

Once Again 861

Chapter 861. Sequence 13

Eunhye's lips twitched. Looking at the middle-aged actor reminded her of general manager Choi. General manager Choi habitually spoke as though it was natural for her to make sacrifices for the company. The same person who took other people's sacrifices for the company as if it was natural hated charity activities the most, which were held every quarter. He proactively sought out other people's devotion, yet he despised devoting anything himself. Suffering when you're young will all come back to help you later, so just do it – this was one of his catchphrases.

The middle-aged actor on the screen was so similar to general manager Choi that she almost threw the remote control at the screen. One of the wishes on her bucket list was to spit on general manager Choi's face when she quit. It wasn't just her. Many employees at her company shared that goal.

Bigfoot, who was standing in the empty room, was captured by the camera for a long time. There was even some quiet background music. Eunhye looked at Bigfoot smiling in a silly manner, then at him fidgeting with his phone, before going back to his silly smile, in a total daze. That character definitely lived a better life than her, but there was something she could sympathize with. Bigfoot tapped on his forehead with his eyes closed for a while before making a phone call.

-Father, I'm so sorry. I was mistaken about my day off. I don't think I can make it tomorrow. Sorry. Tell mom about it. No, actually, don't talk about it. It might worsen her condition. The leaves have turned red around the neighborhood, haven't they? You should go watch them with mom. I heard that walking around the neighborhood you used to live in is pretty effective. I'll send you some money for you two to eat some nice things, so don't you worry about anything, father, and just go sightseeing with mom.

Bigfoot hung up the call and tapped on the screen. He seemed to be sending some money. Eunhye looked at the triangular rice ball on the table. It seemed that the non-main characters had it hard, whether here or there.

-Hey, Bigfoot.

Heewon entered the room.

-What brings you here to the hospital? Isn't today your day off?

-I made a visit because I had something to check. But hey, I heard head doctor Kang tell me something strange. Apparently, you're taking Choi Hyunjin's shift tomorrow.

-Yeah, things happened.

-Don't you need to go meet your mother? You've been looking forward to this for weeks. You told me that you were so excited to finally visit her.

-True. I just got a call too. She seems to be in a good condition and even recognized who I am. I asked her what she ate, what she saw, and if she didn't feel any pain recently. I talked about a lot of things. It's been such a long time.

-Is she not doing well?

-The time it takes for her to return to normal keeps getting longer. I even got a doctor's license as her son, but it's not really of any use. Maybe it's because I'm an intern. I should at least earn a lot so that my father has it easier.

Bigfoot had a faint smile on his face as he stood up. He cleaned his messy desk and started piling up the files and paperwork.

-Let's tell the head doctor about it again. If you don't visit this week, you'll have to be stuck in the hospital for two more weeks at least. You should visit her while she still recognizes you.

-Forget it. I'll go next month.

-I'll try persuading him as well. He might listen if you explain the situation to him.

-This is about Choi Hyunjin. You know how the head doctor is, don't you? He'd do anything if it's related to the director. Yeah, if I reason with him, then he might change me out. But you know what he's like, don't you? You know how he treats people who go against him.

-But this has nothing but losses for you.

-Thanks for saying that. It makes me feel so much better to know that you're looking out for me. Don't worry about me. My mom won't get into big trouble for the time being.

Bigfoot tapped on Heewon's arm with his fist and laughed. It was the laugh he showed in the drama from time to time. That silly laugh that the frugal Bigfoot always had. Bigfoot then waved at Heewon to return. Heewon put down some chocolate on the desk, cheering him on.

-Thanks.

Heewon left the room. The camera closed in on Bigfoot's face as the door closed. The smile that was engraved onto his face like a mask became fainter. His eyes twitched and his lips trembled. His firmly shut lips twisted left and right. His Adam's apple was shaking.

Eunhye rolled her lips inward. She felt a tinge in her nose. She never took interest in this actor because he always only appeared for a brief moment, but now that she got a closer look at him today, his acting skills were pretty incredible. The way he held himself back from crying due to frustration reminded her of her mother. Her own figure overlapped with his since she never made the time to visit her own mother with the excuse that she was busy.

Bigfoot uttered out a trembling breath and put the chocolate that Heewon left behind in his mouth. The smile that disappeared returned to his face.

-I should do my best. It's all experience and a good thing, so I should do my best.

Recalling the words that the head doctor left behind, Bigfoot reached out to one of the files before stopping and looking upwards. The camera slowly pulled back. He spoke when his whole body was in the frame, standing behind two long desks – mom wanted to see me too.

Eunhye ripped two pieces of toilet roll and wiped her tears. The calm background music stopped and only Bigfoot's vain laughter could be heard from the screen, but she still shed tears. Her throat tightened. She wanted to cry, even though it wasn't that sad, even though it wasn't that pitiful. She took

a deep breath and spat it out again. Maybe it was because of her harsh reality or because the actor's skills were so saddening that Eunhye had to fan herself with her hand because of the sudden tears. If Bigfoot's expression stayed on the screen for just a little longer, she would have cried out loud.

The scene changed. It was a scene where doctor Choi left the hospital alongside the director. Behind doctor Choi cheerfully calling the director dad was Bigfoot, looking all tired. Heewon was next to him as well.

Eunhye thought that Heewon would say something. Since he was the main character who goes through everything in order to save people's lives, she thought that he would resolve the situation. She thought that he would either stop the director's path and tell him off or that he would say the circumstances to doctor Choi and change this sad situation. As she had expected, Heewon made a move. However, he wasn't able to go forward. Bigfoot held him back. Bigfoot smiled as he always did and pointed at the vending machine, asking him to buy a drink. Heewon bought a drink and gave it to Bigfoot. Bigfoot thanked him before yawning and walking down the corridor.

Bigfoot's silly smile as he walked with the drink in hand kept coming up in her mind. The scene changed and the drama turned into an intense operation room, but for some reason, she could still picture Bigfoot's figure walking slowly towards the break room. Rather than being frustrated that he didn't resolve the situation, she was frustrated because she could relate to Bigfoot having no choice but to act like that in such a situation. It was something that everyone who had lived a decent social life could sympathize with.

Miss Lee, make some time on the weekend – that single line from general manager Choi made her skip her family outing she scheduled on the weekend. It was unjust. It was a holiday, and she wasn't called because of work either. She shouted in her mind dozens of times that she couldn't do that, but what came out of her mouth was, 'at what time should I come?' In her imagination, she was always the bringer of justice, while general manager Choi was a meager human. Abide with the labor laws – she always said this to her superior in her imagination. However, when she actually worked, she had never said that even once nor did she see anyone say such a thing. When the employees gathered in the supplies room during break time, every single one of them said that this was unfair and that they would not let this slide, but once they were out of the break room, they parroted the same words like some kindergarteners saying 'duck goes quack'. Yes, of course, I'll do it; Leave it to me – Eunhye became one of those ducks.

Heewon inside the drama was cool. He stood up against injustice and did not hesitate to put his life on the line in order to save others. He did not bat an eyelid at the words that enticed him of success but cried when the child of a patient gave him candy as a token of appreciation for saving her mother. How could anyone hate such a character?

However, the person she could empathize with was Bigfoot, who had his day off taken away from him with a single word from his superior. He was a pathetic character who always had a silly smile on his face despite being tired, but he caught her eyes. Bigfoot was really ordinary. He didn't have the role of a villain who would die grandly while fighting against someone from Kang Giwoo's side from Doctor's Office nor did he have some godly medical skills that saved people's lives. Inside the drama where dramatic events occurred everywhere, Bigfoot was experiencing ordinary pain and ordinary worries. Political struggles within the hospital that involved dozens of billions of won and godly medical skills

capable of smooth heart transplants; those things were in the realm of ‘comprehension,’ but Bigfoot was in the realm of ‘sympathy.’ She felt like she could speak to Bigfoot overnight while drinking some soju. Though, the 3.6 million won on his bank account was still envious.

Doctors ended with Heewon exchanging gazes with the anesthetist. Bigfoot no longer appeared. Was he going to appear tomorrow? Or was this it?

Eunhye wished for Bigfoot to do well. It wasn’t even a big dream. After all, it was just about visiting his mother. It would be great if the writer showed that such a trivial dream could come true. The program was then followed by a teaser of the next episode. Eunhye could see Bigfoot’s smiling face among the short clips. Did things go well for him?

The end was followed by a car ad. Eunhye stared at the car in a daze before standing up with the dusty rice ball and the container for the instant noodles.

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“Miss Lee, it’s about time you do your work right. Or what, are you saying that you don’t have to work properly at a company that doesn’t pay you properly?”

“General manager, I didn’t say anything like....”

“Miss Lee. An elder is talking to you. You know? Aren’t you a little too comfortable these days? Did I make your work life too easy? There is a limit to everything. How dare you talk back to your superiors like that? Yes, I may be wrong. If that’s the case, then you should wait until I finish talking before talking to me by starting with ‘general manager.’ Do I even need to explain this to you? You’re an adult now. You should get yourself together. Not only is your work improperly done, but you’re also immature when it comes to how to treat your elders. Miss Lee, I didn’t think you were like this.”

General manager Choi finished off by clicking his tongue. Lee Eunhye turned around with the coffee when she was gestured to return.

“Leave that here.”

“You told me you didn’t like coffee from coffee machines though.”

“There you go again. If I tell you to put it down, then you put it down. Is it so hard to self-improve in an age like this?”

Eunhye barely managed to calm down her shaking eyes and put down the coffee. This wasn’t even about work. She was getting an earful because she brought the ‘wrong’ coffee. A few days ago, she heard that he liked coffee brewed by coffee machines, but today, she got an earful because it was not from a coffee stick. He always talked about ‘self-improvement’ at the slightest opportunity, but it was likely that he didn’t even know what it meant.

She took a deep breath and sat down at her desk. She felt like she now knew why some people had stress-induced gastritis. They say that salarymen always have their letter of resignation with them from the moment they enter the company. Today, she also took out her letter of resignation from the drawer in her heart at least a dozen times. If she had the slightest bit of courage, if she had more money in her bank account, she would have handed it in.

“Eunhye, what did general manager Choi say?”

“Yelling because it’s not coffee stick coffee.”

“He’s bullshitting again. What era does he think we live in? How can he still make a female employee brew coffee for him? Also, didn’t he say he likes coffee machine coffee better? Is he whimsical, getting old, or what. Geez, he’s too much. Tell him to get his own coffee next time.”

“I want to do that, but what can I do? If I don’t, he bothers me the whole day.”

“This is dizzying. How did a man like that get promoted to general manager?”

“See how he acts when he’s with the president. He won’t be able to act like that even towards the savior of his life.”

Eunhye glared at general manager Choi and checked the order form they got from a business partner. As she moved her mouse and checked the numbers on the document, she couldn’t help but think about the coffee. So what if it was from a machine or a stick? If he had such a great tongue, he should have chosen to be a barista instead of bothering his employees at a desk job. As she typed on the keyboard in vexation, it soon reached lunchtime. General manager Choi, who never let the employees go home on time, told everyone to keep the time for lunch and stood up. Assistant manager Park, who was practically his lackey, soon followed him. Following them, a few more people left the office.

“General manager Choi left. Now I can get a breather. Why is he in such a bad mood today? Usually, he nitpicks after lunch.”

“From what I heard, he had a fight with his wife. Heck, even I would do that if I was her. Thinking about how I would have to make food for a man like that creeps me out. He’s gonna be like that at home too, isn’t he? Bring me water, bring me fruit, lay out the duvet. If he was a little older, he would probably yell at her to warm up the bath water.”

As soon as the general manager’s watchful eyes disappeared, the employees in the office gathered in front of the supplies room. Everyone seemed to be angry because of general manager Choi, who nitpicked with them since morning. Eunhye also expressed her frustration.

“Really, this company would have been a lot better without general manager Choi.”

“I wish he gets into a traffic accident and doesn't show up for a week.”

“Even if we talk like this, it won’t do any good. Let’s go out too. We’ll get an earful if we return later than general manager Choi.”

Six employees headed to the nearby budaе-jjigae^[1] restaurant. Before they went in, they had sent a scout in to see whether general manager Choi was in there. They left the company five minutes late intentionally so that they could avoid him.

They sat down and ordered some budaе-jjigae. A year ago, lunchtime was only 30 minutes. Back then, they had to eat in a flash before going back to work. Right now, though, they could order some fruit juice from a café and take it back to the office.

“We really have to thank general manager Kang for this. If it wasn’t for him, lunchtime would only have been 30 minutes, right? That just sounds terrible.”

“Does anyone know what general manager Kang is doing now?”

“I don’t know. I haven’t contacted him ever since the company underwent a restructuring. But I’m sure he has a good job now since he has the skills and the personality. Geez, this is the problem with our company. They cut off all the competent employees because of a reform, and let a guy like general manager Choi be. What was the result of that? We didn’t get paid for two months. I really don’t see a future in our company.”

“It would’ve been great if general manager Kang was the one who remained instead of general manager Choi. Why did general manager Kang leave?”

An employee on the other side spoke softly after hearing that,

“Don’t go around telling anyone else and just keep this to yourselves. Actually, general manager Kang got on the president’s bad side. He’s a regular employee, so it’s legally hard to kick him out, right? So the president didn’t even give him work and just kept telling him to go to other parts of the country. You remember right? General manager Kang only showed up at the company for brief moments. Actually, those business trips didn’t have any reason either. From what I overheard, apparently, there was a time he went to Busan and did nothing.”

Eunhye nodded. She remembered that general manager Kang drove off with a tired expression. How disappointed must he have been? He did his best, but the outcome was that the company was forcing him to quit.

“This is a rumor, but I heard that it’s general manager Choi who helped boot him out. He told the president to do it.”

“I can see him doing that. He’s the worst.”

“General manager Kang is such a gentleman. He drew the line when it came to political struggles and looked after the employees under him. I’m pretty sure that’s why he was pushed off.”

Everyone at the table said a word about him. I will throw my letter of resignation at general manager Choi’s face when I do, I will spit at him, I will go to him now and nitpick with him – General manager Choi’s reputation was being ripped to pieces. Just then, an employee, who was looking at the entrance of the restaurant, tapped the table with a spoon and became silent. Eunhye knew what that meant. The other employees also became silent and put their spoons inside the already empty budae-jjigae pot.

“You were eating here?”

It was general manager Choi.

Eunhye clenched her eyes shut and opened them again. It just had to be her that he was talking to. She tried controlling her expression as much as possible and turned around.

“Ah, yes, general manager Choi. Have you had a good lunch?”

“I had some pork gukbap. Did you guys have budae-jjigae here?”

“Yes.”

“I was a regular at this place once. Back then, I didn’t get paid as much as I do now, so we only ordered three portions of budae-jjigae and just ordered extra rice. We didn’t have it as good as you.”

“I see.”

“You know, young ones these days don’t know how comfortable it has gotten for them. Whenever you turn on the TV, it says stuff like how young people have the right to pursue happiness, and that passion pay is no good and whatnot, but that’s all them being immature. If you don’t suffer when you’re young, then when will you? When you’re old like me? Of course not, you should try out challenges when you still have your youth, your health, and your spirit. When you fall over at that age, you can stand back up. But young ones these days go on about rights and what not, and all they care about is feeding themselves.”

General manager Choi put his hand out. Eunhye took the hint and poured some water into a cup before offering it to him. This guy was practically a politician asking for votes. She wondered if he was going to stop now. However, general manager Cho wiped his mouth and spoke again,

“The new recruit this time quit after just one week, right? Saying that he didn’t fit in with the company. It’s those people that go on the internet and write stuff like how it’s the society that’s the problem, and how they’re doing their best to work, but the businesses are exploiting them badly. That’s all nonsense. I wanna ask them if they really tried their utmost best. When I was your age, I really swore loyalty to the company. That’s why I got compensated like this. It’s because people think about themselves and don’t want to sacrifice themselves that they’re blaming others and society. It’s bad practice. You know that famous saying, right? Before you think about what the company can do for you, think about what you can do for the company. Right?”

Eunhye’s hairs stood on end. Her mouth itched. She wanted to yell at him: that great company, that same company that he swore loyalty to cannot even pay salaries now; why am I not getting any compensation for my hard work when I sweated hard according to that logic of yours.

Her shoulders jerked. She thought about just spitting it out. Just then, she locked eyes with general manager Choi. She felt like she was being stared at by a lion with a full stomach. It wasn’t going to attack because it was in a good mood but would not hesitate to rip her throat out if she did anything that angered it. The aggressiveness that filled her mind disappeared like ice on a summer day. It melted and evaporated in an instant.

“Of course, general manager. You’re right. We must do our best.”

“Right.”

“We have to do our best.”

The employees sitting at the table all followed suit. Eunhye was reminded of a tug of war. An absurd tug of war where general manager Choi, an adult, was up against the other employees, who were practically six-months-old toddlers. He had the whistle, and he would win in less than one second once the game began. They couldn’t think about resisting.

"I knew it. The people working at our company have a different mindset from those people. It's a completely different place compared to others that are filled with people nagging about not getting their payment. I'll pay for your food here, so take your time eating."

Eunhye applauded while making a tragic smile. The other employees did the same. After general manager Choi left, they didn't talk for a long time. The employee who said that she would throw insults at his face was just looking at the TV, and another one who said he would punch him in the face and pay his hospital fees just sipped some water.

"I wanted to say that too," said the employee watching TV.

Eunhye turned around to look at the TV. It was a rebroadcast of the episode of 'Doctors' that aired yesterday. Lee Heewon was going against the head doctor ordering him to change the order of operation, saying that he'd operate on someone whose life was in more danger.

Perhaps it was because she had just acted submissive in front of general manager Choi that she felt bitter even though it was a refreshing scene. She wished she could talk like that too. Everyone seemed to be thinking the same thing as they chuckled and watched the TV. Following that, Bigfoot appeared. It was the scene that made her cry yesterday. Although she was watching it for the second time, the acting skill was so good that she was absorbed in it.

"He's like us, isn't he?" said one of the employees.

Eunhye quietly nodded.

"I watched that yesterday and I almost cried."

"I actually did cry."

"Me too."

"Was everyone like that?" Eunhye asked the six people around the table.

One of the male employees said that he didn't watch Doctors, another one said that he didn't like it, and the remaining one said that he felt a tingle in his nose. The women said that they all pulled out tissues.

"Don't you watch Doctor's Office, senior Yoon?"

"Yesterday, I just didn't feel like watching it. It was rather frustrating to watch people doing well when I'm not even getting paid. Eunhye, you watch Doctor's Office too, don't you?"

"I was the same. I just didn't feel like watching it yesterday."

"It's a good thing that I watched Doctors yesterday. It wasn't a refreshing story, but I felt consoled. Seeing people similar to me living like that made me feel relaxed for some reason. It wasn't despairing. It just felt like he knew my pain. I mean, the one acting that character."

"I felt like that too."

The other two women said that they felt something similar. They said that the acting skill of the actor was incredible and that they couldn't take their eyes off.

“But it did disappoint me a little. It’s still a drama, so I hope he does well.”

“We’ll see in today’s episode.”

“It’s just a gut feeling of mine, but I don’t think there will be a big reversal. Also, I feel like I’d be disappointed if there was something like that. Heck, I don’t get it.”

Eunhye understood that feeling. She wished for him to do well, but at the same time, felt like she would be disappointed if that actually happened. It was probably because they were so similar.

“Let’s go before general manager Choi nags us again.”

Eunhye stood up after sipping some water.

[1] “Korean army stew”

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The clock at the company had to be out of battery. Either that, or there was something wrong with the mechanics. It felt like it had been ten hours since she came back after eating lunch, but it was still only 6. Eunhye looked at general manager Choi. The department’s closing hours were the same as the time when general manager Choi stood up. If general manager Choi kept his fat butt on the chair, then they would spend another day of meaningless overtime work, but if he picked up his jacket behind him, then they would be going home.

“Looks like we’ll be working overtime again today. Even though there’s nothing to do,” whispered the employee sitting opposite her.

The general manager clearly must like holding things back, whether it was their salary or the employees. General manager Choi moved. The people in the department raised their heads like meerkats.

“Let’s go home early today. Good job, you all.”

Six on the dot? Eunhye quickly cleaned up her desk. She had to leave the company as soon as possible. General manager Choi may come back and give her extra work if she loitered around any further. The other employees seemed to have thought the same and cleaned up instantly. The employees of other departments on the same floor gave them envious gazes. Today alone, she felt proud of general manager Choi.

“Eunhye, Hyunji is buying us drinks.”

Senior Yoon waved at her. She didn’t have a reason to refuse when she was getting treated. She wanted to say in a cool fashion that the youngest one shouldn’t be opening their wallets, but her own wallet was too sorrowfully thin for her to say anything like that. She followed Hyunji on the condition that she’d treat her ‘twice’ if she got her salary. Their first destination was the teppanyaki fried rice restaurant in front of the station, where the three of them went to quite often.

“My two unnis, I’ll treat you two to a full course today. First, let’s have some food, then go to a pojang-macha to get drunk, and finally, we’ll go to a noraebang. How is it, perfect, isn’t it?”

Her words alone were perfect. They talked about the secrets behind the closing hours while eating some seafood fried rice. Senior Yoon spoke first. Apparently, general manager Choi, who had a fight with his wife in the morning, miraculously made up with her just before closing time, so he ordered them to go home early because he felt good.

“How can he adjust the closing hours according to his mood?”

“It’s not like this is the first time; we just gotta deal with it.”

“Still, it’s good that we got off early today.”

Senior Yoon said that talking about him made the food taste bad and that they should go to the pojang-macha to roast him. Eunhye agreed. Snacks were better chewed over some drinks. After they had dinner, they went to a pojang-macha. It was ‘Mrs. Kim’s Pocha’ that they frequented.

“I still need some time until I can open, about two hours.”

Mrs Kim was just unloading the truck.

“Then let’s go to the noraebang first. Let’s try singing while still sober.”

We go anywhere our money lord wishes to go – senior Yoon said as she locked arms with Hyunji. Eunhye agreed. Soju would taste even better if they drank after running wild for a bit. As soon as they entered a booth, they selected ‘mal dalija’^[1] as the song. They inserted general manager Choi’s name between the ‘shut up!’s^[2]. It was a song that they always sang at get-togethers without general manager Choi. When they enjoyed themselves for some time, they found that an hour had already passed. The remaining time left on the machine was also close to zero. They were just about to wrap things up and leave, only to find out that the time had increased.

“We don’t really have any customers, so play around for some more.”

The owner of the store had been generous to them. Eunhye looked at senior Yoon and Hyunji alternately. Both of them looked like they had some energy left. They jumped around like crazy for another hour.

“This is the first time I’ve played around like this since college.”

“My throat hurts.”

“Sometimes, general manager Choi does help. I didn’t notice the flow of time when I was swearing at him while singing. Man, that was a good session.”

They headed back to the pojang-macha with messy hair. Mrs. Kim welcomed them after finishing her preparations. She even gave them some free eomuk-tang^[3], thanking them for not going anywhere else. The company had general manager Choi, one of the worst humans out there, while the pojang-macha had the angelic Mrs. Kim. She felt like it was true that everything in life added up to zero in the end.

After they all drank a glass of soju each, she ate a piece of spicy roasted eel. She looked at Mrs. Kim as she chewed on it. Mrs. Kim was staring right at her phone.

“Mrs. Kim. What are you watching?”

“A drama. I found this rather good these days.”

Mrs. Kim showed her the drama. She was watching ‘Doctors’. Eunhye also took out her phone.

“Unni, let’s watch together.”

Hyunji, who was sitting on the other side, pulled her chair over and sat next to her. Senior Yoon did the same. Eunhye flipped the beer glass over and leaned the phone against it. There weren’t any other customers at the pojang-macha, so they raised the volume a little which made it possible to hear the lines they said. She focused on the screen while drinking some soju that Hyunji poured for her.

“Lee Heewon’s so good-looking.”

“I personally think Choi Changsoo looks more handsome. Lee Heewon looks dense.”

“The way he looks dense is a charming point.”

Senior Yoon and Hyunji both commented as they looked at Heewon standing in front of the operation table. The operation followed. It was a laparotomy and the internal organs looked pretty realistic. Hyunji said that she was creeped out and turned her head around for a bit. Though, on the other hand, senior Yoon liked it for being realistic. The surgery was performed successfully and everyone celebrated. A rival had dug a trap in order to put the genius-like Heewon in check, but he managed to overcome that without a hitch thanks to Yoonseo’s help.

“I thought she’d be terrible when she first came out, but she wasn’t actually that awkward.”

“Are you talking about Yoonseo?”

“Yeah. It is a little cringey when she shouts, but I think everything else is okay.”

“Right. I heard that singing and dancing isn’t everything that idols practice these days. Apparently there are some who solely focus on acting.”

“Someone like Yoonseo must own a building in Gangnam, right?”

“One? I’m pretty sure she has two or three.”

“I dreamed of becoming a singer when I was young too. Who knew I’d be drenched in a company lifestyle like this. Since we’re at it, what were your dreams when you were young, Hyunji and Eunhye?” Senior Yoon asked as she ate a piece of fish cake. Hyunji replied after wondering for a while,

“Me, I wanted to become a civil servant.”

“From when you were young?”

“Yes. I have wanted to become one since I was in middle school.”

“How old are you again, Hyunji?”

“I’m twenty-two this year. I lived a goshiwon lifestyle without going to college for just two years, and I thought I wouldn’t make it. I thought that I would be in big trouble if I didn’t collect myself and start working, so I got into this company.... Who knew that my first salary would’ve been my last.”

“How unlucky. You just had to come here of all places.”

“I’ll still hold on for a bit since they said they’ll pay. Eunhye-unni, what was your dream?”

The two of them stared at her. The drama had switched to a scene where Heewon and Yoonseo were on a date in the park. Eunhye looked at the screen and spoke,

“When I was in elementary school, a pianist. But I found out how hard it is to earn a living by playing an instrument as soon as I entered middle school. Since then, I didn’t have a dream. I just thought I’d study and go to a good college and that I should find something I like. Well, the result of all that is drinking here. If you think about it, how many people do you think in Korea have a dream they live by? What do you think, senior Yoon?”

“Almost none. The first thing you learn when you enter first grade is the thought process that you’ll get praised by your parents if you get a higher score than the one sitting next to you. How is there any room for dreams in that? Look at Hyunji. She said her dream was to become a civil servant since she was middle school. She changed like this in just a few years, so I’m sure people younger than her have it even worse. I’m sure they study like their life depends on it, you know?”

Hyunji then trembled, saying that an elementary school boy living next to her had an even stricter life than hers.

“He goes back home at around 10p.m. most of the time, and whenever I ask, he says he’s coming back from cram school. Kids these days have it tough.”

“Just wait another twenty years. I’m sure elementary school kids will be talking to each other in English.”

“That sounds terrifying.”

Eunhye poured some drinks for the two people who were laughing in vain. She was originally going to watch the drama, but she couldn’t focus. If she was by herself, she would’ve immersed herself in it, but now that they were talking about what was actually going on in the world, the drama looked like too much of a fantasy. For a while, they talked about meaningless dreams as they drank. It was when she heard that voice that her attention was changed to her phone again. The two others also became quiet and watched the phone.

“Bigfoot’s here,” Eunhye said those two words before focusing again.

Bigfoot was facing Choi Hyunjin, the cause of his change in shift.

-I heard that the shifts changed because of me before.

-Yes.

-Is it true that your mother is unwell?

-Now, I wonder how you found out about that. It’s supposed to be a secret.

-Why didn’t you tell me? I wouldn’t have changed shifts if you told me that day.

-It’s already a thing of the past. It’s fine.

-I'm not fine. I feel like I became a bad person suddenly. Also, I heard from the head doctor that day that you didn't have anything to do that day, so you could stand in for me.

-Yes, you don't have any faults at all, so you don't have to be sorry for me.

Bigfoot put on his unique sorrowful smile again. Choi Hyunjin's eyes twitched.

-Don't you feel unjust? If you do then just say it. If you're a man then just say it out loud.

-What good is being manly in all this? Just change with me when you're off duty one time. That's fine.

-Don't you have any guts? A member of your family is unwell, yet you can just gloss things over like that?

-So what if I don't? I'm sure the daughter of the director must think that the world is limitlessly liberal, but the world as I see it definitely isn't. I'm sure the head doctor is kind to you, but he's nothing more than a fierce judge who has a hold of my intern performance sheet. I want to do well in front of him.

-Isn't that just an excuse? Aren't you just lacking courage? If it was me, I would have said it boldly. It's my holiday after all.

-If it's you, yes. If it's you.

Bigfoot nodded before trying to walk past Choi Hyunji. Choi Hyunjin frowned in displeasure and blocked his way.

-Are you saying that I'm immature because I'm the director's daughter or what?

-I never said you were immature. I was just saying that we were different.

-Just how are we different? I also put in the same effort as you and passed the national exams. Do you think I received benefits or something?

-You just have to make me feel tragic. I'm not sure what good it is for me to say any of this to you, but still, let me ask you something. Have you ever worked in order to study? Have you ever found yourself thinking that it's such a waste of time to work when you can study?

Bigfoot's expression was filled with endless sorrow. There was a sense of vanity in there as well. He probably found it absurd that he had to explain himself in this situation, and pitied himself for it. Choi Hyunjin wasn't able to say anything.

"Was Choi Hyunjin always that good at acting?"

"No, she was dissed until just last week because she was terrible. I'm pretty sure many said that she was like a child playing around."

"Then how is she so good today?"

"Right?"

"And she goes strangely well with Bigfoot."

Just as the two said, Choi Hyunjin's acting was first-rate. She was good at acting like a prideful high-class lady even though she was awkward until just last week.

Bigfoot shook his head. He shook off the thick and dark emotions that filled his face with a single breath and put on that signature clueless smile of his.

-I shouldn't have said that. Don't worry about it. I know that both you and I had it hard. Just change shifts with me one time, yeah?

After flicking his hair in a funny fashion, Bigfoot walked forward like a toy soldier. The camera showed Bigfoot's figure walking away before shifting angles to Choi Hyunjin.

-Fine, you're awesome, okay!

Choi Hyunjin shouted.

[1] A Korean-style punk rock released in 1996. It's usually a song that's sung at the very end to 'blaze' their remaining energy.

[2] 'Shut up' is in the lyrics of the song.

[3] Fish cake stew.

Chapter 864. Sequence 13

Eunhye sighed softly. Bigfoot just glossed over the incident as though nothing happened. He did not get angry at Choi Hyunjin, nor did he go against the head doctor who dumped him with the shift and just disregarded him. His bright smile as he asked Choi Hyunjin to change shifts with him next time still lingered in front of her eyes. If it was so hard to go against the head doctor, why couldn't he have said something to Choi Hyunjin? Not just vaguely, but outright and refreshingly.

"Looking at Choi Hyunjin reminds me of Ko Chansoo," said senior Yoon.

Ko Chansoo was a famous figure in the company, as the guy who entered the company through the president's back door. She had heard so many rumors about him that it was to the point that it hurt her ears. He would ignore his superiors like it was normal, and he would treat anyone who makes mistakes at work like trash.

"But Choi Hyunjin at least didn't say any bad words. Ko Chansoo, on the other hand, is a total mess."

"If you think like that, then I guess Ko Chansoo is more trash. I went looking for him last time because of work cooperation, and I've never been so disdained outright in my life. It's so fortunate that I don't work in the same department as him."

"I have only heard rumors about him. Is he really that trash?" Hyunji asked as she drank a bit of the broth.

"General manager Choi is better compared to that prick. Do you remember the son of the professor with the glasses in the drama? He's just like that. He has too much faith in his backer, that is, his father, and bullies people below him. In the drama, Choi Hyunjin and that professor's son passed the national exams at least, right? But Ko Chansoo, that guy, all he has is his father's backing. Even his college was

some nameless backwater college, yet he already got promoted to manager even though the people who entered around the same time as him are all assistant managers. Who knows? Maybe he'll get promoted again next year and become even more trashy."

"Is it okay to be so openly biased like that?"

"What can we do? He's the president's son. Man, the people working in his department are so pitiful. Even the general manager takes hints from him. Apparently, the president really cherishes him because he was the son he and his wife got after much trouble. I'm pretty sure he'll stand up for his son even if he murders someone, you know?"

"Having a man like that as your superior must be difficult. I'm so glad that he's not in our department."

"We should be. From what I heard, the atmosphere in that department depends on that guy's mood for the day. It'd be better if he just played around all day without doing any work, but he nitpicks every single matter going on in that department, so it drives everyone else crazy. He nitpicks the mistakes of everyone else, but when he makes a mistake, he just acts boldly. Even if he makes a big mistake, the president is there to cover up for him, so he became that untouchable kind of guy."

"He's the same as Choi Hyunjin in that they're untouchable. Whether it's drama or in reality, why are people from good households all so cocky?"

Eunhye grabbed a glass and responded to that,

"That's not entirely true. When I was in college, there was this guy who was known to be really kind in my major. He had a good attitude and was humble, so many people in our department looked out for him. He was a really good kid who tried to work things out with all of us if something happened, and it turned out that he was the grandson of a super company. He came to college in a Porsche, and it made me think that people with such upbringing can become good. Everything just depends on parental education, and it doesn't really matter what kind of environment you were raised in. Well, I guess there was something different though."

"Something different?"

Eunhye pointed at the phone with her finger while looking at Hyunji, who looked curious.

"Just like what the drama said just now, he had different eyes when looking at the world. It's probably because he started off on a completely different point from me. He may have hung out with us quite a lot, but his conception of money was fundamentally different."

"Well, I guess if you receive millions of won as pocket money since you're young, you won't really understand how much it is. Ah, talking about money reminded me of salary again. This is sad."

For our salary – they shouted as they toasted.

"Ko Chansoo, that guy probably receives his salary, right?"

"Salary? His dad is the president for goodness sake. Also, it's just bottom-rung employees like us that don't get salaries. I heard that the higher-ups get theirs. I'm sure the same is true for general manager Choi."

“That’s so dirty. It’s not like our salary amounts to a lot. I want to go to the president and say to him that it’s much better for the company for you lot to not get paid, instead of us, who only get paid chump change,” Hyunji said as she put down her glass, her cheeks flushed.

“Good! I’ll call the president and bring him to you tomorrow.”

“If you really do, then I’ll tell him not to live his life like that.”

Senior Yoon and Hyunji laughed as she looked at the two. They talked rather seriously about what kind of expression the president would make if they actually did so until they both turned quiet.

“How pointless.”

“You tell me. Do you think there’s anyone who talks back like they do in dramas? People like Lee Heewon, who can risk being chased out of the hospital to say what he needs to say are cool, but if he does get kicked out, that’s just the end for him, isn’t it? The employment pool for mid-sized companies like us is already so small that there are talks about how it’s difficult to get re-employed. A place like a hospital must be even worse since it’s usually people from the same universities, right?”

“You know, I’m thirty-two this year. I’ve switched companies three times in my 9 years of being a salarywoman, and never have I seen anyone who said a word about unjust company traditions. There were people who fought against their superiors from time to time, sure, but in just one month, that person’s seat just disappeared. Or you can do that as you chuck your letter of resignation.”

“Saying the right things will just make your superior make note of you, and if that happens, you will have a hard corporate life.”

“If like in dramas, you have colleagues who stand up for you and are willing to stand with you... it might be better, but you know what happened to assistant manager Park last year, don’t you, Eunhye? Ah, Hyunji wasn’t here back then.”

Eunhye emptied the soju into her mouth. The incident that was just as bitter as the soju that went down her throat was the assistant manager Park incident. He pointed out the disparities in rebates between companies and said that they should correct it, but that ended up getting him assigned to a branch in the countryside. Being the courageous man he was, assistant manager Park said that he would not yield to pressure, yet he ended up leaving the company. Eunhye remembered what happened back then clearly. The people who called him ‘hyung’ until merely days ago put distance from him. That was how he started getting ‘bullied.’ When work ended and everyone went home, they said words of encouragement, but at the company, they acted like total strangers. Eunhye was one of them. You’ll have a tough life if you stay close to assistant manager Park – these were words that general manager Choi said back then. That was the decisive blow. Assistant manager Park was treated like someone with a terrible infectious disease. No one approached him and no one talked to him.

“I wanted to live like a drama too, but that’s so hard,” said senior Yoon.

“Like Choi Hyunjin?” Hyunji asked as she looked at the drama.

“Choi Hyunjin’s good. Honestly, if you tell me to live like Lee Heewon, I can’t. He risks his own life to save others and always does the right things. Is that what a human can do? That’s in the realm of deities.”

“If you think about it, being a protagonist in a drama isn’t entirely that good. They always encounter big crises. Even if everything goes well in the future, I don’t want to suffer that much. I mean like jumping into the fire and taking on the challenge with the risks of failure.”

“If you act like Lee Heewon in real life, I’m pretty sure you’ll have your medical license deprived because of lawsuits and whatnot. You can get into debt too.”

Senior Yoon said that just imagining it sounded terrible. Eunhye had to agree. In ‘Doctors’, Lee Heewon was the literal avatar of self-sacrifice. Not only that, he also had the tendency to ignore procedures if it was in order to save a life. If that happened in real life, there would have been all sorts of problems.

“In that sense, isn’t Bigfoot a lot like us? He’s supposed to be a drama character, so things can work out well for him too, but that doesn’t happen,” Hyunji grumbled.

“Like just now. It would’ve been refreshing if he slapped Choi Hyunjin on the cheek and told her ‘you simply don’t know what reality is like!’ before walking past her.”

Eunhye picked up a piece of eel and gave it to Hyunji, who was pouting. Hyunji ate it in a flash.

“I also wanted that to happen, but then again, if that actually happened, I think it would have annoyed me. Didn’t you say the same to me during the day, senior Yoon?”

Senior Yoon nodded.

“He’s just like me. I have no choice but to smile regardless of what general manager Choi tells me to do, and even if people like Ko Chansoo get annoyed at me, I have to hold it in because he’s the son of the president. Still, the way Bigfoot phrased his words makes him look better than I am.”

Hyunji, who was munching on the eel while on her phone, suddenly turned her phone around and showed the two of them her screen.

“It’s a worker café that I usually visit, and they’re all talking about Doctors. Not only that, most of it’s about Bigfoot too. Everyone’s saying that they can sympathize with him.”

“How many corporate workers don’t sympathize with him after seeing him so tragic? How many people do you think want to act boldly but cannot? I’m sure everyone feels the same. That’s why we get strangely consoled by him.”

Eunhye spoke as she looked at senior Yoon, who was sighing endlessly,

“You’re drunk, senior, aren’t you?”

“Did I get too emotional? I may look like this, but I used to be a literary girl.”

“Uh, considering your age, calling you a girl is a little...”

“Lee Eunhye, don’t tease your seniors.”

Senior Yoon said that it was a punishment and poured her a glass full of soju. Eunhye accepted the drink in one go and wiped her mouth with the back of her hand.

“Still, I want Bigfoot to do well. I mean, it’s sad, isn’t it? To see people in the same shoes doing badly.”

Hyunji raised her glass, chanting 'Bigfoot, fighting!.' Eunhye, who was watching on the side, chimed in with her.

"But it's quite curious, isn't it? Usually, I forget about characters who appear briefly like that, but Bigfoot strangely remains in my mind," said senior Yoon as she pointed at Bigfoot who briefly appeared in the corner before disappearing.

"Maybe it's because he's good at acting."

"That's the biggest reason for sure. You know what they say, calm acting like that is harder than bursting out with emotions."

"If you think like that, actors must have it hard. People who are worse than them are playing main roles, but someone like that is on the level of an extra."

"It's an industry where popularity is everything. But who knows? I heard that many actors who are currently famous were nobodies back in the day. An actor who can show himself like that may become big very soon."

Eunhye thought that she was right. He was an actor that attracted people's eyes. His facial expressions were especially good. That delicate acting where he cried silently last night was still vivid in her mind. A lesser-known actor that only she knew – she raised a toast to Bigfoot, who was smiling amidst the other doctors.

"Let us both do well together."

Bigfoot then said in the drama,

-This is just how everyone lives, isn't it? I'm just like that too. I know that telling you to cheer up might be crossing the line here, but still, cheer up. Thanks for the drink.

That was how people lived. Life was just like that.

* * *

"Cut."

Maru took off his doctor's gown and stood up. His scene was over now. It was 1:10 in the afternoon. He came at 9 and waited three hours before shooting for one hour. Showing up briefly like this got him paid, so it was a very good business.

"Maru, wait a bit."

The director stopped him. He put down his bag and went over to Jayeon.

"You're leaving right now? Do you have something urgent to do?"

"I was going to go grocery shopping. I need to buy some rice."

"So nothing urgent, huh? Then wait a bit."

Just as Jayeon was about to say something, she picked up her phone. From how her voice became aggressive, it seemed that something had happened.

“Sorry, I’ll take care of this real quick.”

“Okay.”

The director hurriedly ran off somewhere. Maru said goodbye to the staff he made eye contact with before switching places. Jayeon, who said she’d be back soon, didn’t come back even after 10 minutes.

“Han Maru?”

Maru turned around. Choi Hyunjin, wearing a long coat, was approaching him, saying that she found the right person.

Chapter 865. Sequence 13

Maru stood up as he grabbed the cardigan on his lap. Choi Hyunjin, who was approaching him quickly, stopped about five steps away from him. She looked like she was about to ask for a handshake in a friendly manner, but she suddenly started smiling awkwardly. Maru was puzzled as well. Why would she approach him so amicably? Considering that the first time they met was a week ago during a shoot, she looked strangely kind to him.

“Uhm, you told me I can drop the honorifics with you, right?” Hyunjin asked.

The person who just called him by name and said something about how she found the ‘right person’ suddenly looked rather nervous. Maru smiled for now. Hyunjin would probably be at unease if he did not.

“You’re going to use polite speech with me again? You don’t have to. We said we’ll drop the honorifics last week.”

“But still, after I called you, it sounded somewhat awkward.”

“What’s there to be awkward about? A senior wants to drop the honorifics with a junior.”

“Right?”

Hyunjin approached him by another two steps.

“What are you doing here? Everyone else is going out to eat.”

“I was about to go home since I’m done with my shoot, but the director told me she wanted to talk to me, so I’m waiting for her. She said she’d be back soon, but she hasn’t been back for a while. I wonder what she’s doing.”

“If it’s the director you’re talking about, I saw her run towards the parking lot.”

“The parking lot?”

“She was in such a hurry that I didn’t even get to say goodbye.”

What could have happened for her to rush towards the parking lot? Hyunjin was worried that it may have been an accident.

“Please give me a moment.”

Maru turned around and picked up his phone. A call had come from Jayeon, who supposedly ran off in a hurry. Jayeon apologized for making him wait. There was an agitated voice mixed in the call. There was a woman who was getting angry. He could overhear something about parking and insurance, so it seemed that Hyunjin was right and there had been an accident.

“Director, did you get into an accident?”

-This ahjumma tried to run for it after crashing into my car, but thankfully, someone stopped her and called me. Madam! If you crashed into someone’s car, you should call the owner and talk about it first!

“You aren’t grabbing her by the hair or something, right? No matter how nonsensical the other party is, you can’t do that.”

It didn’t seem to be a major problem. The lady who crashed also seemed to be getting angry because of the shock. She seemed like she would apologize given enough time to calm down. There was a possibility that she would act entitled until the end, but once Jayeon’s eyes flipped and she started nitpicking, anyone would roll their tails between their legs.

“Come back once it’s all done. I’ll be waiting.”

-Would you like to eat something for now? You can eat something expensive. I’ll buy it for you.

“If that’s the case, I’ll be eating Hanwoo sirloin.”

-That’s taking things a little too far.

“So take care of it as soon as possible and come over.”

When he hung up, he saw Hyunjin staring at him.

“It’s the director, and she got into a little accident. No one’s hurt or anything; a lady tried to run for it after crashing into the director’s parked car.”

“Something like that happened to me before, and back then, someone really calm apologized to me and left me a contact number, so I managed to sort things out easily.”

“That’s the norm, but there are times where people try to gloss things over by getting angry. Do you have a shoot today?”

Hyunjin shook her head. She said that she had work near the TV station and was just visiting to say hello to the director.

“But she just walked past. It’s rather weird to go say hello now, so I’m going to go for today. Maru, are you going to keep waiting?”

“The director told me to eat something. I was just getting hungry, and I don’t have anything to do, so I’m going to stave off my hunger while waiting for her.”

“By yourself?”

“Yes, by myself.”

“If you don’t have anyone to eat with you, may I join you? I’ve also yet to have lunch. I’ll treat you.”

Hyunjin hesitantly waited after telling him that the gukbap restaurant in front of the TV station was good. She looked at him cautiously and looked like she would get hurt if he said he was going to eat alone.

"I didn't do anything worth for you to treat me, so you don't have to."

"That's true, but... nothing. Looks like I shouldn't have said anything. It might be more comfortable for you to eat by yourself."

"I'm not saying that I'll eat by myself. I'm saying that we should pay for our own meals. Where's this good gukbap restaurant you're talking about?"

Hyunjin immediately brightened up and led the way. Maru thought about Woofie, who would be at the house. The dog's expression as she wagged her tail while bringing a drool-drenched ball and asking him to throw it looked just like that. They left the set and crossed two roads. There was a gukbap restaurant in an alleyway that he usually did not use.

"Only people who know about this place come to this place. Whenever there's a get-together around the TV station, I always come to this place to sober up. A senior told me about this place as well."

The broth was boiling inside a cast iron pot. There were two items on the menu: Dried pollack gukbap and bean sprout gukbap. Maru ordered bean sprout gukbap. The gukbap came out before even five minutes had passed. He took a spoonful of the white broth and ate it. It was refreshing without any sort of smell.

"Pretty good, right?"

"I want to open a bottle of soju. I should be a regular in the future."

"I guess it was worth introducing you to this place."

After eating some more, he added some spicy paste, which was on the table. Hyunjin said that it was used instead of chili powder. The broth was still first-class after it had turned spicy. He was reminded of Gaeul, who said that she wanted to drink a refreshing broth. Whenever she had a heavy drink, she looked for something hot to drink as food the next day. She would probably love it if he took some home.

Maru was eating a spoonful of the gukbap when he saw that Hyunjin's hands were completely still. She was stirring the gukbap with her spoon just a while ago. He was near his limits of playing dumb. She was expressing with her whole body that she wanted to say something.

"You have something to say, right?"

"No, that's not entirely true."

"Usually, people who say that do have something to say. You introduced me to such a nice restaurant, so if you have anything to say to me, please go ahead."

He did somewhat expect this to happen when she asked to eat together. She was not the type of person who would naturally talk to people who she felt a sense of distance to. He had only seen her for the first

time last week, but he could tell that much. After all, the only reason she decided to drop the honorifics was the director jokingly telling them to get closer.

“I just wanted to thank you.”

“Did I do anything that you needed to thank me for?”

While there was a bit of silence, Maru looked back on the events that occurred during the past week, but he didn’t remember doing anything that might have made her grateful to him.

“I was so grateful during the shoot. I was at a loss as to what to do with my emotions, but you guided me. I feel really sorry and grateful for that.”

“People can’t be perfect all the time. It was just that I was in a good condition that day while you weren’t.”

“Well, I wouldn’t be so sure of that. I don’t think I’ve ever been in a good condition,” she said as she looked down at the floor.

“Don’t be like that. You were good that day. I’m also terrible on bad days.”

“In my eyes, I don’t think there was ever a time you did badly. I watched you during the shoot from time to time. Although they were short scenes, you never made an NG. I was really curious and envious of you.”

“A minor character doesn’t have much to do. It’s because my lines were all simple.”

“Well, I don’t think I can do such a simple thing.”

Maru looked at Hyunjin as he put his spoon in his mouth. The reason she looked like she lacked energy was probably because of the articles. Among the numerous articles that talked about Doctors, the drama, some of them talked about Choi Hyunjin’s acting skill and how it was bad. The middle-aged actors showed their experience, while Lee Heewon was considered one of the best among actors in their twenties, and Yoonseo had managed to remove her label as an idol. The only shadow cast over the good evaluations of the main cast was Choi Hyunjin.

“I was praised for my acting on my 2nd year of debut, but now that it’s been ten years, I’m only hearing that my acting hasn’t changed.”

Hyunjin sighed while stirring the gukbap before eventually apologizing with a smile.

“I didn’t ask to eat with you just so I could complain about my own life, but I ended up doing it.”

“That’s understandable. If you are having a hard time, it’s good to grab just anyone and talk to them about it. I almost broke down while suffering by myself like a fool until just a while ago, but a thankful friend realized the state I was in first, so now I’m all good.”

“Thanks for telling me that. But that’s unexpected. Honestly, I thought you wouldn’t listen to things like this.”

“Why?”

“I dunno, just the atmosphere around you?”

Hyunjin’s eyes looked up.

“I do look rather expressionless. My sister tells me I look cocky, while people close to me take it a step further and tell me I’m cold-blooded. I even heard that I’d get the Academy Award if I just hold a knife if I’m supposed to be acting as a murderer.”

“It’s not that bad.”

“Thank you. Your words put me at ease. But if you leave that any longer, that thing will no longer be gukbap but porridge. There’s still more time, so you should eat even if you have anything more to say.”

Only then did Hyunjin start eating. Maru sent a text to the director saying that he was eating at this gukbap restaurant. Jayeon replied to him that she’d come after wrapping things up. From how she was still tied down in the parking lot, it seemed that her opponent wasn’t ordinary either. Maru put down his phone and watched Hyunjin eat for a while. If anyone asked him what ‘eating blessedly’ looked like, he would reply that it would be the woman in front of him. He locked eyes with Hyunjin who was placing a kkakdugi on top of her spoon.

“Am I too unlady-like while eating?”

“I didn’t say anything.”

“You seemed to be looking at me so curiously.”

He just smiled because that made him flinch inwardly. Hyunjin, who was chewing with all her energy, suddenly looked forward in a daze. Maru turned his head to see behind him. ‘Doctors’ was being rebroadcasted on the muted TV. It was the scene that they shot just last week. It was the scene where he was talking to Hyunjin in the corridor. The owner, who was looking at the screen with them, gave them a glance. When he met eyes with her, she winked at him. As her business was right in front of the TV station, she didn’t look at celebrities like they were rare animals.

“You look much better in real life than on a screen,” said the owner.

Maru smiled and told her that she was a beauty as well. He received good words, so he had to return them, even if he didn’t mean them.

“It was that time, when I felt grateful to you,” Hyunjin said.

Her eyes were on the TV, but what she seemed to be looking at was a week in the past.

“You can stop thanking me. Also, you were really good back then. The director shouted cut in excitement.”

“The thing is, I was dazed because I felt like my own acting wasn’t my own.”

Hyunjin put down her spoon.

Chapter 866. Sequence 13

The shoot last week reminded her of when she first did a play in her college hall. A pleasant sensation of unease overwhelmed her throughout the entire time she was acting. It wasn't an act that she was doing out of habit; it wasn't an act where she followed rules; it was an act where she had no idea what was coming, just like when she acted without knowing about anything. Hyunji found even herself unfamiliar at that time, and she tasted what it meant to enjoy acting for the first time in a long while.

The fact that she didn't change her acting style despite the criticism that it was too standard was first because of her pride, but there was also the fact that she did not know where to go from there. If she saw a crossroad, she would have chosen one path and gone ahead with it, but the only thing she saw was the vast plains. Even if she wanted to take a step irresponsibly, her 'ten years of experience' always held her back. She was a thirty-year-old actress. If she slipped up when her charm as a lady reached its peak, her value as an actress would become like that of a fish that wasn't sold in time. If she had spread her reputation through various good pieces, she would have tried running even if it was the empty plains and just hope that she would try to be better next time, but Hyunjin was an actress who prolonged her career through various minor roles. A close friend of the protagonist, the friend of a rival character, the woman the president had an affair with, a lesser-known protagonist. She had repeatedly told herself that this would be the last time, and that ended up lasting ten years. By the end of every year, Hyunjin thought that maybe she should have changed her acting style last year. Regret was always late, and she didn't have anything to fall back on in order to break past her current acting style.

Straws might be worthless, but to someone who was grasping at straws, they were more important than anything. Hyunjin was afraid. If she tried changing herself and failed, the decade she had piled up would collapse on the spot. That journalist Kim, who must terribly despise her, always wrote articles whenever she did a drama. Choi Hyunjin, never changing regardless of what role she plays – she didn't even want to retort to that. It was right after all.

That journalist Kim wrote an article as soon as the first episode of 'Doctors' aired. She even advertised on social media with the hashtags #choi_hyunjin #lookatthis. At this point, she even felt grateful for journalist Kim who kept writing about her, even though she had been picked as one of the top three 'celebrities you know the face of but don't know the name.' What pained her more than journalist Kim's insulting articles was the lack of comments. It meant that Choi Hyunjin as an actress didn't even manage to become a consumable item.

Yoonseo, who had reached the top once with her dancing and singing, showed top-notch talent even during shoots. She didn't even feel jealous of her. Her own position was way too pathetic to feel any kind of jealousy towards the female protagonist receiving the spotlight. Seeing Yoonseo being praised by seniors she had known for years made Hyunjin hide in a corner and cry to herself. You're good at acting – the words she wanted to hear so much were given to a junior so easily.

Was she wearing clothes that did not suit her? Maybe she had talent in some other field but was doing this line of work anyway? If it was not for the shoot that happened a week ago, she would still be thinking about that.

Hyunjin looked at Maru, who looked like he would bury his nose into the gukbap bowl. The 'thank you's that she had uttered hundreds if not thousands of times in her line of work were fundamentally different from the thank you that she said to Maru. Although that shoot had only happened over two days, she grabbed a hold of the method to break through the ten years of mannerism. Even if she tried

challenging herself now, it wouldn't change anything dramatically anytime soon, but she would be able to say that it was the start of a change in the future. She found a path amidst the vast plains. Whether the path was the right one or one that led to an abyss, she did not know, but she gained the courage to move forward without fear.

Hyunjin opened her phone gallery. She had screenshotted an article that came up yesterday. It was that journalist Kim's article. She was jumping on the spot as she was screenshooting the article. She even called her boyfriend in the middle of the night to brag about it.

"After yesterday's episode ended, an article like this came up."

She showed Maru the article. It had a title that made her excited even now: Actress Choi Hyujin, I applaud your challenge.

"I'm envious. You get articles like this written for you. So you brought me here to brag?"

"No. I really hate this journalist. She has been writing articles ever since my second drama. Choi Hyunjin's deficient, lacking acting skills. Until a while ago, she even wrote that I had the same acting no matter what role I played. But she wrote this after yesterday's episode. I couldn't believe it. The critic that's passionate about criticizing me complimented me for the first time."

"That just goes to show that your acting was good, regardless of me."

"You are involved in this. It felt really good to act with you."

"Stop putting me on a pedestal. Hearing things like that makes me want to hide. Also, I may have coincidentally given you an opportunity, but it was your ability that managed to bring about change using that opportunity. Even if you give a child who never played soccer a ball, the only thing they can do is kick. It's just like how only people who have simulated in their heads and practiced with an actual ball without anyone's acknowledgment can eventually become professional players. Of course, there are exceptions. There might be some children who play like Ronaldo the first time they're given a ball. People like Lee Heewon, I mean. He's near the top on the list of people that make me jealous."

"Heewon did seem rather different."

"If you have time later, you should try discussing acting methodology with him. You'll experience a thrilling sensation where the very concept of acting as you know it shatters into smithereens. I still don't understand even now. How can there be color to emotions?"

Maru shook his head in resignation before eating the last bit of gukbap. Just as he said, Lee Heewon looked like a child from another world. They acted at the same shooting set with the same script, but that guy's acting was fundamentally different. His sensory perception of the world was different, so it might have been a natural result. Hyunjin did not have a method to see emotions visually. However, Heewon said he could, not through facial expressions and hand gestures, but the emotions themselves. At first, she thought that he was saying nonsense, but she couldn't help but accept it after seeing him act. It was unthinkable to think that his expressions and thought processes were from someone who had seen and felt the same thing as her. She was curious about who raised him as well. After all, someone who possessed a fundamentally different understanding of the world usually had a very different thought process before reaching a conclusion. Without leading him in the right direction, Lee Heewon

would have shown acting that wouldn't be understood by anyone. His acting was something that was polished from a special 'something' without letting it stay unique. He was the prime example of enchanting acting.

However, Hyunjin liked Maru's acting better than Heewon's uninterpretable, inimitable one. A genius' method only made her gasp in wonder, but the method of a talented ordinary person was something she could chase after. To Hyunjin's eyes, Maru was strangely experienced with everything, to the point that she couldn't believe he was only twenty-five. Some might think that he's a genius as well, but from how she saw it, Maru did not blossom all in an instant; he was nurtured and watered cautiously over a long period of time until he finally managed to blossom. She could be sure of it as she had been at a standstill for a long time. Looking at Maru made her feel that she too would reach his level if she did not give up and continued to hone her skills. That was where she gained the courage to run into the vast plains.

Maru's act had a power that attracted people. He was the same as Heewon in that anyone watching would applaud him, but Maru's act invoked her urge to take on challenges. Heewon's acting made her reverent, but Maru's acting made her want to stick to acting and fight passionately. Like fencing, whenever she stabbed, he stabbed back at a precise time as though he had been waiting. The exchange of attacks invoked her pure fighting spirit, which made her drunk on the moment. When she woke up, the act had ended. The racing of her heart she felt that day was as fast as when she first won a supporting character role. It had been a long time since she felt that the sound of 'cut' made her long for more.

"I hope you can continue to teach me a lot in the future, just like last week. I'm at the point where I look forward to going on sets."

"There you go again. Even if you praise me like that, you won't get anything from me. Also, I'm sure that my part is done. A minor character that was consumed that much means that the character has seen its use."

"You can't be too sure about that. You've seen the reactions, right?"

"That, I did."

"These days, dramas react sensitively to viewer feedback, so the writer may change it. It's especially the case here since the writer is young, so she wouldn't feel any sense of rejection to reflecting the trend."

"I'm not entirely sure about that. I'm just a bottom rung without any say in the matter."

"I wish for your character to last a little longer. Honestly speaking, because only then will my character look better. It was just a short moment, but I can say with confidence that acting with you in the future will change me."

"I'm glad to be of help. If you happen to become more famous in the future, then buy me a suit."

"You might not believe me since it's the intuition of an unpopular actress, but I believe that you'll be in the center of attention in a little while. The eyes of the masses are sharp after all. A good actor is bound to get discovered."

"You know that a good actor and a popular actor are similar but strictly different, right?"

“You want to become a popular actor instead?”

“Rather than someone who receives a good judgment, I want to become someone truly good. Being propped up by someone who works in the same industry will almost likely end up just as reputation. I want to become an actor who sells. Becoming a good actor comes second.”

“You’re right. In the end, only actors who sell can remain until the end and become good actors.”

“I hope you become an actress who sells too.”

“In my case, I am selling a lot. The problem is that I’m not being sold well. But now, I’ve gained the confidence to sell well too, thanks to you. So please stay at the set for a long time.”

“If possible, sure.”

Hyunjin felt refreshed. Ever since she had grown older and adapted to society, she had to watch her mouth, but today, she managed to say everything on her mind without going through a filter. It felt like talking about dreams when she was still a snot-nosed brat. She felt like there was mud all over her hands; mud that she played around with at the local playground, mud that could become anything.

“Senior, I didn’t mean to look, but I think you got a text message with a heart emoji in it.”

She had placed her phone in front of Maru to show him the article. Although she was supposed to be flustered, Hyunjin strangely felt okay.

“It’s my boyfriend. I bragged about it to him last night.”

“I won’t tell anyone.”

“I don’t care if you do. I’m an unpopular actress anyway, so there won’t be any scandals.”

Hyunjin smiled and sent a text.

“Seems the director still isn’t coming.”

“She texted me that she would take care of it soon, so I’m sure she’ll be here in due time.”

“It seems to be something important, so I better stay out of it. I said everything I wanted to tell you anyway.”

It was when Hyunjin was about to stand up after grabbing her purse. The door to the restaurant opened and director Jayeon came in.

“Oh? Hyunjin’s here too?”

“We happened to be eating together. I heard you had something to talk to Maru about, right? I’ll leave now.”

“You don’t have to be in such a hurry. It’s nothing secretive. No wait, it might be better to have you around I guess?” Jayeon said as she sat down.

Chapter 867. Sequence 13

“You guys checked the viewing rates for episodes seven and eight, right?”

Both of them nodded at her question. Jayeon messaged the assistant director saying that she'd resume the shoot in twenty minutes before speaking again,

"The viewing rate for episode 9 of Doctor's Office was 19%, and ours was 12%. There was almost no difference from last week, but it was a different story for yesterday's episode. The viewing rate for episode 8 of Doctors was 15%, while episode 10 of Doctor's Office was 15%. Ours increased, and theirs, although only a little, fell. Considering the margin of error, it's not that big of a difference, but the fact that there was a change in viewing rate is something worth noting."

"That must have put the writer at ease. I hope she gets a little better too," Maru said.

He knew that Eunbin was suffering from stress-induced gastritis because of the viewing rate. After all, she talked all about it when she called him over to her house last time.

"I got a call this morning from her about that. She was very excited. The reason I wanted to see you was the call I had with her."

Jayeon explained to Hyunjin that she was on close terms with the writer, Lee Eunbin.

"There was no change in the overall progression, and it's not like a big event happened in the drama, but there was still a change in the viewing rate. We can only interpret that as something that has relations to your side story. The internet opinion seems to indicate so as well. That's where you come in, and I hope you can help us. Hyunjin, if possible, you participate in it as well."

"How can we help?" Hyunjin asked.

Maru seemed to have an idea as to how already.

"We'll hold a discussion for ideas. I'm not forcing you to do it. It's just that when I saw you two act a week ago, I think you two fit each other pretty well. Why don't we bring that outside the drama?"

"An idea discussion? Are you talking about the plot of the drama?"

"The outlining structure of Doctors is already set in stone, so there's almost nothing to touch. What I want is the side stories that can be fitted into the drama, not the plot itself; just like your stories in episodes 7 and 8. The story of you two was too good to just leave it as a one-off thing. It didn't feel out of line with the drama either, and it didn't harm the overall atmosphere. When I called her this morning, she told me that she wanted to talk about the story more, and she welcomed it."

Eunbin was definitely a talented writer. She was only thirty-five, yet she managed to create a whole mini-series drama without an assistant writer after all. Given enough time, she would be able to create a story that lived up to everyone's expectations. The problem was that they were already shooting and the episodes were being aired. As Doctors was something that Eunbin had created over several years, the problem of getting a last-minute script since she only had to fix the lines to fit the current trends did not exist, but to create side stories to insert in the middle of the main story, there was too little time. No matter how talented she was, it would be difficult for her to create a story that the viewers could accept and sympathize with in just a few days. Not only that, the shoot was already quite tight as Lee Heewon and Yoonseo had strict schedules. They had to create episodes as quickly as possible and deal with the side episodes while the main characters were away. Eunbin said that many heads were better than one when it came to creating a dense storyline in a short time, so Jayeon reduced the group down to these

two – the actors who showed the characters' inner selves the most. The writer also agreed that Maru should input his opinion.

"Unni, that is, writer Lee Eunbin prefers working alone, but she's not adamant on it. She's held idea meetings with me from time to time as well. But this time, I don't think I'll be enough to create a story. That's why I need your help like last time, Maru. And you too, Hyunjin."

Hyunjin replied immediately, saying that she would do it.

"I'm not so sure," Maru said as he raised his glass.

She suddenly felt like she went over a speed bump while driving at 150km/h. Jayeon looked at Maru, her eyes full of questions about why he was so doubtful about this.

"Don't you think it'll be for the best to cut this story here? Of course, if the writer wants to do it, I will act with all of my effort."

"I don't see a reason not to do it. The reactions were good too."

"Doing it once may look like a fresh attempt, but doing it twice may look overdone. Episodes 7 and 8 definitely did not affect the main story, but don't you think it's dangerous to talk about Bigfoot even in the next episode? It just means that you will have less time to allocate to the main story."

"I'm the director; did you think I didn't even think about that? Both I, and the writer, are bringing this up because we think that it's worth a try. The reason we're asking for your help without doing it by ourselves is the results from last time's work were good. Also, like I said, you two have good acting chemistry and have a high understanding of the characters, so we want to do it more efficiently this time."

"So you're saying that you aren't doing it just because the viewing rate was good and that you've planned to an extent and found that it was worth investing in, correct?"

"I hate doing things impulsively. Don't you know that already? You know what kind of people I work with and what kind of environment I work the best in."

Maru, who had an indifferent look on his face the entire time, smiled and nodded for the first time. Jayeon subconsciously sighed. She was reminded of her job interview for the TV station. Maru's eyes looked similar to the interviewer who looked through her strong pretense and looked at her true self. She had known him for a few years now, so she had forgotten how picky the boy, no, the man in front of her was. No matter how hard she tried to tell him that there was good food in front of him, he would not believe it until he saw it with his own two eyes.

"Personally, I believe that it's better to wrap things up here, but the writer, who has talent in writing unlike me, says she saw potential, so I should cooperate."

"I thought that you'd easily cooperate, so you made me sweat a little. Anyway, since you promised you'll help, I think we should get going right now. Maru's well-known for not having anything to do. How about you, Hyunjin? If it's okay with you, I'd like to get to it right now."

"Right now?"

“Why? Do you have something to do?”

“No, not today. I was just a little surprised that you want to do it right now.”

“You know how important every single hour is towards the end of the drama. We have to take care of things while we still have some leeway in the schedule and can still make adjustments so that we have an easier time later. I’ll tell unni about it. We can probably go there right now.”

“There? You mean the noonim’s house, right?”

“Yeah. Oh, but before we go, can I ask you to do something for me?”

“What is it?”

“Order a gukbap for takeout for her. I’m sure she’s sitting on an empty stomach right now.”

“Alright. If she’s on an empty stomach, we should order dried pollack gukbap, so that she can eat heartily.”

Jayeon left the restaurant after asking them to take care of writer Eunbin.

* * *

“You know the writer?”

“As you heard before, I saw her once before at her house. Back then, she told me that she had a story to insert for episodes 7 and 8.”

He was particularly close to the director, and he was also acquainted with the writer. Hyunjin found Maru more and more curious as she found out more about him. A young actor who she wouldn’t even know the name of if she didn’t meet him through the drama actually turned out to be qualified of exchanging opinions with a veteran director and a writer. Although directors and writers listened to many people’s words and exchanged opinions with them in order to complete their pieces, the scope of those ‘many people’ was definitely not that wide. The fact that he was in the scope meant that his skills could be guaranteed. Maybe the attractive force that he showed while acting was actually effective on people with other jobs as well?

“Don’t the main cast get to listen to how the drama ends and a brief description of the characters?”

“Generally. We get an explanation beforehand especially if there’s something like a death scene, and all the more if there’s a sensitive or a controversial acting scene. It may involve the actor’s image after all.”

“Don’t you think the character’s image would be ruined if the story sidetracked too much? I’m sure you’ll do fine by yourself, but please give me a signal if you don’t think something’s right. I’ll pull back as well.”

“You’re satisfied with the ending in episode 8?”

“For me, yes. That was supposed to be talking about the ordinary pains of an ordinary person, no? It didn’t drag on for too long, and it was blunt. It was a genuine story without any sort of fantasy, so it felt good even as I acted. I had a vague expectation as to how the viewers would feel while watching as well. Honestly speaking, I predicted this kind of response.”

“You have good eyes for reading the trend, huh?”

“Aren’t you going to say that I’m boasting too much?”

“Maybe it’s because I was deeply impressed by your acting, but I think I can believe you. Honestly, I just enjoyed myself while acting. It had been ages since the last time I had fun while acting. Whether it was the viewing rate or the responses from the people, I didn’t think about any of it.”

“So you were immersed in yourself.”

“That’s probably it.”

“I really had fun back then as well. You received all the emotions I threw at you and returned just as much back to me. When there’s a good interaction, it is really fun when acting.”

“I felt like that too.”

Maru spoke as he turned the wheel,

“That’s why I’m even more cautious. We managed to put a good ending while it was still good. I fear that adding any more to that story will ruin that. I’m a minor actor, so a short burst of impact is crucial for me. If it ends like this, I can become the main character for just those two episodes, but if it continues and becomes awkward, then the image I’ve created will shatter.”

This person looked far into the distance. Hyunjin thought that what he said was plausible. After all, unlike her, Maru played a character that was quite far away from the main storyline. It might be more beneficial for him to leave the scene while everyone applauded him and had a good impression of him.

“If the story the writer tells me is not to my liking, I am going to object to it. Of course, if she wants to press on with it, I will have no choice but to shut up and do my part. I don’t have the right to refuse after all.”

“We’re going there to come up with ideas so that it doesn’t end awkwardly. Let’s do our best. It’s been years since I heard praises. I don’t want to ruin it either.”

The car entered a parking lot. It seemed that they had arrived at writer Lee Eunbin’s apartment.

Chapter 868. Sequence 13

This was her second time visiting a writer’s house. Hyunjin was filled with expectations. What kind of lifestyle did the creator of the work she featured in live? The previous writer’s house she had been to was a cozy, yet elegant place. She was a female writer who had just reached forty, and she only had items that were necessary for living, saying that she strived to live a simple life. It was similar to the minimalist life that was the trend these days. The conversation she had in the space where the work was born was very meaningful. That writer broke her misconception that those who made a living off writing would be overly sensitive.

Writer Lee Eunbin’s drama always contained warm, humane affection. Her residence must be a cozy and warm-feeling place as well. Perhaps there might be cute dolls. She pressed the bell and waited for a while when a voice inside told them to come in. Maru pulled open the door.

“It’s messy but come inside.”

Writer Lee Eunbin greeted them, wearing a t-shirt that reached all the way to her knees. Hyunjin stopped in front of the porch. Even the shoe rack was a total mess. How could one high heel be on top of the shoe rack, while the other one was on the porch? There was a pair of striped slippers right next to a gray pair of sneakers, which god knows what color they used to be. Many of the shoes here looked like they belonged in the garbage. She slowly moved her eyes away from the slippers. She saw a box of pizza as well as other empty boxes of food. Beer cans, coffee cans, and even what seemed to be cat food cans took a portion of the floor area as well. The indoor bicycle in one corner of the living room had laundry hanging off it, and beneath that was a duvet. Hyunjin could not even begin to understand why a duvet would be in a place like that.

“Was it like this the last time you came here?” she asked Maru quietly.

“No. Back then, director Jayeon came first and did some cleaning, so it was rather clean. I did hear that she doesn’t do much cleaning if she’s busy, but I didn’t know that things were this bad.”

Maru scanned the living room with eyes that looked as though he was a soldier that had just heard news of defeat. He seemed to be muttering something, and she heard words like ‘this needs a big cleanup’ or something along those lines. Hyunjin took off her sneakers and went inside. Although the apartment looked messy as though it had been abandoned in the middle of the night, it strangely smelled rather fragrant. It seemed to be the power of the scented diffusers placed throughout. She could see deodorizers placed everywhere. So she was a writer who could handle visual messiness but not foul stench?

“I heard from Jayeon. I’m Lee Eunbin. We met during the get-together, didn’t we?”

“Yes. Back then, I was so out of it that we didn’t get to talk much.”

“I left too early, didn’t I?”

Hyunjin just laughed it off. On the day of the first read-through, Eunbin didn’t seem to be in a good condition and left the get-together early, severely drunk.

“Would you like to have a talk first?” Maru said as he took off his jacket.

When Eunbin asked why, Maru quietly pointed at the empty pizza box. A cat, which was grooming her fur on top of the pizza box, slowly got up and moved away.

“I’m going to clean up a little.”

“It’s fine, you can leave it.”

“No, I’m not fine with it. I got a disease after I started living alone, so I start to feel anxious if I stay in a messy place.”

He didn’t sound like he was joking. When Eunbin said she’d help, Maru stopped her.

“You can get to discussing ideas for now. I’m sure that’s what’s more urgent. I’ll join you after I clean this place up just a little. Or if it’s anything important, you can just say it in a loud voice, and I’ll try to reply.”

Maru picked up the clothes littered across the floor. Eunbin swiftly picked up the underwear and put them away. Whether it was Maru who was cleaning with fire in his eyes, or Eunbin, who was watching him in contentment, Hyunjin could not understand either of them. In the past ten minutes, she came across two incomprehensible incidents. The world was a strange place.

“Then shall we begin by ourselves?”

“Yes.”

Eunbin brought some canned coffee. There was a box full of it right next to the fridge.

“I enjoyed watching your act. I was applauding because the atmosphere I saw was the atmosphere I wanted to see.”

“That was nothing. It was me who had fun enjoying acting because of the good lines. You’re an amazing writer.”

“It’s been a while since I heard a compliment like that. Jayeon always says it’s okay, but she never says it’s good. Not only that, she even secretly gives me pressure. She has zero respect towards an unni.”

“The director is a little strict. But that’s why the results are good.”

“Sometimes, it’s good to give praise, even if you don’t mean it, but she’s somewhat too realistic and detached from the world.”

“Sometimes, she does show such a side from time to time.”

When things didn’t go her way during shoots, Jayeon would scream like a madwoman. Even male producers known to be strict did not touch producer Jayeon once she flipped. Hyunjin saw Eunbin clap her hands as she agreed. It seemed that she quite liked this unintentional behind-the-back talk.

“Err, you are discussing things, right?” Maru asked, poking his head into the living room.

He was holding a cat by the scruff of its neck with one hand and a bag of trash in the other.

“Interaction is important when having a conversation. Things are going very well, so don’t you worry. I feel like I’ll get along with Miss Hyunjin here and get many good ideas.”

“If that’s the case, then I’m glad.”

Maru disappeared once again, saying that he would come back and participate soon. There was enough space to lie down in the living room now when there was barely enough to step foot before. His talent for cleaning was as good as his talent for acting.

“Maru, that kid is pretty strange too. Then again, how many people are normal among the people who get along with Jayeon, right?”

Aren’t you one of them, writer? – these words reached her front teeth, but Hyunjin just smiled and replied, ‘that’s true.’ A writer who created stories that contained human affections in a chaotic place that made people’s minds messy just by looking –that was her first impression of writer Eunbin.

“Shall I hear your story then?” Eunbin said as she placed her hands on her laptop.

“What story?”

She couldn't think of anything when she was told to talk about a 'story' all of a sudden.

“Tell me about the 'Yoomin' that you acted, Miss Hyunjin.”

“Don't you know that better than I do, writer?”

“No, I actually don't know everything about all the characters. Of course, I know more than most other people know. I did create them after all. However, once that turns into a script and the script goes into the hands of the actor, those characters sometimes undergo a change, right?”

Eunbin looked like a completely different person as she spoke while tying her hair behind her back. She turned from a hysteric auntie who couldn't get married and had terrible cleaning habits into a genius artist with a strange perk. Receiving a gaze full of expectation made it even more difficult to talk. Analyzing a character was something that all actors did. Just as Eunbin said, the writer would pass on the character to the actor in the form of a script, and the actor would repeatedly interpret and reinterpret the character based on the script they receive. In such a process, there would be cases where opinions that the original creator did not intend would appear and end up changing the nature of the character. The extent of that would vary according to how much the actor stays true to the script, or how they want to emphasize their own traits.

Hyunjin strived towards being faithful to the script. She placed importance in expressing the world that the writer created with minimum loss. This applied even when she first came across the character 'Yoomin.' When the director specifically requested her to do something differently, she would do so, but otherwise, she stuck to the script as much as possible.

“I acted Yoomin as truthfully to your description of her as possible. I pushed aside my own interpretation and stayed faithful to the script and the direction.”

“I felt that way too, until last week's episode, that is. You expressed the text I wrote very truthfully to the point that it even surprised me. I was thankful for that, but it also sometimes frustrated me.”

“Was my acting skill that frustrating?”

“No, I'm not saying that your acting was frustrating. I meant that I was frustrated that I would be disappointed in my own writing. The actor has a complete understanding of the script, but the results still aren't good. That means that the responsibility lies within the writer, doesn't it? That was why I wanted actors like you to act on their own accord from time to time. That way, I would be able to escape the sense of guilt from the fact that my writing was what caused the bad results. It's just a form of escapism for a terrible writer.”

Eunbin waved her hand in dismissal and laughed. She was really honest. Although it was a little burdensome, she didn't feel uncomfortable with it. Hyunjin, who was smiling back at her, asked a question. There was something that tugged at her mind among what Eunbin said.

“You said until last week. Does that mean that you thought differently this week?”

“To my eyes, yes. Also, the viewers seem to have felt it as well. No matter how good a story is, if the actor that recreates the story is no fun, people do not rave about it. But there is already talk about

episodes 7 and 8 circulating around, right? I know it's somewhat wrong of me to say this since it's like putting myself on a pedestal, but the first reason is that the story is good, and the second reason is that the actors provoked sympathy within people. If text could convey everything, dramas wouldn't exist, would they?"

Eunbin emptied the coffee can in one go and brought another one. From her speed of drinking, it seemed that the box of canned coffee wouldn't even last a week.

"Honestly, I'm not asking for amazing ideas. It's my job to come up with things like that. What I want from you is inspiration. It might feel like I'm boasting again, but I really study a lot before I work. I already have the basis of a lot of stories inside me already. However, they're in a messy state, so without a flash of inspiration, or in other words, a guide, I cannot take them out properly. Given enough time, I might be able to find it while probing my way through the dark, but we're running short on time now. I want to listen to everything that you felt about Yoomin while you acted. It's fine even if it's trivial. It'll be even better if it's something you personally wondered about. I wouldn't ask for more if you had anything that you thought should have changed. That's what idea discussions are about. It's like trying to find treasure amidst trinkets. To do that, we need trinkets first. Of course, I'm not saying that your thoughts are nothing more than trinkets. It's just a figure of speech."

"You're saying that anything's fine?"

If there was no fixed topic, she had a lot to say. She had been shooting for months after all. Eunbin narrowed her eyes before looking at Maru who was cleaning outside the living room.

"Honestly speaking, I want a huge quantity of ordered data like what Maru gave me, but only slightly weird people do things like that."

"A huge quantity of ordered data?"

Hyunjin turned her laptop around and showed her the screen. She then opened up a word document with the title 'Bigfoot,' inside which was a huge quantity of text.

"It's the past, present, and future of Bigfoot that even I never thought about. Would actors normally analyze a minor character who doesn't even have that many lines to such an extent? I wouldn't think so. This is closer to paranoia and obsession. And looking at him, he seems to be something of a clean freak too."

The amount of detail about the character was surprisingly large. Like she said, it was a huge quantity of data. Hyunjin turned around to look at Maru. What the hell was the identity of the man who was currently wrestling with a cat?

"Do you have something like this?" Eunbin asked.

The answer was simple. Hyunjin shook her head vigorously. She wouldn't even analyze a main character to such depths.

Chapter 869. Sequence 13

"It's natural that you don't have anything like this. Even I don't do things like this. This isn't just a load of gibberish text, it's nearly the whole life of a person, so it must have taken a lot of time for him to make this."

Hyunjin asked if she could read it for a bit. Eunbin gave her permission. She pulled the laptop to her side and read the detailed background of Bigfoot that Maru had come up with. Not to mention trivial family history or growth, there was even an introduction to his personality and habits.

"That's a lot."

"It just shows Maru's personality. We talked about many things the previous time he visited my house. What I was impressed with the most about him was the way he dissolved himself into the character. Usually, actors say that they get assimilated with the character and get led by the character's emotions, right? It is to the point that some people even get mental diseases because of it. But in Maru's case, rather than falling for the character itself, he chooses to analyze the character meticulously and give the character an endless number of choices. Why did this character here act like this? What would have happened if that character did something else instead? Apparently, he keeps pondering questions like that even while acting. I still can't believe that you can split your mind into two and have one of them focus on acting while the other one observes, but he says he does that, so I can only believe him. Apparently, he has two minds or something."

"If that's possible, then it is quite amazing."

She had her hands full with acting, so it was impossible for her to check if she was doing well. She had her hands tied up by just expressing the character that entered her.

"Apparently, the reason he came up with every single detail like this is so he can smoothly come up with choices. I guess he can act like that because he has the effort to back it up. Of course, you were really good as well. Even I didn't know that the character known as Yoomin had such a charm."

"I feel like you're nagging me by saying that my acting was terrible until last week," Hyunjin said while squinting.

Eunbin smiled awkwardly, saying that that wasn't the case. As Hyunjin didn't bring up that topic to nitpick, she quickly said that it was a joke. She knew it herself. She felt firsthand that her acting had changed.

"Looks like that's enough chitchat, so let's get to the constructive things then, shall we? Anything's fine, so let us both dig into this Yoomin together. Maybe we'll come up with amazing ideas. First up, what kind of girl is the character known as Yoomin in your mind, Miss Hyunjin?"

Eunbin placed her hands on the laptop keyboard. Hyunjin was reminded of an investigator writing up reports of an incident. The gleaming eyes, the tense fingers – she knew she had to speak truthfully here without trying to justify herself.

"Honestly speaking, I thought that she was an uninteresting character when I first received the script."

"That makes my heart hurt, but sure. This kind of work cannot be done without empty formalities. Why did you think that Yoomin is an uninteresting character?"

"First up, she's the stereotypical villainess character. Not only that, she is one that turns to good. For me personally, it was too boring to see that instead of the character being someone who would try to drag down the protagonist to hell with her until the end, she is someone that changes for the better."

"To stand up for the character as the writer, I didn't really have a choice about Yoomin, as she plays a key role in solving a conflict. If everyone's evil, the incidents that occur cannot be resolved after all."

When Hyunjin looked at her without saying anything, Eunbin made a dejected expression and continued,

"I'm just making excuses. Like you said, Miss Hyunjin, she could have been more evil. As for resolving an incident, I can solve that by raising the skill of the protagonist. But I'm of the mind that characters have their limits, even if it's the main character. Not only that, I believe that all people have good in their hearts somewhere. Those ideologies of mine are reflected in my writing. In that sense, Yoomin is the ideal villainous character for me."

"Now that I think about it, there was a character similar to Yoomin in your previous work too, wasn't there?"

"You watched my other works? There are only a few short mini-series works at best."

"I found out on my way here. I searched your name in the car, and I happened to come across a title that I watched with interest before. Oh, did I phrase that too badly? Maybe I should have said that I was deeply impressed and it remained in my memory?"

"It's too late for that. But still, that's rather curious. I've never seen actors who have seen my mini-series works. Anyhow, as you said, the characters I write for each drama are pretty similar. That might come off as a drawback, but personally, I think it's an advantage. I'm of the mind that moving your feet everywhere when you can't even do one thing properly will bring you to ruin."

"I agree with that wholeheartedly. That's why I hear a lot that my acting doesn't change."

"That's a compliment. It's a good thing that your skills never rust."

"It's been a long time since I was flattered like that."

"You know? We seem to get along pretty well, don't we?"

When Eunbin smiled, a cat appeared out of nowhere and curled itself up on top of the laptop. Eunbin picked up the cat which seemed to think that the keyboard was her bed and placed it on her lap.

"I referred to this one a lot when I first came up with the character Yoomin."

"You mean your cat?"

"Yes. She never comes when I tell her to, but when I don't give her any attention, she would come over and act cute because she wants interest. She might look coquettish at a glance, but she yearns for affection. Isn't that similar to Yoomin?"

Hyunjin nodded as she looked at the cat going on top of the keyboard again. Like she said, in the drama, Yoomin turned hostile against Lee Heewon who intrudes in her property, but she would approach him

instead when Heewon distanced himself from her. Such encounters eventually changed her and made her become one of Heewon's close aides.

"I don't think I'll have any more chances after this, but will Yoomin be single throughout the whole drama?"

"Probably, I think? There's too much of a temperament difference for her to hook up with the protagonist, and I don't want that to happen either."

"Like a real cat, I see."

After enjoying Eunbin's caressing, the cat left the table as though she had enough.

"I've always wanted to try acting as a character who loves wholeheartedly. But wait, does that even help?"

"Right now, anything's fine. Yoomin's wholehearted in a way, though, isn't she? Towards her own position."

"I want to love a person. It seems like writers and directors alike always think of someone thirsty for power when they see me. The roles I get offered are all similar too. Do you think the same, writer?"

Eunbin nodded.

"You don't actually look like you're thirsty for power. I'm sure it's because of the roles you've been playing until now. You were good at expressing those kinds of characters too."

"It makes me feel bitter because I feel like it's the same all the time. But I don't have the courage to change things up either. After all, I'm afraid of becoming an actress that doesn't sell."

"I'm also afraid of becoming a writer that doesn't sell. But still, your acting changed a lot last time. The character's nature hadn't changed at all, but the emotions became plentiful. I was surprised while I was watching. Until last week, you were just a stereotypical villainess, but this week, your character was really spiteful. It's not just abstract hate that formed because of the plot, but a result of the expression skills of the one acting. Thanks to that, the nature of the character was emphasized, and the story gained power."

"That was because I was really absorbed. Maru really has the power to lead other people's acting. It's to the point that I can't believe he's a junior of mine. Until now, I just progressively went through the same steps when I acted Yoomin, but when I was with Maru, I boldly ignored all the procedures and improvised on the spot, just like when I first started learning to act."

"Improvisations can only come about with enough foundation and experience. From what I hear, you seem to be thinking that it was entirely thanks to Maru, but I don't think that's true. It's because it was you that Yoomin stood out, Miss Hyunjin."

"You say something similar to Maru."

"Because that's the truth. In my eyes, I think you can have more confidence. I'm sure you won't like someone that's not an actor giving you advice, but I was convinced after watching the drama last night: Oh, this actress can definitely do more."

The bombardment of praises made her face flush. Hyunjin just smiled without saying anything. She couldn't remember the last time she had been complimented for her acting, and not only that, by the writer of the work she was appearing in.

"Do you think Yoomin should have more confidence?" Eunbin said as though talking to herself.

"Isn't she already full of confidence as she is? I think it reached the point of recklessness a little while ago."

"The authoritarianism that stems from the background that is her father is one of the things that support her. I felt like it would be okay to make her into a character who can stand on her own."

"Doesn't she become like that towards the end of the drama? From the look of things, it looks like she'll turn her back on her father."

"I'm saying that we should pull the trigger forward a little. From how her character changes thanks to the main protagonist, to her changing because of her contact with another character. Like you said, we should break her away from the stereotypical villainess character. We won't change her from a villainess to an angel; it'll be from a villainess to a loveable villainess. She'll lose more and more character towards the end, so even if we change her character now, the main plot will not be affected that much."

"That makes me feel bitter. So she's a character that's bound to be abandoned, huh?"

Eunbin avoided her gaze and said that they should change it starting now. Then, she seemed to have a flash of inspiration as she started typing.

"You're quite open to other people's opinions. You're quite liberal."

"You mean I don't have my own opinion?"

"Absolutely not."

"If started writing by myself from the very beginning, perhaps I may have become one of those writers filled with pride and doesn't listen to others. I do hear that I'm quite frustrating to get through when I'm quite reckless. But I started off as a writer for an entertainment program. When we held production discussions, I came up with absurd ideas, accepted some, and created games. That became a good experience for me. I managed to get myself a thin pair of ears, so I was able to go anywhere I wanted. That's why I'm saying that talking with you helps me a lot, Miss Hyunjin."

Eunbin pressed the enter key with her pinky finger before taking her hands off the keyboard. She didn't look completely satisfied, but she did look like she had solved a big problem.

"Any progress?"

Maru shook his hands and entered the kitchen. Hyunjin looked back at the living room. What was originally a mess became spotlessly clean. She wondered if this place was always so wide.

"Come sit down. I have a general idea on how to tie Bigfoot and Yoomin together to create a story."

Chapter 870. Sequence 13

Maru picked up the cat roaming around his feet and sat down on a chair, the cat on his lap.

"You don't happen to be talking about a romantic relationship, are you?"

"Love is an emotion that transcends all of time. It's a strong source of pathos as well."

"Are you really going to go with such a plot?"

He neither had the thought nor the right to go against the writer if she set her mind on it, but if she was just thinking about it, he wanted to tell her to think again. The love between the daughter of an evil hospital director and a man who barely managed to become a doctor after much hardship was a typical Cinderella story. It was something that appeared a lot even today and would continue to appear even in the future. It wasn't bad. It was just that in his opinion, using such a story to connect Bigfoot and Yoomin inside Doctors was a bad way to go.

The viewers' responses would be obvious. If Bigfoot, who displayed the hardships of youth in the current era in a plain fashion, fell in love with a woman from a household of power within the drama, the viewers who sympathized with the 'ordinariness' of the character throughout episodes 7 and 8 would become frustrated at the key to everything – love.

"If you're going to ruin the drama, then go ahead – this is written all over your face right now. Of course, I'm not going to do it like that. I finally managed to incite sympathy from people, so I can't let love ruin all of it. Ordinary people will not feel like it's love; they will feel like it's filth instead."

"Then how are you going to do it?"

"Before I say it, how do you think it should go?"

"For me personally, I think it should end as it is."

"That's an opinion that pours cold water over the discussion, but fine. Why do you think that?"

"It's because Bigfoot has shown all of the character's value in episode 8. He has already conveyed the message that we understand the pains of the many 'Bigfoots' out there. I liked the fact that we didn't show them any hope, nor any consolation. I asked around after yesterday's episodes went live about their feelings. It was just as we intended it. The internet responses were the same. It felt like my story – that was the majority's opinion."

The requirement of a good story was a good ending. Bigfoot's story already fulfilled that criterion. There was no refreshing revenge or a hopeful tomorrow, but it still manage to dissolve the conclusion that people endured and still forged ahead into the story. It was a story that was good because it was not dramatic. It would be for the best to close the door right here while there were still some lingering feelings. If people reflected back on the scene someday because of those lingering feelings, they would naturally think of the actor known as Han Maru as well. He was in the perfect condition to leave behind a good impression.

"Not only that, people are also saying that the actors did a good job, so if we touched it recklessly, the good image we have formed might shatter, so it will be for the best to leave things here. Is this what you're saying?" Eunbin asked.

Maru stroked his hand down his face. Was there something written on his face? She really had a full grasp on what he was thinking. Jayeon referred to Eunbin as the master of describing character

psychologies. In order to describe such things, she would have to have a good understanding of them. This female writer definitely had an unordinary pair of eyes for discerning what people thought.

"So you know. That's my honest opinion. All the clips that went on the internet were the scenes where Hyunjin-noona and I were acting. At least for episodes 7 and 8, we were the main characters. If you don't talk about Bigfoot anymore, I feel that it's going to get talked about a few more times among the viewers in the future. It was a splendid result for a consumable character, so I want to leave it as it is."

"But that means that you want to do another story if it's something that can be talked about among the viewers, right?"

"In theory, yes. My job is to act anything you write, so I'm going to do my best when playing my role regardless of what you write."

"Even while cursing me on the inside?"

"How could I possibly curse someone who's given me work? I'll just think it's a little pitiful."

"If you don't want it, then you don't have to do it, do you?"

"If I reject the script you write just because it's not to my liking, that will be the day my contract ends."

These days, it was the writers that sat on the thrones in the drama industry. Other than top-tier actors and producers, there was no one who could endure pressure from the writers. Just like how there were people who bought movie tickets just based on the director's name, there were many drama viewers who believed in the writer when watching a drama, even if they didn't entirely like the cast. A mere minor actor with a standard contract going against the writer who sat on the throne was a fantasy that wasn't even talked about in dramas.

"So in the end, it means that I have to write well, huh? If I want you two to keep liking me."

Eunbin brought some A4 paper and a pen from her room. She put the paper in the middle and wrote 'Yoomin' and 'Bigfoot' on each end of the paper.

"There is no such thing as a 'new' story in this world. It all comes down to how you recombine the existing stories. The story about you two managed to provoke the interest of the viewers. There was a reaction in the viewing rate, so we can't afford to miss it. But if we go with a love story, then just as Maru said, it would be worse than not doing it at all, but we can't go with a rival relationship either since the two characters can't be compared whether it's their talent, background or passion."

Maru nodded. They couldn't just make Bigfoot into a hero. There was already a hero played by Lee Heewon after all.

"But we can't keep leaving Bigfoot in reality. This is a drama after all. If we keep giving trials to the character, it's likely that the viewers would get fed up and leave first. There needs to be a catharsis. It doesn't need to be anything great. Bigfoot's charm is all about the small stories after all."

"What are you going to do with his relationship with Yoomin?"

"This occurred to me while talking to Miss Hyunjin: A loveable villainess. When inside a drama, even murderers can be sympathized with. We all know that the murderer's actions are wrong, but since we

know that it's all imaginary, we can assimilate our emotions with them. Yoomin will no longer be changed by the main character and will remain evil until the end. But being 'evil' doesn't mean she crosses the line. She'll just desire everything that she can reach out to. Perhaps she might end up looking like an adolescent girl. The main character and Bigfoot are standing in her path to making everything her own. If she bites back at both the characters in the same way, it would be no fun, but if there's a difference in the way she treats the two people, her character will become really plentiful. A cute villainess who knows pity. It might be a good idea to portray the contrast between the main character running towards the ideal without stopping and Bigfoot, who conforms to reality through the character Yoomin as the standard."

What started off as an explanation quickly turned into muttering to herself. Eunbin's hands became busy. Words that portrayed her thoughts started filling the empty A4 paper. She clearly seemed to be the type of person who didn't notice her surroundings once she became absorbed in something. Even when Hyunjin called out to her, she did not reply. The cat just kept watching as though she had seen her owner act like that many times.

"Let's give her some room," Maru said to Hyunjin.

It was just as Jayeon said in the gukbap restaurant. She said that the writer would start going on by herself after a certain point; and that they should just leave her be if something like that happened. They left the kitchen and sat on the sofa in the living room. Eunbin kept writing with her pen, and with her other hand, she ruffled her hair. From the looks of it, it didn't look like she was going to finish anytime soon.

"Creating a story isn't easy, huh."

"You tell me. I think I can see how some writers get carried on an ambulance due to stomach cramps. I'm sure writer Eunbin must have it hard too."

"I guess that must be why she focuses like that once she gets a grasp of something. She will have to wander for a long time if she doesn't write while her Muse is still here. But still, she's really aggressive about it."

Eunbin stared holes into the paper as though her thoughts had reached a stop. She could be heard swearing from time to time as well. She sometimes even prayed to a certain being. It was like watching a monodrama.

"Do you think other writers are like that too?"

"Probably not. I'm sure she's a special case."

"You never know. Most writers work on their own in their studios. Maybe it's because they all swear and become aggressive like that, so they can't help but work alone."

"A friend of mine is the opposite though. He becomes so quiet that his existence becomes faint. Sometimes, it makes me think that he's sleeping."

"You have a writer among your friends?"

"An aspiring one. It's just my intuition, but he'll probably become famous. He promised to use me in his work if he does well. Maybe this is why connections are good."

"If it's a really good piece, then give me a spot as well."

"You'll naturally have to go through an audition, noona."

They conversed while waiting. When Eunbin came out from the kitchen, she stomped her way to the veranda and opened the door wide. The autumn wind made gushing noises as it intruded into the living room. The artificial fragrance that filled the room disappeared in an instant.

"I'm hungry. You said you brought dried pollack gukbap, right? Let's eat that. Miss Hyunjin, you should eat with me," Eunbin said as she turned around after looking outside in a daze.

Her face looked very calm compared to before. It seemed that she managed to bring things to a closure.

"Do you think you can write a good script?" Maru asked.

Eunbin told him to look forward to it without hesitation.

"I think Lee Heewon and Yoonseo will have to be tense. You know that sometimes, the supporting cast gets more attention than the main cast, right? There's no rule stating that minor roles can't do the same. If we can ride the flow well, things will get very interesting. The two of you need to treat me to something good if things go well, okay?" Eunbin said with confidence.

"If that happens, I'll listen to your wish once."

"Me too."

When Maru and Hyunjin said those words, Eunbin widened her eyes and replied,

"You just need to introduce me to a man. Miss Hyunjin can introduce me to someone around my age, and Maru, someone younger than me. I don't prefer older men."

I'm not joking – Eunbin added seriously. Maru nodded. Just then, the cat on top of the table hopped over and pulled on Eunbin's foot. The cat seemed to be asking her owner why she needed anyone else when she had her.

"Because you're female," Eunbin said.

Hyunjin covered her mouth and laughed.

"I'll boil the soup for now. Both of you can stay seated. It'll be somewhat plain with just the soup, so should I make some side dishes as well? If there are ingredients, I can make some."

"You can cook too?"

"Well, if you live by yourself, you have no choice but to do it."

"Maru, would you like to come to our house as a housemaid? This noona will give you a lot of money. Miss Hyunjin, don't you think everyone should have a Han Maru at their house?"

Hyunjin agreed with her. Maru just shrugged at the two women and opened the fridge.

