Yuna became stiff like a startled cat and spoke,

“D-did you get into a fight or something? Is it because of me? Is it because of my mistake?”

Maru shook his head.

“It’s not that we fought.”

“Th-then why?”

“People need some time to themselves in life, right? I think it’s that time for her right now. That’s why I asked you. I was wondering if perhaps she was worried about something. From what you said though, it doesn’t look like that’s the case. Perhaps there’s a different reason other than time.”

Maru stood up as he stretched his arms out. Romantic relationships during studenthood usually ended with separating after a period like this. They were at an age where they had nothing to worry about in terms of relationships. Meeting and dating were easy, but separating was just as easy as well.

After getting older, there would be a lot of things to think about. People would become cautious and would think about what the other party is thinking. There were a lot of other variables at play as well. Money, time, acquaintances, and jobs. Once a relationship becomes deep, it would be hard to untangle like a pair of earphones that were stuffed inside a pocket. That was why there was a need to notify the other party when there was a need to split up. Only after telling each other clearly that they were done would they be able to untangle that earphone cord.

During studenthood though, there was nothing that bound them or restricted them. There was no need to worry about social appearances, so splitting up was always done in a vague, subconscious manner. Though, the ones who knew etiquette would still tell the other party that they should get along well in the future.

Gaeul was currently standing on a very important crossroad in her life. She joined an agency and was seeking opportunities while taking lessons with a talented person. She might be psychologically and/or physically tired. Perhaps she crossed off dating from her list of priorities after realizing that romantic relationships weren’t anything great. Regardless of her decision, Maru was willing to respect her for that and follow it. Even a snot-nosed brat knew that the future was more important than immediate relationships after all. There was also the possibility that her agency had banned her from having romantic relationships.

“Seonbae, there’s nothing wrong, is there?”

Yuna had asked nervously. It seemed that she thought that her presence might have influenced their relationship negatively. Maru put on a relaxed smile. For now, the priority was to calm her down. Just as this was an important period for Gaeul, Maru was also facing an opportunity he could not miss. Calming down his work partner and helping her focus on the drama was his priority.

“I said there’s none. We’re doing well.”

“I-if you’re curious about how Gaeul-seonbae is doing, I’ll tell you from time to time. I can do that much.”

“How much of a bad guy are you trying to make me? I won’t ask about Gaeul in the future. In fact, sorry about that. I asked you something unnecessary.”

“No, I... am really fine.”

“Thanks for the words.”

Maru shoved a script in front of Yuna’s face.

“Anyway, did you memorize the script properly?”

“The script? Of course, I hugged it in my sleep.”

“Shall we go through it once before the shoot begins?”

“That’s good for me.”

“You have to do it like it’s the real thing even while practicing. You know what I mean, right?”

“Of course, I’ll do just that,” replied Yuna who had been trembling like a scared herbivore.

Maru became relieved and opened the script again.

## **Chapter 707**

“Do I look good?” Ganghwan asked.

The apron he was wearing, which had udon broth splattered here and there, was from the owner of the pojang-macha himself. The navy-blue jersey was apparently Ganghwan’s own. It seemed like there were no sponsored items or anything.

“It suits you. But do you know how to cook? You’re going to have to use a lot of tools during the shoot.”

As soon as Maru said those words, Ganghwan put a ladle in between his fingers and spun it around.

“You shouldn’t underestimate a single man living by himself.”

“But is there anything to cook?” Yuna asked.

As the main menu of the pojang-macha only included udon, dumplings, and soondae, it didn’t seem like there would be a lot of cooking scenes. At most, Ganghwan would just have to put the already-cooked food onto the plates.

Maru looked behind him. The staff surrounding the pojang-macha were all looking at producer Jayeon. She, who was sitting in front of the monitor, was staring holes into a paper in her palm. It was probably the order of contents that she wrote down.

Jayeon stood up. It looked like she was about to begin.

“I’m sorry to say this before we start, but it’s gonna be tight. Be prepared, actor Yang.”

“Yes, yes, director. This is your debut piece, so you should try your best.”

Ganghwan joked around.

“It’ll be quite hard since there will be eating scenes in it. You’re going to have to keep eating until we get a proper cut, so if you feel sick or anything, just put a little in your mouth and continue chewing. I’ll place a trash can next to you, so if you really feel like you can’t do it, you can spit it out.”



Yuna smiled brightly and replied 'yes'. Maru inwardly sighed. During his shoot of Apgu, there was a scene where all of the minor actors ate boiled chicken soup. People ate the chicken happily during the first shoot, but eventually, they looked like they were chewing on rubber. Maru was the same. There was nothing scarier than repeatedly acting out an eating scene.

"Good, let's have a go then."

Jayeon returned to the monitor.

\* \* \*

"That's two udon for you. Enjoy yourselves. Tell me if you want more."

Yuna accepted the bowl with both of her hands. She looked at the bowl of udon that was steaming before smelling it. It was a fragrance that made her stomach feel warm. She maintained the smile that crept onto her face before putting some noodles inside her mouth with her chopsticks. The elastic noodles snapped just perfectly and added to the chewiness. The udon was delicious to the point that she didn't need to exaggerate that it was delicious. It should suffice if she just showed the camera what she felt like right now.

She picked up her spoon and took a spoonful of the broth before blowing on it. From the way there was no cut sound, it seemed to be going well. Was she doing rather well for her first shoot? Just as she thought that and was about to drink the broth, she heard the cut sound which broke her immersion. Following that, she heard footsteps approaching the pojang-macha.

"Yuna."

"Yes?"

"You're eating way too blandly."

"Eh? Me?"

"Look."

Jayeon picked up some strands of noodles with the chopsticks. She put them inside her mouth with a faint smile on her face before she started chewing. What seemed to be the problem? Yuna kept observing Jayeon before she widened her eyes. The way she chewed looked way too haughty. Her lips were sealed as though it was zipped up, and the movement of her jaws was way too small. Compared to that, her head was nodding way too exaggeratedly.

"Was that how I ate?"

"Wanna look?" Jayeon said as she pointed at the monitor.

Yuna shook her head.

"You're trying to eat way too prettily. Well, yes, if you're on a date in a nice restaurant with a romantic atmosphere, then sure, I can take that. You would look around to take in the mood, admire the fragrance, and evaluate the food while nodding. But this place is a pojang-macha. Moreover, isn't the

character known as 'Yoon Jihae', that you're acting out, supposed to be a determined girl? Or am I the only one thinking that?"

Jayeon handed her the bowl. Yuna accepted the bowl with an apologetic expression.

"I'm not telling you to exaggerate it. But you know, how would it look normally? You just need to show that. Think about how you would eat ramyun at home. I don't think you would nod with your mouth closed like some noble lady, would you?"

"I'll try again."

"Yes. I like that you aren't shrinking back on your first shoot. I also like how you're trying to show a lot. However, I'm telling you now that that's not enough. You have to do well, please."

The word 'please' reverberated in Yuna's mind. The bowl of udon suddenly felt heavy now. She quickly placed the bowl on the folding-out table. The pressure overwhelmed her body.

"We'll do that again."

Yuna shook her head and got herself together. This wasn't the time to daze out. She thought about the director's instructions. She needed to forget about eating prettily and act normal. But wait, were the chopsticks supposed to go in the right hand?

"Three, two, one, cue!"

Jayeon's voice woke her up. She picked up her chopsticks as she looked at the broth that was changed out in order to renew the steam. She thought that she should smile and eat like it's delicious. She opened her mouth moderately and put the udon in her mouth. The udon had become bloated in that short time causing the noodles to just slide down her throat before she could even chew on them. It was much worse compared to the elastic noodles of the first time, but Yuna acted as though she was impressed by the noodles and just kept eating.

"Cut!"

She heard those words when she scoped her third round of noodles. Her tension loosened up, and she let go of her chopsticks. She turned her stiff head around to the monitor. Yuna subconsciously bit the inside of her mouth. Jayeon was approaching her with the same expression as before.

"It wasn't good, was it? I'm sorry."

She said those words as soon as she met Jayeon in the eyes. Reality hit her. The fact that this was a shooting set and that many people's time depended on her pressured her a lot.

"Kim Yuna."

"Yes?"

"What are you so scared about?"

Jayeon asked her with a smile. Yuna focused on her straight upper teeth before she was startled by the hand that was placed on her shoulder.

“Are you nervous?”

“N-no.”

“Do you remember when you did your audition? I did pick you because I liked your acting, but I gave you high points because you showed yourself without hiding anything. Of course, I get that you’re having a hard time since it’s your first time shooting. I have it hard too. I honestly don’t know where I should start. I imagine that you’re the same.”

“I’m sorry.”

“No, no. It’s not something for you to apologize about, and no one here would feel pleased about your apology either. You know? I just want to see your honest acting. Right now, it feels like you’re trying to show something off. I get that you want to do well, but I want you to rein it in. Also, one more thing. Remember that there are three of you acting right now. Don’t focus on the udon so much. You don’t have to. Just be natural. Of course, I understand how hard that must be, but don’t you think actors should be able to do that?”

Yuna slowly nodded. Nothing Jayeon said was wrong. Jayeon followed on to give her more detailed instructions.

“As I said during the rehearsal, look around when you eat and exchange gazes with Maru. You didn’t realize that Maru was looking at you from the side, did you?”

Yuna honestly nodded. She was so focused on the udon that she was unable to think about other things.

“This time, try having a wider vision.”

Jayeon went back. Yuna apologized to Ganghwan and Maru in a small voice.

“Making mistakes is how you learn. Anyway, Jayeon, she became rather lenient. If it was before, she would’ve slapped you and asked if that’s all you amount to.”

Ganghwan said that while shivering. Maru agreed with those words

“It’ll become like that soon enough. She’s letting her go because this is the first shoot outside, but I think she’ll definitely say something later on.”

Hearing the two say that, she became extremely worried. When she made a dejected expression, Maru spoke to her,

“Don’t be afraid of people swearing at you. It’s normal here. Just like what hyung-nim said, everyone here learns from mistakes. What’s important is to make the director not say the same words twice. Do you remember what she said to you?”

“Yes. I remember them.”

“Try being conscious of that when you act.”

“Can I do it?”

“Well, we’ll see when the shoot starts.”

Good luck - Maru added. Yuna puffed up her cheeks before slowly loosening them. Nervousness left her face after being taut from the puffing.

“Also, don’t forget to turn your head my way after you eat some noodles.”

“Yes.”

While she gathered herself together and muttered her lines, there was another cue sign. Her lips rendezvoused with the bloated noodles. Let’s just eat comfortably - thinking that, Yuna chewed on the noodles that just fell apart. Then she picked up the bowl. She usually drank the soup from the bowl instead of using her spoon. The perfect temperature broth entered her body. The prickly air at the set felt a little softer.

When she put down the bowl, Yuna thought about the rehearsal. I should turn my head - just as she saw the side of Maru’s face, Maru also turned around. He, who had a few strands of noodles in his mouth, hurriedly slurped them down before wiping his mouth with the back of his hand. He then made an awkward smile as he looked at her.

For a brief moment, Yuna forgot that this was a shoot. Maru, who expressed his embarrassment openly with a pure face, looked nothing like the usual him. She could feel a ticklish embarrassment welling up from inside her throat. She felt like she could feel the exact same thing that Maru was feeling.

For now, she carried out all of the director’s instructions. This was an eating scene without any lines. She wondered what she had to do next. Yuna looked at her own feelings first before she looked into the character’s background. What would love be to a girl who had been living alongside poverty for a long time? What would a ‘normal date’ feel like to a girl who had been handing out leaflets during middle school and was still working four days a week even now that she was in high school?

Yuna couldn’t smile that easily. If it was the real her, she would grin helplessly, but she felt like the ‘Yoon Jihae’ in the drama wouldn’t be so relaxed. Despite that, Yuna smiled. The smile was far from a pleasant one, but she still smiled. It was a smile that was a mix of truth and lies; a mix of the drama character and her own self.

Yuna looked at Maru’s eyes for a while before turning back to her bowl. She then started eating wordlessly. She felt happy but sad at the same time. It was because of the drama background as well as her own feelings towards Maru. She thought that perhaps the character in the drama was in a similar situation to her.

“Would you like some more?” Maru asked.

This wasn’t in the script. After all, there weren’t any lines in the script. Haejoon and Jihae eat udon together at a pojang-macha - this was everything in the script.

Yuna’s thoughts raced. How should she reply? Before she could finish thinking about how she should answer, her mouth gave the answer already.

“May I?”

When her words entered her ears, Yuna thought that this was the best outcome possible. They were words that were from both Yoon Jihae, who had been living a life where she read people's feelings all the time, as well as her own, who was having a hard time during the shoot.

"Of course. Not that it's something I'm giving you."

Maru asked Ganghwan for another bowl. Ganghwan made a gentle smile and scooped out a ladle of boiling broth and a handful of noodles. Seeing that whole process, Yuna felt like this pojang-macha was something real. She was also dissolving into this atmosphere. It was relaxing and comfortable.

"Good!"

The moment she heard that shout coming over from where the monitor was, Yuna felt like she had woken up from a dream. Her eyes were fixed on Maru.

"You did well there, eh?" Maru said.

Yuna felt an indescribable sense of excitement.

"How's the udon I made? Pretty decent, isn't it?"

"Hyung-nim, the owner of this place prepared all that, though."

"But you know, but there's still the taste of the hand."

The two laughed at each other. Yuna looked at the two for a while before smiling. If she was by herself, she would have never been able to do anything. These were people who led her into the world of acting just by acting with her. She gained the confidence that she would do well.

"I thought we'd take an hour at least, but 20 minutes was all it took. At this rate, we might be able to reduce the number of shoots and save up some money for eating out, you know?" Jayeon said as she walked over.

Yuna sighed in relief when Jayeon patted her like she had done a good job. It finally felt like she had finished a cut.

"The start is good."

The director's voice made everyone feel pleased.

## **Chapter 708**

The first thing that people thought of when they thought of pojang-macha would be the bustling noises from the customers. Going past that orange-colored curtain would increase the noise level by at least double. It was a place where all the emotions in life reverberated and where glasses hit each other with a clang. It was a place of complete disinterest when it came to other people making noises. It might feel desolate at first glance, but people still gained consolation from it.

Maru lightly brushed his hand over the fold-out table. This pojang-macha in the middle of the set had less of that noise. Other than the time when a drunk customer came by and complained about life to the owner, it would be very quiet. The people that came here just sat down and ate udon and paid for their meals before going off to wherever they had to go. It wasn't like other pojang-machas where people

finished off the day by spending hours here; this place was a refuge where they could rest their bodies and minds.

Maru picked up a boiled egg and looked in front of him at Ganghwan. He had turned into the owner of a pojang-macha in just one day. After the cut ended, Ganghwan kept making bowls of udon without rest and handed them to the staff when it was supposed to be a break. It was 8 p.m. There was no better time to end their starvation than now. Everyone in each department, from the youngest to the oldest members, lined up outside the pojang-macha and received bowls. Ganghwan made bowls of udon leisurely without looking like he was feeling rushed. He shook off the moisture from the noodles and put them in some hot broth before he added some spring onions, dried tofu, and dried fishcakes. His movements were very quick and without any wasted movements. He looked like he had done it for a long time. Don't look down on a single man - he showed what he said through his actions.

Sometimes, there were people who approached the set from afar in confusion, and they were mostly the previous customers of the pojang-macha. When they asked if something happened, like there was something big happening, Ganghwan explained the situation to them in kind. Although it was supposed to be done by a staff member, Ganghwan drew the line, saying that it was his job. Ganghwan gave the customers, who looked like they were rather disappointed after listening to the circumstances, a bowl of udon. They looked at Ganghwan with suspicion when they received the bowls, but when they ate a little, they would raise their thumbs up. You learned properly - these were their words.

"That was the agreement, so we can't help it," Jayeon said.

One of the conditions to rent this pojang-macha was to explain the situation to the customers who came by and give them food. While it couldn't be helped while they were shooting, the pojang-macha's owner told them that they must absolutely give food to the customers who came during break time.

"You should watch while you eat. Also, there's no shoot tomorrow, so you can come by and be at ease."

Ganghwan gave a bowl of udon to each of the two students that just arrived. They were the students that Maru saw when he first came here. This place was probably like the mill for the little sparrows they were.

After the untimely supper, they started preparing for the shoot again. Maru asked Ganghwan, who was washing his hands,

"When did you learn all that? Your movements looked quite experienced."

"I came here starting the day after Jayeon, no, our director said she rented this place."

"Here?"

"Where else? I came here and helped out so that I could learn by watching. That hyung-nim looks like a man among men on the outside, but he has an emotional side to him. He especially said that the placing of the toppings must not be done wrong several times. His wife said that he had an intricate personality, and man, I could nod to that."

"Then you came here frequently for weeks?"

"I came here every day. I told everyone I met that the shoot starts this month, but it looks like the regulars who visit this place every now and then didn't catch the news."

Now that he thought about it, Ganghwan did talk to the students like they were close. He was wondering when they got so close, and this solved that question.

"Actors, please get ready," said the assistant director while clapping.

Looking at the sky where the sun had completely set, producer Jayeon made a satisfied smile.

Maru and Yuna got out of the pojang-macha. This time, Ganghwan had to act alone. As soon as they finished cleaning up the surroundings, the shoot began. Maru flipped his script over. Both the actors and the production staff would have an easier time acting and editing if they shot in the order of the plot, but shooting environments were always rather restricting. Even in just one episode, they had to skip back and forth several times. If they were given more time, they would set the schedule accordingly, but once they started running out of time, they had to go to the future, then back to the past, and to the present again.

Right now, they were on scene 13 after having done scene 1. They had skipped over the cuts that would show the everyday lives of the various characters so that they could shoot all the scenes they had to shoot at the pojang-macha.

"Thank you for your job today too."

Ganghwan was talking to a minor actor while chopping up some soondae. There were five minor characters talking to each other in the pojang-macha. Jayeon was smiling as she watched them. It seemed that she had taken a liking to the atmosphere.

Maru called out to Yuna who was dazing out as she looked at Ganghwan's acting.

"Yes, seonbae."

"You know that it's our scene next, right? It should become easier if you think about the incidents leading up to that scene to get your emotions ready."

Yuna nodded and opened her script. Her script was stained with highlighter pen ink.

"Should we go through the meeting part in scene 3?"

"Yes."

Maru pictured a classroom in his mind. The surrounding noises became faint, and he eventually felt like the classroom was real. It was the masked man helping him out. The dark stage where he resided could be used in this way by changing the scenery.

He grabbed onto his consciousness which was floating among tens of thousands of thoughts and put it next to the character known as 'Park Haejoon'. His focused consciousness started analyzing the character in depth. After tearing apart the character from all facets, he classified the parts into hundreds of elements and accepted them into his own body, practically imprisoning 'Park Haejoon' inside him. Acting rationally while looking at the traits of the character lying below his consciousness - this was the acting method specialized for Maru.

“How can you be so bold?” Maru spoke.

This was his first line said to ‘Yoon Jihae’, the character played by Yuna.

Park Haejoon was an average student. Number of family members, household circumstances, academic achievements, hobbies, friends, dreams. After extracting a mean or median value from every single one of them, they would represent ‘Park Haejoon’. He acted righteously from time to time, preferred not to stand out, and wanted to study well but liked playing games more. To him, who felt a sense of kinship with the ‘average joe’ in textbooks, Yoon Jihae was a mystical being that lived outside the fence of ordinariness.

Yoon Jihae was a firm girl. When the other people in the class boasted their brand-name student uniforms, she boldly boasted her second-hand one, and she always raised her hand to refuse when teachers asked who was willing to buy postage stamps from the red cross or badges from NGOs as donations. To Park Haejoon, who unwillingly took out his money because he didn’t want to stand out, that was something very bold to do.

‘Maru’ knew her household circumstances, but Park Haejoon didn’t. That was why his first line was that of admiration, envy, and respect.

“What do you mean?”

A rather gruffy reply came back. Maru, no, Park Haejoon thought of that cold answer as an expression of confidence. Compared to him, who could never say something like that in fear of ruining his relationships, she looked like a strong woman who could survive in the world by herself.

“I mean, before, when we were buying badges.”

“What about it? Are you dissatisfied because I didn’t buy one?”

“No, it’s not like that.”

“What then? What do you want to say?”

“So uh... you look really bold.”

“Are you mocking me?”

The moment he saw Yuna’s face as she said those words, Maru felt that the characters of Park Haejoon and Yoon Jihae that were within him were creaking a little. Maru raised his hand. Yuna, who was about to follow up, blinked her eyes and didn’t say anything.

“What is it, seonbae?”

“You’re doing well, but can you do that last line again?”

“The one where I ‘are you mocking me’?”

“Yeah.”

Yuna cleared her throat and said the line again. With a prickly tone of speech, her lips curled up a little. It felt a bit like she was mocking him.



“What is it? Was I strange?”

“Before that, can I ask how you interpreted this? I mean, people have their own ways.”

Yuna opened the script and spoke,

“I just said what I felt when I read this line.”

Maru nodded. There were no directions for the expression of emotions indicated by the writer for that line. It just went according to the flow.

“Was it strange?”

“If you’re sure about it, then I don’t really have anything to say to you.”

“No, say it anyway. I have to learn a lot.”

Maru scratched his eyebrows and spoke,

“You know how when you see the other lines, the writer has indicated what emotions to express and the circumstances, right?”

“Yes. At those times, I try to follow them.”

“There are times when you should change it according to the requests of the director, but most of the time, it’ll go according to how the writer wrote it. The problem is when such directions aren’t there. This is when the actors need to think about the most. While the director is in charge of everything, she won’t instruct you on everything. The director’s job is to bring out the best of each part after all. So in parts like this one, the actor needs to decide how to say the lines and how to show them to the director. If that process is smooth, the director would entrust the rest to the actor, but if there’s a disparity, the two should start tuning it together.”

“Ah, yes.”

“I’m saying this again, but this is an extremely personal opinion of mine, and I’m not telling you that your acting method is wrong, so just take it lightly. First, the background of scene 3 is the classroom, right?”

“Yes. It’s when the two first talk to each other.”

“As you know from the script, episode 1 doesn’t portray the household circumstances of the characters. But we know about it already. Park Haejoon is the epitome of being average, while Yoon Jihae is someone who feels that poverty is shameful and expresses herself as a vicious girl in order to hide it.”

Yuna flipped through the script and replied ‘yes’.

“If you say that line like how you did with just the information given in episode 1, I would say that your interpretation is good. After all, these kinds of lines are usually said with a mocking tone in a drama. It also suits the character of Yoon Jihae shown on the surface. But you are already aware of what kind of life she leads at home. Do you remember the script for episode 2? The scene where you hang up your call with your friends, who asked you to go out with them, and then started crying by yourself. Her personality might be bold on the surface, but don’t you think that Yoon Jihae is actually extremely

defensive and shy on the inside? If her exterior personality was because of rebellious psychology or some sort of self-defense mechanism, then I don't think it'll be a bad idea to say the line how you did."

Maru looked at Yoon Jihae's line. Would 'mocking' be the only thing in her mind when Park Haejoon tells her that the shell she created for herself is cool and amazing? Rather than that, a dry rage without any sort of mocking tone would suit the line better. In order to prop up the collapsing true self, she had to put up an even stronger barrier of falseness which would increase the intensity of the line instead.

"Are you mocking me?"

Maru said the line mixed with anger and wariness. He could see Yuna flinching back a little. Maru loosened his expression and showed her the script.

"You see my line right afterwards, right?"

"Yes. Extremely flustered and apologetic, that's what's written above it."

"If Yoon Jihae replied with a mocking tone, don't you think that is overreacting?"

"That's definitely true. Now that you mention it, cold rage might suit the flow better."

"Of course, I might be wrong."

"No, I'm sure you're right. In the last part, the directions also say that Park Haejoon wants to talk to her but he could not. He could not - this always tugged on my mind and I feel like I finally understand why."

Yuna's eyes sparkled as she kept reading through the script. After she finished, she nodded as she accepted.

"This is what you call attention to detail, right?"

"It's just a difference of interpretation. I might be wrong about this, so don't believe in me too much."

"We'll find out when we act it out later. We'll see which one the director likes better. But in my opinion, I think what you said is close to the answer. Ah, and here I thought I analyzed the script quite thoroughly. I was unable to connect other characters' lines to the stage directions. I guess they don't give you the script to just look at it."

Yuna snorted before taking out a pen.

"Uhm, seonbae, let me write things down for a little."

"Take it slow. I think it'll take a while for scene 13 to end."

"Yes. Please wait a little."

Yuna's hands started moving busily.

## **Chapter 709**

Ganghwan liked acting. The first reason for that was it used the body, and the second reason was that there was no correct answer. With acting, there might be a standardized pattern, but there was never a

fixed answer, allowing for all sorts of challenges. He found the world of acting way too charming since even a misinterpretation might be a trigger to view something from a different perspective.

A play had a script as well as a general direction, but the details were up to the actors. During practice, actors would have to talk to others to tune their acting and to exchange opinions, but once the play started, time would become solely their own. Even if they made a mistake, the 'producer' couldn't just interrupt halfway and tell them that they did something wrong nor could their colleague actors ask the audience for forgiveness and then try the same scene again. After the starting point, there would only be the driving wheel with no access to the brakes.

"Cut!"

Ganghwan felt his heightened emotions collapsing at that sound. The background actors sitting in front of him put down their bowls and sighed. The breaks had been stepped on. This mechanism, which wasn't present during a staged play, existed during camera acting. It was also in the most authoritative and powerful form.

Once there was a 'cut', everything would stop even if the actors were at the epitome of their emotions or were creating a great picture. The time when acting, which solely belongs to the actors in a stage play, would be taken over by the producer, which made Ganghwan feel extremely iffy.

"Why do you look so gruffy, hyung?"

"Dramas don't suit me after all."

"There you go again. You started already, so you can't go back. There's only going forward."

"Just let me keep going forward then. Stop cutting in midway."

"If I don't cut and keep going, who would do the editing, and who would come up with the composition? Stop complaining and fix your makeup. Your hair is too down. You should also get your cheeks touched up."

"Sweating on the stage is supposed to be natural."

"Unfortunately, this is not a stage."

"Then give me thick makeup so that it doesn't get wiped away with sweat."

"If I do that on an HD broadcast, the forums will go into an uproar, you know? They'll ask if you're an actor for a Beijing opera or something."

"You just won't lose a word, will you?"

"If I lose, it means that everything will become a mess. Get your makeup fixed and get ready for the next cut."

Ganghwan brought his face in front of the makeup artist. After a few brushes, he returned to how he was during the beginning of the shoot. Ganghwan found the quick makeup method rather desirable. He decided to ask later.

The shoot resumed. Ganghwan spoke to the girl sitting on the left,

“Did the assistant director instruct you on anything before the start?”

“He told us to eat naturally.”

The others said the same.

“If that’s the case, you should look at each other when you eat. You all are very pretty and handsome. You should exchange numbers too. What do you think?”

Hearing that, the background actors who were supposed to be a couple became slightly embarrassed as they looked at each other. They smiled awkwardly. Ganghwan liked how they looked. At least for this moment, the expression those two showed looked really natural. He gave some advice to the others as well.

“Let’s enjoy ourselves.”

“Yes, okay.”

Just then, they got a signal from the director.

The following cut was given an okay after just two shots. Ganghwan thanked the background actors for the job.

“We’ll take a 10 minute break,” the assistant director shouted.

Ganghwan sat down inside the pojang-macha. It would be better if his role required him to move around, but since he had to stand still throughout the whole shoot, his calves were hurting.

“Why don’t you quit stage plays and continue with dramas since you’re here? I’ll definitely use you if I manage to win a mini-series or something.”

“You can do that all you want. I don’t think dramas suit me after all. There’s no sense of tension here.”

“Do you want me to bring an audience then? So that you feel like you’re being watched?”

“Will you?”

Jayeon shrugged. It was an absurd notion, so Ganghwan didn’t expect anything either.

“What do you think about those two?”

Jayeon pointed at Maru and Yuna with her chin.

“For Maru, I find him reliable since I’ve been watching him for a long time, but as for Yuna, I’m not too sure. What did you see in her that made you choose her?”

“The fact that she can become endlessly honest with herself. Also, a bit of acting skill.”

“That was your criteria? Aren’t you being too lenient because it’s your debut piece?”

“Hyung, don’t you know me? You know I despise being lenient. I actually thought about it until the end. I thought about who would fit this drama better. Actually, I didn’t pick Maru based on acting skills alone. I liked his attention to detail and his quick adaptation to the system. That’s why I gave him high marks.”

Ganghwan nodded. Jayeon was someone who prioritized cooperation ever since she was in college. She preferred team members who were slow but could walk together with the others towards the goal rather than those who were individually very good but couldn't fit in with the rest. Of course, it wasn't that she didn't value their skills entirely either. She would just prefer someone with better teamwork if two people were around the same level.

"Yuna is definitely rather subpar when it comes to acting skills alone. But, she's only in her first year of high school. It'd be rather strange to look for perfection."

"But she made quite a lot of mistakes though."

"That's true. Compared to everyone else here, she's quite lacking in terms of acting. I'm not that worried though."

"Why?"

"I told you, Yuna is a very honest girl. I'm not sure what she was like before, but Yuna is someone who is true to her desires right now. While she sometimes tries to hide herself because of the gazes around her and holds herself back due to etiquette, fundamentally, she doesn't hold back when it comes to projecting her emotions."

"To me, she just looked like a shy little girl."

"That's because you weren't there at the audition. Yuna doesn't ignore her own emotions. Normally, when people are told that they're bad, they would despair or snapback saying that it's not true, but when it comes to Yuna, while she might feel frustrated at the fact that her skills aren't up to par, she would not blame herself or others because of that. In fact, she asks this: what can I do to improve myself?"

"Really? She is someone with ambition."

"Yes, hyung. She's ambitious. I could see that she was longing for something. That's why I brought her here. Honestly speaking, I think that the acting skills of minors are all so-so at best. If that's the case, the things I have to look for are how they can fit in with the rest of the team and how much they can improve themselves throughout the shoot."

Ganghwan nodded. It sounded like something like Jayeon would think. However, there was one thing she was wrong about. This was something he had to mention.

"If you still think that minors are all so-so at best, then you should scrap that mindset right now."

He stood up and looked at Maru, who was standing afar.

\* \* \*

Jayeon looked at the monitor with her breath abated. She could see Yuna's face over Maru's shoulders. Yuna, who was hesitating with chopsticks in her hand, slowly started speaking. Jayeon thought that she looked pretty okay and listened to the voice she could hear through the monitors.

"Poverty is a sin. I'm sure of it."

She could see Yuna's firm eyes losing strength. Yuna's loose eyes were captured on camera. Jayeon tapped on her thigh with her finger. It was slightly lacking, but she decided to keep watching for now.

"It's not entirely like that."

That was Maru's voice. Even though she couldn't see his face, the emotions contained in his voice were very good.

Having heard that, Yuna became quiet and looked towards the udon. About 3 seconds later, Jayeon shouted cut. While the progress was smooth, she found the depth of emotions to be a little lacking. She felt like one more step would scatter a depressing light all over the screen.

"Uhm, you know."

Before she could say anything though, Yuna raised her hand as though she was in a classroom. Jayeon looked at her in confusion.

"Can I do that in a different way this time?" Yuna asked.

She seemed filled with the desire to challenge. Jayeon looked at her for a while before looking at Maru, who stood next to her. He was smiling as though it was okay for her to trust Yuna.

"Alright. If there's something you thought of doing, then try it out. We still have time."

Jayeon returned to the monitor. She decided to keep the footage they shot just now. Tapes that were totally unusable or had an NG in them usually wouldn't be numbered, but if it was decent, it would be kept for editing purposes. If the shooting schedule was strict, she would be satisfied with the footage she got just now, but they had some leisure. Moreover, an enthusiastic actress wanted to do something. As a director, she couldn't ignore that passion.

She shouted cue and looked at the screen. This was scene 13, where the two high schoolers started taking interest in each other and telling each other about how they truly felt. The meeting between the ever-average boy and the girl who had lots of ups and downs in life would give the viewers a sense of expectation. Whether they could overcome the difference in opinion and into love or go their separate ways. In order to heighten that sense of expectation, their natures had to be shown in full in this scene. Viewers projected themselves onto attractive characters, not nobodies who just walked on the street.

Jayeon rested her chin on her hands and focused on the monitor. The order of progression was similar to before. There was no difference in how she brought out her emotions either. She wondered where Yuna would show that change. After watching for a while, Jayeon stopped breathing. Yuna's expression crumpled miserably. She could feel the emotions strongly even when she was just looking at the monitor.

Too exaggerated - that was the first thought she had. Yuna's acting was definitely fit to be called 'exaggerated'. Usually, she would cut this off and start again, but for some reason, she couldn't say anything.

It was exaggerated yet attractive. Yuna exuded the feeling of 'look at me', which made her unable to find the exaggerated acting bad.

Jayeon stayed quiet for five seconds before shouting cut. She stood up and walked over to the pojang-macha.

“How was it?” Yuna asked.

Even though her act had ended, Jayeon could feel a sense of sadness and rage from Yuna. She looked like she was deeply immersed in the sea of acting.

“Did you two go through that together?” Jayeon asked Maru.

Maru nodded. Jayeon looked towards Ganghwan. She needed an expert’s opinion.

“While it was exaggerated, it was something that made me want to keep watching. At least, I didn’t think about anything else while watching.”

That confirmed it. Jayeon had to think about it. After all, she was asking for his opinion, not judgment.

“Let’s finish up for now.”

“Shall we keep going like this?”

“Yeah, go on.”

Jayeon said with a smile.

## **Chapter 710**

“Does she mean that she’s satisfied when the director said we should go on?” Yuna asked.

She had the confidence that it would work, but now that she actually finished acting, she was very worried. In the first shot, she stayed true to the script, but in the second shot, she mixed in her own interpretations. Naturally, the first one contained her interpretations as well, but it was much fainter compared to the second one.

“Rather than satisfied, I think she means that she’ll watch how it goes,” Ganghwan said.

Maru nodded. It wasn’t a ‘pass’ quite yet.

“But still, well done,” Maru consoled her.

Yuna scratched her head. Whenever she was complimented by Maru, she felt relaxed. She couldn’t help but think about his words more than the director’s. Ever since she heard that he wasn’t contacting Gaeul-seonbae, a greed that should not raise its head up kept poking its head up within her. No, no - she kept shouting inwardly several times, but when she came to, she would have written a novel in her head. A sweet and romantic one, that is.

“It’s exaggerated, but it doesn’t look overdone. I’m not sure if we should polish this or not,” Ganghwan said.

“Is there really a need to? Since the director said that she would keep watching us, I don’t think it’s entirely off the mark.”

"If it's for play, I won't be too sure, but this is a drama, isn't it? I honestly don't get whether this goes with the latest trends or not. I mean, what do I know about dramas? If the director says it's okay, then I guess it's okay."

Ganghwan prepared for the next cut while washing his hands.

Yuna also tapped on her cheeks and focused. There were two things she learned from the read-through with Maru. The first was that she had to have a clear understanding of the structure of the script and the relationship between each character. The second was to not be afraid of expressing emotions. 'If you can use your personality, then you should' - she thought about what he said.

The assistant director gave the standby signal. After becoming conscious of the new placement of the camera, Yuna started acting. She did not restrain the emotions surging inside her and impulsively let them all out. Yuna found a common ground between Yoon Jihae, who had found a clue for change, as well as Kim Yuna, who had feelings for Han Maru and scattered them without restraint.

"On weekends, I have to go to part-time jobs. Do you think it's any different on weekdays? I have to keep working even at home. I don't even have time to do homework. But that's not the case for you, is it? You have it easy, yet how can you say that poverty is not a sin in front of me? You don't even know what it's like."

It felt rather curious. Even though she was acting, it didn't feel like she was acting. The percentage of falseness in her lines was less than 1 percent. She projected her emotions through the frame known as acting. She truly felt angry and then sad. Yuna felt her nose tingling. She felt like she was about to cry, so she turned her head away to look at the pile of boiled eggs. She was in a state of acting yet not acting. She felt really complex and simultaneously, a sense of liberation. It was thanks to remembering the script that made her turn back around while holding back her tears.

She heard a cut sound. That became the trigger for the teardrops in the corner of her eyes to fall.

"What do I do? I'm so sorry, I didn't plan on doing this."

Her acting was over, but her emotions continued. Yuna urgently wiped the corner of her eyes with some tissue.

"Yuna."

Jayeon had approached her.

"Yes?"

"Are you going to be okay with that?"

"With what?"

"I mean the current situation. Isn't it hard?"

"I don't think there's anything like that. Please give me a second."

Yuna sighed while trembling before raising her head. The emotions finally died down.



“The emotional consumption in that must have been immense. Are you really okay?” Jayeon seemed concerned.

Yuna nodded energetically.

“I don’t feel bad at all. In fact, I feel refreshed.”

She wasn’t lying. When the lingering emotions disappeared, she felt refreshed as though she felt a breeze of wind after a light jog. There was no residue left at all from the sadness. Jayeon looked at her for a while before speaking,

“How peculiar. Is being honest an advantage at times like this?”

“Eh?”

“Nothing. If you’re okay, then you should keep doing that in the future. When I first looked at you, I thought you were exaggerating, but if you can fit all of your acting on this level, you will create a solid character for yourself and it would look more natural instead.”

“Should I keep going like this then?”

“Yes, well done.”

The words ‘well done’ made her sigh in relief. She felt proud as though she had received a good mark on a subject that she didn’t prepare that much for. Perhaps luck was on her side.

“There is no correct answer to acting. However, if you think that something isn’t right while acting, you should definitely say so immediately. Emotions aren’t like visible wounds, so only you would know whether you’re hurt or not,” Ganghwan said.

“Yes!”

Yuna replied in joy.

‘Only I know it.’

This seemed like very important advice. Yuna relaxed her shoulders and checked on her own state. She learned from her acting school that actors needed to be able to check on their current state. She was told that she should observe not just the physical things, but the mental things as well. Thanks to that, Yuna was able to see whether she was in a good state or not quite clearly. And, according to her judgment, the current state of her mind and body were above average.

If spending too much emotion was a problem, then she should have been very emotionally tired right now, but for some reason, she felt better than normal. She felt like she had just expelled a bunch of clumped emotions, so she even wanted to maintain this current state. Her shoulders, which felt heavy from fear and pressure, no longer felt that way either. The gazes of the staff felt very distant as well. While her heart was excited, it didn’t go overboard, and she was in a state where a moderate amount of tension was perfectly mixed with the joy of working.

She liked acting. No, she liked acting together. Yuna looked at Maru’s face for a moment before staring holes into her script.

\* \* \*

Ganghwan leaned against the wall and looked at the two kids acting. Maru was his senior when it came to acting in front of a camera at least, while Yuna had never even done a part-time job as a background actor. In terms of skill and experience, the two had a lot of differences, making him suspect that the disparity would show, but right now, he was watching the two juniors with a relaxed mind.

Maru's acting had become much more intricate than before. If he acted like a machine doing a specific task, then he would have given the judgment that he had regressed, but his act, which maintained a standardized form but still had his nature dissolved in with it, had definitely improved compared to before. Above all, he liked the fact that Maru's act had become closer to that of his own age. A long time ago, Maru's act showed an incredible display of familiarity with a middle-aged man to the point that Ganghwan wondered if he was possessed.

This was especially the case when Maru helped out with his play two years ago. The bus driver act he showed back then gave Ganghwan the feeling that a real bus driver was borrowing Maru's mouth to tell his own stories. His act was abnormally mature. While people said that exceptional actors could show an act that transcended age, the fact that a teenage boy could display the emotions of a man who was halfway through his life without any sense of awkwardness was something that made him feel worried rather than surprised.

Right now, however, Maru had lost the weight that he had before, and he had gained the cheerfulness and passion befitting his age. A mature act was definitely good, but as appearances were definitely an element of concern for actors, an act that suited one's age was definitely necessary, and the current Maru had a perfect balance of appearance and age. While there was still a sense of maturity to him, it was just enough to make the whole thing look stable. His eyes, which looked at the very foundation of an object, combined with his not so exceptional but realistic expressivity showed a great combination, heightening the quality of his acts. Ganghwan really looked forward to what Maru would become in one year and in ten years.

Then there was Yuna. She became more and more interesting the more he watched her. Ganghwan believed that there existed a total quantity to emotions. He believed that the fact that humans couldn't be limitlessly happy nor limitlessly sad was due to the fact that there was a limit to how much emotion a person could possess.

Actors were fundamentally emotional laborers. They had to be sad when they weren't sad, and they had to be happy when they weren't happy. They also had to be able to do so whenever and wherever they had to. Expressing emotions at just the right time would maximize emotional consumption. Ganghwan also spent his life lying down in stillness at home once he finished a very dynamic play. When he recovered some stamina he would start watching dramas, movies, or reading books. Only after checking that he would cry at the sad things and laugh at the funny things would he feel that his twisted inner emotions were healing.

If an actor brought out emotions without end, the well would dry up quickly and the actor would become an empty can, no longer able to do anything. Ganghwan had seen numerous people who have given up on this job because they spent more emotions than they could recover. It was a well-known

fact even to ordinary civilians that actors frequently visited psychotherapists, so he thought that emotions should not be pushed out so recklessly.

Yet Yuna seemed different. The backlash of spending her emotions seemed especially little for her. She was someone who exuded an incredible amount of emotion to the point that she couldn't hold them back even after the director gave a cut sign, yet with a bit of time, she would no longer look tired and would instead smile as though she was feeling refreshed. There was no lie in her smile. This was amazing. It was definitely outside of what Ganghwan considered to be common sense at least.

A girl who's endlessly honest to herself - Ganghwan thought about what Jayeon said. Emotions that were brought out artificially by the actor would clash against the actor's true emotions and erode away at their mentality. However, if someone could easily synchronize their real emotions to the artificial emotions, that fatigue would be relatively low.

Ganghwan looked at Yuna. She was huffing as though she was very angry. As she had a cute appearance, she didn't look that scary, but her rage was something unrefined. It lingered for a long time because the anger was truly there. However, once those lingering emotions disappeared, Yuna would soon return to her usual, smiling self. It looked as though her emotional expenditure had been refilled instantly.

On one side was a boy who dug into the extreme depths into not just himself, but the characters as well, and on the other side was a girl who emphasized the character with pure, visible emotions.

What a nice pairing - Ganghwan inwardly muttered to himself as he nodded.

"I think you should press it down a little. Everything was good, but that was just a little lacking."

"Then I'll try changing it just a little."

It was probably thanks to Maru that Yuna's emotions weren't bursting out uncontrollably and were at the level of being just a little too much. His quick thinking had reached a level where he could influence other people's acting. This would be a useless skill against those much higher than him in acting skill, but for the current Yuna, it would be akin to treasure.

"There's also the fact that her heart is open too."

It was obvious just how much Yuna had opened up her heart to Maru from how she accepted Maru's words without any doubts. There was probably more than just 'goodwill' in her emotions. Perhaps it was the synergy of all these elements and working with someone in the same space that allowed Yuna to bring out her full potential. If there was someone else in the place of Maru, Yuna might overdo it with her emotions.

Jayeon said that she valued Maru's analytical skills and calmness and Yuna's honesty. While her decision of not prioritizing acting skills was a big gamble, from the results that could be seen now... she had hit the jackpot.

"Senior, do you have anything to say?" Yuna asked while taking a break.

Ganghwan shook his head.

"No, you're doing good. Maru, you should try to be more like her."

Maru, who was flipping through his script on the side, frowned and spoke,

“Why do I feel a sense of defeat when I hear that from you, hyung-nim?”

“Because I’m good, and you’re not.”

“Man, I miss Geunsoo hyung-nim.”

“You know, he and I aren’t that different when it comes to being a lunatic.”

“But at least he doesn’t boast like you do.”

Maru chuckled. Ganghwan also agreed, saying ‘that’s true’, with a smile.