

Once Again 201

Chapter 201

6 am. Bangjoo opened his eyes and turned off the beeping alarm right next to his head. It was early dawn, well before sunrise. Bangjoo folded his blankets and put on his running clothes to exercise.

“Good morning.”

“Running again?”

“Of course.”

It'd become a routine task for him at this point to greet the neighboring lady that went out to pray every morning. Bangjoo began running after some brief stretches with the sharp, cold air grazing past his cheeks dispelling his sleepiness. He turned at the park right behind his home and did a lap around a nearby hill before coming back home. It took him exactly 40 minutes. Compared to the 80 minutes he used to spend to complete this run, it was a significant improvement. It was a bit annoying how he wasn't able to get any faster, but he wasn't about to exhaust even more energy just to tire himself out for the rest of the day.

After taking a shower, he put the soup he made last night on boil. After scooping some rice from the rice cooker, adding some side dishes his sister made, and the soup, he got himself a very nice breakfast. By the time he finished eating, it was 7:30am. He quickly finished washing the dishes and stepped outside. It took him about 40 minutes to get to the school, Bangjoo put earphones in his ear and set it to the local radio to start his commute. It was 8am, and the radio show had just started.

- They say morning people are the symbol of success. That's why whether you're a student or a businessman, you are to wake up early each day. Maybe in this day and age, those that are really happy are the night owls? I for one am in support of the night owls. Good morning. I'm...

“What a liar.”

Bangjoo raised his speed as he shook his head.

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“Um... Grandma, let me help.”

Jiyeon shook her head looking at her wristwatch, then approached an old lady next to her. She had to walk to school since she missed the bus. At the same time, she discovered an old lady struggling to carry her luggage across a pedestrian bridge.

“Shouldn't you be heading to school?”

“I-I'm fine.”

She felt a little agitated looking at the clock, but she didn't want to leave an old lady by herself. She grabbed the lady's luggage before heading up the bridge. She was slowly getting further away from the school. Even so, she was happy that she could help someone out.

She made her way down the other side and gave the luggage back to the old lady, the old lady expressed her thanks multiple times before moving forward. The lady looked so perilous walking by herself that Jiyoong decided to help the lady all the way to the bus station. Unexpectedly, the weight of the luggage made it pretty hard for her to walk.

'What do I do?'

Right then, someone called out to her from the back.

"Lee Jiyoong?"

It was Bangjoo. She wasn't very close with the boy, but it was only a matter of time due to their shared club. Jiyoong was incredibly glad to see the boy.

"C-can you help me with this?"

"This?"

Bangjoo stepped closer and picked up all of the luggage like it was nothing, the boy was incredibly strong despite his height. Was it because he was a guy? Jiyoong and the old lady followed right behind Bangjoo.

"Grandma! Is this good enough?"

He had a loud voice for sure. The old lady complimented Bangjoo, saying he had the voice of a general.

"Here, have some of this."

The old lady gave both of them candy big enough to completely fill their mouth, Jiyoong accepted the candy with a bow.

"Thank you very much."

When she accepted the candy, she immediately noticed the clock at the bus station. 8:10am. She was reminded that she needed to get to school by 8:30am, the scary looking disciplinary teacher flashed by in her head.

"We might be late. What do we do?"

"Just run."

"I can't run."

"Want me to carry you?"

Jiyoong shook her head quickly, if her friends saw her being carried by a boy in the morning... She didn't even want to think about it, she'd get teased for a month straight.

"We'll just have to run like hell, then."

Bangjoo looked oddly excited, Jiyoong sighed before chasing after Bangjoo.

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Aram, who was riding her bike with a yawn, suddenly came to a stop to take out her MP3 player. It had a radio function, so she dialed into her favorite station and checked the time. 8:16am. Sixteen minutes since the show started.

“Ugh, I’m late.”

She put the earphones in and started listening.

- Alright, and now we’re back with our usual affair. We got a lot of messages to work through, so let’s just take a look at a few.

This was a radio show hosted by her favorite actress, so Aram always listened to every episode. She sent out a lot of messages as well, although none of her messages got chosen so far. Aram quickly sent a message through her phone as she stood.

- I’m an office worker working in Seoul. The street’s so clogged on my way to work. Ugh, going to work is a great pain. But having a job in itself is something to be happy about. At least, compared to the unemployed.

Ah, that cynical response. Aram lived for this stuff, she loved how direct this actress was. There were several people online who criticised the actress for being rather rude, but Aram thought that was what made her so charming.

- I’m a student. I have to study earlier in the morning because of math. That’s why I’m at school an hour before everyone else. Ugh. Math. Why do we even learn it? If you don’t like it, you should just give up on it. But if you don’t have the courage to? Then just study. If you don’t see a way to start earning money for yourself right now, then you should just shut it and study. Life isn’t nearly as easy as you might think it is.

“Ugh, so cool...”

Aram got ready to hear the next message as she pedaled on.

- This is from a student as well. You know this isn’t a very good show for students, right? Well, whatever. I’m going to school on a bike right now. I listen to your show every day. Love you, sis! Is what it says. Hm, I’d have preferred to get a message like this from a boy, but oh well. I’m happy that a nice junior in life respects me so much though, so I’ll be giving this listener a gift. I’ll be calling you a little later, miss, so get ready for a call!

Aram shouted in excitement while biking. This was the first time she was chosen! A gift as well, on top of that? Today was going to be a great day. Right then, she saw a familiar girl in the distance walk with tired puffs.

“Eh? Isn’t that Jiyeon?”

Aram turned towards the girl immediately, she noticed Bangjoo was next to Jiyeon as well.

“What are you two doing?”

“Hah... Hah... Aram...”

Jiyoon was sweating bullets and Bangjoo was looking at the girl with troubled eyes.

“Leave... Go... You’ll be late...”

The poor girl looked pitiful. Aram looked at her phone, 8:23am. If she pedalled like hell, they could just barely make it in time.

“Get on!”

“Eh?”

“Get on.”

She tapped the back of her bike with her hand. Jiyoon shook her head with a pale face, she knew the girl would refuse.

“You’ll get hit by that wild dog if you’re late though.”

She called the disciplinary teacher that because of how persistent the man was. She was originally going to call the man a rabid dog, but changed her mind after being told that was a bit too rude from a friend.

“I-I can’t.”

“Trust me.”

“I’d r-rather be late.”

“Hey!”

Aram gave Bangjoo a glance, hoping that the boy would catch on and put the girl on the bike. But the boy just stood there blinking his eyes. Ugh, he just didn’t have any sense, did he?

“Just get on!”

Only then did Jiyoon get on with a scared face, Aram immediately started pedalling when she felt the girl’s arms around her hips.

“You just run!”

It’d be fine if Bangjoo gets punished for being late, but Jiyoon would probably collapse if she got punished. Aram pedalled wildly while thinking that. Right then, she felt something pass right next to her. It was Bangjoo. the boy clearly wasn’t lying about wanting to be a martial arts actor.

“I’m not gonna lose.”

She started feeling competitive. This was something she couldn’t lose at. Even in Judo, she’d lose sleep every time she lost. She always had to get payback if she wanted to sleep well. She could hear Jiyoon scream right behind her, but she couldn’t stop here. Not until she caught up to Bangjoo!

* * *

Dowook, who was pedalling slowly all this time, sped up right when he saw a boy and a bike zoomed past him. He was never one to stand a bike passing him.

“Aram!”

He realized that the girl that was screaming on the bike was a club member, Dowook didn't care. He sped up looking at the one who was pedaling the bike. She was good, but couldn't speed up much with that extra luggage. Dowook caught up with ease and passed right by. Right then, he heard someone shout right behind him.

“Jiyoon! You better hold on tight!”

* * *

Maru had to wipe his eyes for a second before taking a look again. What in the world did he just see? He could see Dowook pedaling ferociously, right behind him was Bangjoo running with a grin, and behind that was Aram biking with a massive frown. Poor Jiyoon was pale as a ghost on the back of Aram's bike. The four of them charged right into school in that order. At the same time, he heard someone roar at them in anger.

“Which bastard decided to charge in with a bike! And you! I told you not to run when you come to school!”

It was the disciplinary teacher, Maru had to organize his thoughts for a bit before walking towards the gate himself. He could see the four students all lined up kneeling in front of a bike. Maru's eyes met with theirs as he passed by, he grinned at them before promptly ignoring them. He could hear them call out, “hey” and “senior” right as he walked by, but he knew they weren't talking to him. Of course they weren't, Maru changed his shoes as he thought about how difficult practice was going to be from now on.

* * *

Suyeon slept very deeply for the first time in a long while. It was 4pm. The stress she accumulated at the villa must've vented in the form of sleep.

“My head hurts.”

It felt like a massive hangover, she put a hand over her throbbing head and gulped down some cold water. She thought about spending the rest of the day doing nothing like a jobless person before remembering what Junmin had told her.

- It starts today.

“Hah...”

Suyeon took out workout clothes from the closet and put on sunglasses, she didn't want anyone noticing her. She thought about checking herself in the mirror before deciding against it, she'd just be going to meet students anyways. She drove straight to school in that outfit, it was a little past five when she arrived at Suwon. She didn't even have makeup on, but she was pretty confident that she looked stunning without it. It'd be nice if she parked right inside the school, but she didn't want to make things annoying so she just parked nearby.

On her walk towards the building, she came across a few students. Suyeon sighed, surely they'd ask for her signature.

“Want to bet on who pays for the PC bang?”

“Let’s go.”

A group of boys passed by her saying that. Suyeon took off her sunglasses with a small smile, surely they’d recognize her now.

“Let’s go play pool. I know the owner, so he might order food for us.”

“Oh, hell yeah.”

Another group of boys passed by without even looking at her. Suyeon didn’t lose her smile as she walked straight into the school, not a single student recognized her.

‘This is kind of annoying.’

At the same time, she realized just how far away she was from becoming famous. She really should take up more jobs. She can’t afford to be lax, she should take care of this teaching business as fast as she can before her next audition.

She stepped up to the fifth floor calmly, they were supposed to meet at a classroom on the fifth floor. Just as she turned to the hallway on the fifth floor, she ran into Maru.

“Surprise.”

He probably didn’t know who was coming, a great chance to tease this troublesome kid. Maru stared at her dumbly out of surprise before smiling.

“It really is a bit of a surprise.”

He pointed at her forehead as she spoke, Suyeon put a hand on it out of confusion. Something fell from her head right then, it was a pink hair roller that had turned completely flat.

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Their first meeting was interesting. Everyone was flabbergasted at Suyeon’s appearance, even Taesik.

“Why didn’t you put on makeup from the start if you were going to disappear to put it on anyway?”

Suyeon managed to fix both her skin and hair perfectly in a flash, she did this in only ten minutes after hearing that Taesik would come.

“I barely put on anything. This may as well be my natural face.”

Suyeon smiled like a fox, she introduced herself quickly to everyone in the club before coming out to talk with Maru separately.

“Why did you decide to teach the acting club?”

“Don’t ask. I didn’t ask for it either. Mr. Junmin told me to, so I had no choice.”

Suyeon stretched with a small frown.

“Can you do it?”

“Don’t know. I don’t think it’ll be hard though.”

“Knowing how to do something and knowing how to teach something are two different things.”

“You always have to start somewhere to do anything. No one’s a teacher from the start.”

“True, but our club doesn’t need another new learner in our midst. We need a teacher. If you want to do it, I won’t stop you. But you better try your best.”

“Shouldn’t I be the one to tell you that? You’re the one who’s going to be on stage. I might get sick of your lack of talent first before anything. I do have experience teaching as well.”

Was she talking about Geunseok? Maru still didn’t know why Junmin sent this woman, but there was no point in worrying about it now.

“I’ll be in your care from now on. Please teach me a lot, both as an actress and an instructor.”

Maru bowed slightly as a greeting.

“I’ve been thinking this since a while ago, but you really are frightening.”

“How so?”

“You form relationships based on need. You separate work and personal life with a very clear line. Humans always begin relationships with logic, but end them with emotions. Just like with the many men I’ve met. You don’t seem to be the case though.”

“I think they’ve been very logical until the end.”

“Really?”

“If the rumors are true, then the men all left with what they originally came for. Sure, they might’ve gotten the short end of the stick, but since both sides left with something, I think there was still logic involved.”

Suyeon’s smile widened at the word ‘rumor’.

“What rumors?”

“Exactly those that you’re thinking of right now.”

“I’m not thinking of anything though?”

“Well, they must’ve just been baseless rumors then.”

“You like to play with people, don’t you?”

“Did I play with you, or do you just feel like you got played? Personally, I’ve no intentions of playing with you.”

“Wow, what manners. Boys that confuse girls aren’t popular.”

Her smile was widening, but her eyes were getting colder. Maru became certain that Suyeon wasn’t just a nymphomaniac. She was a businesswoman in high demand and an actress filled with ambitions. She

knew what it meant to make progress through her friends and didn't let morals stop her in getting what she wanted. If the rumors about her he heard from Ganghwan were true, then she was a very dangerous person indeed.

"What's the reason a woman puts on makeup?"

Suyeon asked as she stepped forward.

"The biggest reason would be to show off more to others around them."

"Then what does it mean when a woman doesn't put on makeup?"

"There's no need for them to look better."

"Nope."

Suyeon grinned.

"I look better with no makeup."

"Hair roller included?"

"How do you keep coming back like that?"

Suyeon slipped back into the classroom as if nothing had happened. Maru tried to get some information out of her to no avail, even the word bubbles beside her were identical to her speech.

"Hey guys! Nice to meet you. Let's try our best for this year. I might be a little lacking in experience, but I'm sure we can achieve some satisfying results if we work hard together. Ask me anything you want whenever you get stuck. I'll try my best to answer."

A bright voice spilled out of the classroom, the woman really was great at making herself look friendly. Even back at the villa, Suyeon approached Gwak Joon multiple times despite multiple warning gestures from the man. Most people would've given up after several attempts, but Suyeon continuously approached the man as if she was just playing. She did eventually realize that smiles alone wouldn't help her get close to the man. So, she started fighting with him like they were old enemies.

She seemed to instinctively understand how to deal with people. In the end, Gwak Joon told Suyeon his real name. Maru found that out when he called the author last time. Back then, Gwak Joon described Suyeon as 'a jam stuck on your hand'. In any case, Suyeon managed to open the man's mouth and embed herself deep into his memories.

Most men are foolish enough to start wondering if a woman likes them if they look into each other's eyes. Suyeon could become friends with most men with just half the effort she put into Gwak Joon, she might even be able to turn these men into slaves if the rumors were true. Perhaps she really was born to be an actress after all. Becoming friends with others meant that you needed to understand what the other side wanted out of you, a very important talent for actors.

"Come inside, Maru."

Suyeon was calling him over with a soft wave, Maru stepped inside with a slight sigh.

“Don’t be embarrassed, senior!”

“Senior! It’d be troubling if you got embarrassed by our instructor’s beauty!”

Aram and Bangjoo teased with playful expressions, Suyeon must’ve said something while he was outside. You couldn’t win in situations like these; getting mad would just make the situation awkward, accepting it would make you seem annoying, staying silent would only make you get teased more. Maru turned to give Suyeon a slight glance, the woman gave him a playful wink in return.

“Maru must’ve been surprised. I was kidding, guys.”

Everyone laughed at Suyeon’s words, they must all think Suyeon made that joke to lighten up the mood. She must’ve been quite the annoyance for other female students back in her school days, especially with her being the type that always turned the situation around so that she couldn’t be spoken badly about.

“What are you planning on doing for the first day, instructor?”

Maru switched the topic around, since he had no intentions of starting a fight with the woman. He’d rather think about acting than about fighting.

“Well, it’s obvious, isn’t it? It’s gotta be that!”

“That?”

“Orientation!”

* * *

“Orientation.”

Maru looked outside from the veranda, their venue for the orientation was Suyeon’s house near Suwon station.

“Ahaha, big sis, you’re so funny!”

“You know it! I’m quite the comedian!”

Maru could hear the group laughing inside despite just having closed the glass door. Just how loud were they laughing? He took a bite out of the cracker in his hand. He actually welcomed an event where they got together like this, Maru didn’t want to practice so hard from the first day either. He flipped through his past memories as a businessman, looking at the cars parked in front of the station. The night scenery was beautiful, but... It reminded him of a saying: ‘the beautiful night view of Seoul was created by countless tears of businessmen that couldn’t finish their work’.

“...Senior, what are you doing?”

It was Jiyeon, she had opened the door behind him.

“Meditating.”

“What?”

“I’m just breathing in some fresh air. Why did you come out? It’s cold.”

“I-I wanted fresh air as well, I’m feeling a bit hot after laughing so much.”

Jiyeon fumbled around a bit behind her, there was a glass of beer in her hand. Maru frowned as he looked into the living room, so they decided to drink after all. He could see a big bottle of it in the midst of the boys.

“Don’t drink if you don’t want to. You didn’t drink last time either.”

“That’s why I decided to try it today. Here, this one’s yours, senior.”

Jiyeon slowly handed him a glass, he gladly took a sip from it since he was feeling pretty thirsty. Jiyeon stepped closer to him.

“Ugh... So bitter.”

“That’s why people drink it.”

“Really?”

Of course not. Korean beer only existed to fill the bellies of those who liked to eat all the food in company meals, it wasn’t something to drink for flavor.

“Don’t force yourself. It’s not good for you at all.”

“But I was told it’d be good to learn it for when I enter society...”

“Is that what the Instructor said?”

Jiyeon nodded, Maru wanted to sarcastically say that the woman was teaching such nice things. Unfortunately, he could only sigh at the fact that he had to agree. Learning how to drink really was good for multiple things, because society still demanded that you had to drink if your superiors asked you to. If you refuse? The superiors that were tamed by the Korean military culture wouldn’t let you get away with it, gender wouldn’t be a factor. If you refused or even failed to drink at a superior’s command, you’d instantly be branded with a horrid reputation as an employee that refused to listen.

“Just try one glass at first, don’t drink a lot at once, and keep taking small sips. Eat a lot of snacks in between each sip, talk a lot as well. Get a good grip of how you feel before going for another glass. Not quickly, but slowly. You’ll slowly start to feel yourself getting drunk as you do so.”

“After that?”

“Again, measure how you feel before accepting another glass. If you start feeling weird inside, stop right there. A lot of kids throw up on their first time because they don’t have tolerance.”

“T-throw up?”

Jiyeon immediately put her glass down in fright. How cute, she was the type that’d be popular between boys. Innocence was incredibly powerful in that sense.

‘Girls like these suffer a lot after a bad boyfriend.’

“You should never drink with a boy before figuring out your limit.”

“Why not?”

“No girl is more in danger than one that drinks with an innocent face. In a lot of ways.”

Jiyeon looked confused. Hah, this was troublesome. Maru would rather talk to Suyeon, it was hard to talk to kids. In the end, he could only tell the girl to take it slow.

“Uhm, senior.”

“What?”

“Do you think I can do well?”

“In what?”

“The acting club. It’s fun, but I’m pretty worried. Am I too much of a drag?”

“We didn’t even start anything, start worrying later. You won’t be able to get anything done otherwise.”

“How did you get so good at acting?”

“I’m not good at acting.”

“No, you are. I saw you. I saw you act in Anyang last year. That’s what made me register for the club. You were shining back then. You were so cool.”

Jiyeon raised her arms to the sky and spun around. She really didn’t seem like her normal self.

“...Are you drunk?”

“What?”

“You’re talking a lot better than usual. You’re not embarrassed as well.” “Me?”

Jiyeon smiled widely. Yup, she was drunk. Did the cold air get to her?

“You really shouldn’t drink. If you’re drunk after a glass, then you should just stay off of alcohol forever.”

“This is my fifth glass!”

“What?”

Maru widened his eyes as he looked into the living room. Next to Aram, he could see five empty bottles of beer. He couldn’t see Daemyung, Dowook, and Bangjoo either. Where did they go?

“Senior! You’re so cool!”

Goodness, she was definitely the talkative drunk. Maru dragged Jiyeon back inside. Suyeon, who was just laughing with Aram, looked his way.

“Where are the boys?”

“Probably sleeping inside.”

Suyeon raised a bottle of soju as she spoke. When did she sneak that in? She must've made them a soju bomb while he wasn't looking. Just then, Aram fell back onto the floor. At the same time, a sound of someone throwing up came from the bathroom. By the voice, it was probably Daemyung.

"Don't worry. I didn't give it to the girls."

Suyeon spoke with a very straight voice, Maru sighed as he scratched his eyebrow.

"Senior, can I really do well? Can I? Do you think so?"

Jiyeon started sticking closer to him. Goodness, he'd probably have to take care of this one first.

Chapter 203

"Senior, why don't I have confidence? Senior? Senior?"

Jiyeon muttered on and on with a bright red face. Five glasses of beer... It only made sense that a girl who tried drinking for the first time would get drunk from it.

"You're plenty confident right now, so please be quiet. Stand up straight as well."

He patted the girl's shoulders as he led her into a smaller room to rest, he put her down on the bed before waking Aram up in the living room. The girl woke up from her nap after a few shakes.

"Woah! The ground is shaky!"

"That would be your eyes, not the ground."

It reminded him of a college party when he threw Aram into the small room as well. He managed to stay sober back then till the end and ended up having to take care of all the corpses afterwards, how strange that nothing has changed even today.

"Hey hey, don't throw up too much, you'll clog the toilet."

Suyeon shouted towards the bathroom, the three men who drank soju bombs were throwing up very energetically together. They must've drunk everything Suyeon gave them, despite feeling sick. All because of their petty pride as men, Maru was a bit surprised to find Daemyung in their midst though.

He sent the three of them into the bigger room before cleaning up the bathroom a little bit.

"I could've taken care of that, you know."

Suyeon smiled with a glass of beer in her hand. After cleaning the bathroom, Maru made rounds around the small room and the big room to check on the kids. Thankfully, no one seemed to have gone too far over.

"You seem used to this."

"Of taking care of drunk people? That I am."

Maru scraped together what remained of the snacks and sat in front of Suyeon, he was hungry after so much work. The clock was nearing 11pm and the TV next to them was playing a Chinese martial arts movie.

“Care for a drink?”

Suyeon gave her glass a little shake. Maru looked around to find an unfinished bottle of soju, he poured himself a third of a shot.

“Do you want to drink more?”

“If you’re offering, sure.”

Suyeon put her glass forward, prompting Maru to pour the rest of the bottle in her glass.

“Did you finish all the beer?”

“There should still be a few bottles in the fridge.”

Maru opened the double door fridge and grabbed a beer. The fridge was surprisingly clean, he noticed. There were a lot of side dishes and vegetables inside.

“Why are you looking so carefully into someone else’s fridge?”

“There’s a lot to be learned about a person from their tables, fridge, and bathroom. Especially when they are all surprisingly clean.”

“Surprisingly? Aren’t you being a bit rude?”

“Do you have a can opener?”

“Isn’t it next to the fridge?”

Unfortunately, Maru couldn’t find anything. He just settled for opening the bottle with a spoon.

“Who in the world are you? You were so natural just now.”

“High schoolers nowadays can all do this.”

“Liar.”

Maru gave the bottle a little shake with his thumb over the top and poured the foaming beer into each of their glasses. Even if most of his memories were gone, his body still remembered how to make perfect soju bombs. Their glasses frothed with white foam in an instant.

“I’m surprised you know how to do that.”

Suyeon took a sip from her glass. She clearly drank a lot with the kids, but her face remained the same as ever. Maru took a sip as well, it tasted sweet.

‘I drank a lot back then because of that damned department head, Mr. Go. Or was it Lee?’

He remembered having to drink almost every day alongside his superior. They were very humiliating and enraging at the time, but felt like sweet memories right now. He even missed it a little bit, he figured it was just like how he could only remember the fun things in the military.

The two of them emptied their glasses without words. They didn’t have anything to talk about, nor did they want to find something to talk about. Just like that, they finished about three glasses of soju bombs

in a flash, but Maru didn't feel any effects of the alcohol. Was it because of the stronger body he got in leaping back to the past?

'I guess it's closer to reincarnation.'

Honestly, he could be fine even if he lost everything thanks to this strong body of his. He did want to continue down the path of acting, but no one knew what could happen in the future after all. Perhaps everything might just go wrong tomorrow. If that happened, his body would be the only thing he would be able to rely on. Maru finished his current glass and put the soju and beer bottle aside. There was no reason for him to be drinking right now, so he decided to cease there.

"Are you drunk?"

"Yes, I am."

"Liar, you don't look a tad different."

"There's no need for me to drink until I'm actually drunk. I'm fine with setting the mood a bit. And... I need to take care of my health."

"Ugh, thinking about health at *your* age?"

Suyeon poured herself a new glass with an annoyed mutter.

"You know beer has a lot of calories, right? Will you really drink more?"

Suyeon flinched, she looked at her glass for a bit before pushing it towards Maru.

"Drink."

"I'd rather not."

"You made me want to stop drinking, take responsibility."

She must be a bit buzzed, seeing how her voice was a bit higher-pitched than usual. He had no intentions of fighting with a drunk woman, so he just took the glass.

"You should sleep if you're drunk. I'll take care of this."

"I'm not drunk. I'm not Kim Suyeon if I get drunk with this little amount of alcohol."

The woman let out a small huff before picking out potatoes from the gamjatang in front of her. Come to think of it, this woman had quite the personality as well. She was relaxed when she needed to be, but also knew how to act cute. She could just as easily become a taunting woman capable of easily charming a person.

"A key that opens all locks before is praised as a master key. A lock that opens before all keys, on the other hand, is cursed upon for being useless. So why is it that the men take on the role of the key and women that of the lock? Women can just as easily become keys too. Is it because we don't have a dick?"

Suyeon talked incredibly casually as if this was just another topic of conversation for her. Maru picked up a cracker in front of him as he looked into her eye, she wasn't smiling anymore. She looked

completely emotionless, Maru couldn't help but feel that this was the most honest she's been with him all this time.

"Well, if we're going by appearances, aren't men closer to keys?"

"Ugh, you have such a macho mindset as well."

"I'm just playing along with your joke."

"Is that so? Then play along for a bit more."

Suyeon stood up with a few sways and laid down on the sofa Maru was leaning on. Every time she let out a breath, Maru could smell an intense amount of alcohol. She was clearly drunk.

"You should sleep inside if you're sleepy."

"This is my house, I can do whatever I want."

"Don't blame me if you catch a cold."

"No worries. I'll keep the heaters on at full blast. What do you think I'm earning money for? It's to use it for stuff like this!"

"Good for you."

"Good for me is right. I work this hard because I want to earn money!"

"This is the first time I really agree with you."

"Oh? That's nice."

Suyeon lightly slapped Maru's shoulder, saying 'this is for us having similar opinions for the first time'. It was 12am now. The movie channel on TV was playing an erotic melodrama, a movie about a woman sacrificing her life for the male lead.

"An innocent woman. A quiet woman. A good wife. Why does this country always force its submissive stereotypes on women?"

"Because they're scared."

"Scared?"

Maru grabbed the glass in front of him, he'd need more alcohol to talk about stuff like this.

"Before getting further into this topic, I'd like to clarify that not all men in the world think like this."

Maru took a shot of soju before continuing.

"Some men obsessively hate to watch women climb on above them in the world. There's no wonder that there's even a popular phrase about it. 'How dare this woman?' It's all because they're scared. They're scared of being taken over by capable women. That's why they try to stamp it out from the start, saying bullshit like 'good women need to be quiet'."

Maru got a bit flared up as he talked because he was reminded of a story related to 'her'. Back then, after their marriage, she left the acting industry to be hired at a company as a secretary. She got into trouble with a man in that company and Maru remembered being incredibly mad after hearing the reason why. The man started trouble because she dared to look him in the eye. In fact, Maru could still feel incredible rage despite having lost most of his memory of the situation. What made him even angrier at the time was how she tried to laugh it over like it was nothing.

"That patriarchal worldview ruined many, many people. There are too many idiots running around thinking that they're superior just because they have a stick between their legs. You see, when I get a daughter in the future, I'm definitely going to teach her self-defense. I'm going to tell her to kick him right in the balls if she meets one of these idiots in the future."

"Oh, that's nice."

Suyeon laughed as if she were a fan of the thought, she laughed for quite some time before letting out a small sigh. She continued the conversation with a much calmer tone.

"People would laugh if I tell them that I got raped by a man I dated, right?"

"Did such a thing happen?"

"It was rape, at least from my perspective. I was a doll and he was a rabid dog. The bastard."

"Are you really okay with telling me this? I don't really like you, instructor."

"I know. I don't like you either. I wanted you, but gave up since you act way too hard to get."

"So why are you..."

"Because there's no one else. There's no one else I can tell this to. You're... You're annoying, but I don't think you're a bad person. It's annoying how you act like an adult at your age. I don't like the way you talk. It's unbearable how you draw a line between certain relationships. I hate everything about you, but at least you don't try to hit on me desperately like those fucks."

"That's literally only because I don't like you."

"Can't you be a bit gentler about it? Seriously."

Suyeon got up from the sofa and embraced Maru from the back.

"How is it? Feeling excited?"

"You reek of alcohol. Can't you just go to sleep if you're drunk? I can listen to your stories all day, but I'd rather not have to take care of your physical actions as well."

"Oh, so cold."

Suyeon rested her head on Maru's shoulder.

"You see, I thought emotions lasted forever. I thought love lasted forever. I thought as long as I loved, I would be paid back with an equal amount of love. But that wasn't the case at all. Emotions are

expendable things that run out very quickly. Love was the same, just packaged to look a little better. They wanted me and once I gave them my everything, they threw me away.”

“What did you do?”

“What do you think? I became a merchant. Fine, I’ll give you what you want, but it’s not going to be free. If you’re going to use me, you better pay up. Back then, I was a girl who wanted love. But now, I’ve become a woman who got too used to loveless romance. Rumors? About me being a whore? About how I sell my body? Whatever. It’s just a transaction, just like anything else in the free market.”

Her breath passing by his ear was hot, he might’ve even felt a bit of disgust if he didn’t know anything. He would’ve thought she was impure, dirty. All he felt now was the alcohol in his body and a bitterness similar to it.

“So, are you satisfied?”

“Satisfied? Sure. I’m not hurt anymore. I’m a dry twig devoid of emotions at this point.”

“Well, so long as you’re satisfied. By the way, can an emotionless person even act?”

“I’m living proof of that, aren’t I? Acting’s all a bunch of lies anyway.”

Suyeon raised one of her arms towards the sky.

“Out, out, brief candle! Life’s but a walking shadow, a poor player that struts and frets his hour upon the stage and then is heard no more.”

Suyeon looked incredibly desperate and devoid of energy as she spoke. She looked up at the ceiling lights dumbly before smiling again, she buried her face into Maru’s shoulder.

“I’m sick of Macbeth.”

“That was Macbeth?”

“You don’t even know Macbeth? I thought you were an actor!”

“This is my first year, you see.”

“Ugh.”

Suyeon muttered incoherently for a second before continuing.

“In any case, I’m a very good liar. Who knows? Maybe my words right now are lies.”

She laughed silently as if she was very amused at what she just said. Maru shrugged.

“It doesn’t matter if you lied or not.”

“Why not?”

“It doesn’t matter. I don’t care what you do. Just don’t break the law.”

“I don’t touch married men, obviously. I don’t go for the ones with girlfriends either.”

“Then it’s fine, isn’t it? No need for you to talk to me like this about it.”

“Don’t you think it’s dirty?”

“Why? I’ve never heard from anyone that romance is a dirty thing.”

“I can’t tell if you’re a romanticist or a pessimist.”

“I’m a romanticist towards my woman and have no such interest in everyone else. By the way, can you get up now? You’re heavy.”

“You’re saying something very rude to a woman right now. Do you know that?”

“Gravity doesn’t discriminate, unfortunately.”

Suyeon smirked before getting back up. Looking back, he noticed that her eyes still had vibrant energy. She must’ve faked being drunk to talk about this.

“That’s odd. I thought this attack would work for sure. Do you even have a dick?”

“Want me to show you?”

“Oh my, how bold.”

“It’s past midnight. You should go to bed.”

“Don’t want to. I want to keep talking.”

“Well, I’m going to sleep.”

“Why? Stay, I’m bored.”

Suyeon was begging him. It was honestly hard to tell if this woman was drunk or not, she’d probably chase after him even if he walked away to sleep. Maru sighed as he took out a book from his bag.

“You can talk by yourself. I’m going to read.”

“Twilight Struggles? Are you preparing for the audition?”

“Of course. I don’t know if I’ll get in though.”

“You can come running into my arms if you fail. My bosom is wide enough to welcome you in.”

“Yes, yes. I’m sure it is.”

Maru turned off the TV and flipped a page, Suyeon fell silent as well. The fridge hummed in the distance, he could hear the wind whipping itself against the windows. Many little noises came and went within the room. In a flash, the living room became quiet like a library. Maru flipped a page, then another, and then one more. By the time he flipped through about twenty, he heard a noise behind him.

“...To whom do I need to go to get my purity back?”

It was Suyeon. As her voice slowly faded away from the room, Maru turned the TV back on. He flipped through the channels until he reached a loud entertainment show and raised the volume. By the time he made it loud enough for it to impair his concentration, he heard a noise from behind him. A noise of someone forcing her tears down her throat.

Maru kept the TV on as he continued reading.

Chapter 204

After some time spent on reading, Maru eventually realized that the sound of sobs was gone. He lowered the volume before turning off the TV. The moon outside the window looked oddly small today. After closing his book, Maru looked back. Suyeon was sleeping with messy hair. She looked exhausted after a night of talking and thinking.

“I told her she’d catch a cold if she sleeps outside, too.”

It was 2am, but he couldn’t sleep because of the alcohol in his system. Maru cleaned up the snacks and the dishes in front of him, Suyeon trembled from the noise of the dishes clacking together. After cleaning up the living room, Maru looked back into the small room and the big room. The girls in the small room were hugging each other in their sleep, they must’ve been cold. Come to think of it, the heater wasn’t on. He grabbed a blanket from the pile in the corner and covered the two with it. He took another one and stepped outside.

“Can’t you act more your age?”

He put a blanket over the woman. She might’ve looked lovely or baby-like to anyone else in this state, but to Maru, she just looked sad. Everyone had their stories, no one was born innately good or evil. It’s their accumulated experiences that would nudge them towards good or evil. What’s funny was that the standards of what was good or evil were subjective, Maru knew that better than anyone else. A role model you looked up to might secretly be someone who stepped on others to get to where they were, on the other end, a person on death row might be someone who could give you a valuable life lesson. That’s why Maru tried his best to judge people based on how they treated him. In that sense, Suyeon was a good person. Her relationships were purely based on profit. So long as she stuck by that, Maru’s opinion of her would be neutral, but he did want to tell her something.

“Are you sleeping?”

No response. The woman breathed like a little baby.

“If you lived happily so far, then don’t have any regrets. But if your actions come back to you in the form of pain, then it’s time to stop. If they don’t, then live as you always have. Don’t try to be ‘good’, you should know better than I do that’s a nigh impossible thing to do. So stay greedy. Live the life you want to live, as long as it’s within the confines of the law.”

Maru turned the heater on and the lights off, he laid down on the living room carpet and put on a blanket. The living room was quiet now, he started steadying his breath. He could feel sleep slowly approaching from the other side of his consciousness.

* * *

He dreamed of chasing a woman he didn’t know. No, that wasn’t a stranger. He knew that woman for sure.

Maru opened his eyes and looked up at the ceiling dumbly, it was colored gray. Ah, right, this was Suyeon’s home. He put a hand over his dry neck and sat up, the dream just now was already fading

away deep into his subconscious. All he remembered was that he was chasing after a woman he felt like he knew. The woman was sometimes young, sometimes old, and at other times someone else entirely.

An odd dream indeed, but it faded away quickly enough that he didn't think much of it. The living room was colored with sunlight, it was 9am. After taking a deep breath of the fresh Sunday air, Maru got up.

"Oh, you're awake."

Suyeon was standing by the kitchen, surprisingly. That tear-stained face of hers from the night before was gone without a trace. Now, she was the actress Kim Suyeon. So this is the end of her storytime from last night, Maru nodded as a small greeting before walking inside himself.

"Want water?"

"Sure."

He finished the glass of water in two gulps. He could feel the drowsiness inside him being washed away instantly.

"Thanks for the blanket. I'm glad you at least have some manners."

"I'd rather we have a healthy instructor teach us."

"Ugh, you aren't cute at all."

"Being treated as 'cute' in my age is problematic."

"You sound like an old man."

"Much better than being an immature adult, wouldn't you agree? Anyway, should I wake the kids? I think we should go out soon."

"No, let them sleep. They were a mess last night. We'll start our first training after letting them sleep till lunchtime."

"Training?"

"I want to check your vocal cords. I want to see how well Ms. Miso did."

Suyeon took out a toaster.

"You're fine with toast for lunch, right?"

"Do you have rice?"

"Can't you just eat what I give you? You're not going to be popular if you keep acting this way."

"I've said this before, but I'm kind to my girlfriend. So there's no need for you to worry."

"You have a girlfriend?"

"Yes, I do."

"Whew, that's unexpected. I thought you hated women. Especially since you never even spared me a glance."

“Are you really bored enough to bring up yesterday’s conversation?”

“I can’t stand quiet meals, sorry.”

“Get your own boyfriend then.”

“How? The way you told me to last night?”

So she was listening. Maru spread some jam on his toast as he responded.

“Why pretend you were sleeping? Now I feel awkward for no reason.”

“Because it’s fun.”

Suyeon poured both of them a glass of orange juice.

“So how’s your girlfriend? Is she pretty? How’s her personality?”

“She’s better than you in every aspect. Face, body, personality.”

“Boo, there’s no way she has a better body than me.”

Suyeon crossed her long legs. Maru had to make a correction, Suyeon did indeed have a better body for the time being.

“Just give it time.”

“How do you know she’ll look better by then?”

“I have good eyes.”

“Ew, what a pervert.”

“All men are born perverts. We just restrain it.”

“That’s just proof that you’re a massive pervert. Aren’t you embarrassed?”

“Not as much as someone who tells their life story alongside tears. Also, haven’t you run into my girlfriend when you visited me in the hospital?”

“Did I? Sorry, I’m not the type to remember people unrelated to me.”

“Not surprised.”

The toast crunched inside his mouth, the strawberry jam was pretty tasty. Where was it from? He turned the bottle around to look at the label, all that English made it hard to read.

“Tasty, right? I got it as a gift. It was like 150 thou per bottle?”

“So that’s why it’s tasty.”

“Want a bottle?”

“I’d rather not. I don’t like accepting gifts without reason.”

“Consider it a gift for our future relationship. Though it doesn’t look like we’ll be friends.”

“Agreed.”

“Why do you dislike me so much?”

Maru responded as he chewed on the toast.

“I don’t dislike you that much. There’s just no reason for me to be friends with you. Ah, if it looked like I was avoiding you, that’s because I consider you a scary person. I dislike scary women.”

“Me? Scary? Why? Because I screw with men?”

Maru responded as he looked directly into her eyes.

“If you’re that conscious of your behavior, then I’d recommend that it’s best to just stop. I don’t care about what you do. If you’re talking about it to me on purpose, then I’d like to ask why you keep doing this. I said you’re scary because you’re terrifyingly good at controlling your emotions. I like women with weak spots.”

Suyeon let out a little “hmm” as she looked at Maru. Her smile and erotic gaze didn’t change, but Maru noticed that her eyes looked very cold inside.

“You’re too cold, but also gentle. It sounds hypocritical, but it’s true. I get why I told you everything last night. You’re not the type to console me. But you still listen. You don’t try to relate, but you understand. I can’t ask you for forgiveness, but I can at least confess. You even scolded me when I needed it.”

“Do you feel good after getting scolded by a child?”

“Yes, very. I was feeling pretty complicated recently, but that’s all gone now. People need to live their lives in a way that fits them. It’s impossible to return to how I was in the past. No matter what I do, I can’t fix my old scars. So I might as well live like this.”

Suyeon finished her orange juice in one gulp.

“If you keep planning on touching people like that, then please don’t approach minors. Especially the kids in the acting club.” “I have standards, you know? Pretty high ones. You think I do this to anyone?”

“Mm, that sort of sounds like a compliment. Thank you.”

“Hah.”

Suyeon put another piece of bread in the toaster.

“Care for another?”

* * *

Jiyeon couldn’t open the door in front of her. She woke up a while ago, but she couldn’t step outside. Suyeon and Maru were talking outside. She couldn’t hear the conversation, but she knew things would get awkward quick if she stepped out now.

‘What do I do?’

The worst part was how much she remembered everything from last night, she felt her face redden just thinking about what she said to Maru. She won't drink ever again from now.

"Bathroom."

"Oh my god, you surprised me."

Aram was grabbing the doorknob with a sleepy expression. Jiyeon stopped the girl.

"Things are bad outside."

"Really?" "Yeah, Senior and Instructor..."

"Reaaaally?"

Jiyeon closed her mouth with a shocked face, Aram's face was grinning with a teasing look. Right. This person was different from her. The girl opened the door, clearly expecting to run into some trouble. Unfortunately, all she ran into was Maru standing in front of her.

"Oh, Senior! I heard something interesting was happening outside."

"Nope. Go wash your face. You look like a mess."

"Really?"

Aram walked to the bathroom as if nothing had happened, Jiyeon looked at Maru with an awkward smile.

"You."

"Y-yes?"

"Never drink more than three glasses of beer."

"...Okay."

Right then, loud music started playing in the living room. The noise only got louder every time Suyeon tapped on the remote.

"Wake up, kids! It's lunchtime!"

* * *

Dowook breathed lightly into his hand, his breath still smelled slightly of soju. He learned how to drink from delinquents early into high school, but yesterday was the first time he had so many soju bombs. He regretted having thought lightly of drinking just because he sipped a little in the past. He immediately lost himself after a few glasses and before he knew it, he was in the bathroom. The next time he came to was an unconscious Daemyung lying down next to him, he felt a chill run down his back whenever the boy gagged with a pale face. Thankfully, Daemyung didn't throw up during the night.

"That instructor is weird."

They went to the top of the building after lunch and shouted their lungs out. Suyeon just laughed at him when he said he was trying to be a support member, he ended up having to shout to the sky as a result. He did feel a lot better after doing it though, so it was a plus.

Afterwards, Suyeon asked the club to make sounds with their hands over their stomach. She made them talk normally and even shout, she also taught them how to do abdominal breathing. Daemyung laughed when she said it'd make them run out of their breaths, he was shocked when he actually did.

- We'll stop here today. We can pick out a play tomorrow and practice more. I'm not very good at teaching, so you guys should prepare as well.

She sounded irresponsible, but that fitted her image well. Suyeon was an odd woman, but she was very serious when she taught. Trustworthy for sure.

"I'm supposed to make props though."

Dowook clicked his tongue as he got on the bus. He hated annoying things and he had a feeling things were only going to get more annoying from now.

Chapter 205

"This is the first time I've seen anything like this. That is, having an actor take part directly in storyboarding of the movie. Not to mention feedback from the author himself... I wouldn't have even thought about taking on this project if it wasn't for you, sir."

Director Yang left after speaking, Moonjoong sat back down after sending the man off. In his hands were the completed script and a storyboard, the dialogue was powerful and the story was very well-fleshed out. This was bound to be a big hit for sure.

"So this is the beginning."

It'd been a very long time since his last movie, he'd get really busy once they worked up a real schedule. Famous actors would receive the scripts all over and the extras would audition for their roles, the locations for filming were almost finished as well. Things were moving very quickly thanks to Junmin. Moonjoong's talented junior honestly just made things so much easier. With this, the only thing he needed to focus on, was simply, success.

Before starting, like most people, Moonjoong didn't feel much passion for the movie. But after receiving the script, Moonjoong felt an enormous wave of enthusiasm surging out of himself. A perfect movie was an ideal that was almost impossible in comparison to anything else, but he still wanted to make one despite knowing that. Moonjoong was a veteran, he was used to fueling his motivation with pure passion. He was good at taking care of his health and he had a good grasp of what his character would be like, the only thing left for him now was to put his soul into it. Junmin told him that things would take a little longer, as the man was focused on recruiting only the best. Sound, camera work, lighting, CG, editing, etc. Moonjoong was sure that the man was recruiting only the best in all these fields.

As a matter of fact, that knowledge became a burden to him. That burden, however, almost instantly transformed into a motivational pressure. This was it, this was the reason he stepped out of retirement. Moonjoong opened the script, internally thanking his friend for providing him with such an opportunity.

* * *

“My head still hurts a lot,” Daemyung said, putting a hand over his forehead.

As a matter of fact, it felt like he had a small bug crawling in his head. He had no idea alcohol could be this dangerous.

“You drank more than two bottles of soju along with beer in just two hours. It only makes sense you’d be hungover. I honestly didn’t know that you of all people would drink like this.”

Maru responded as he flipped a page in a novel. Daemyung smiled, he liked how tipsy he got when he drank beer a while ago. He thought this would be similar, so he just drank whatever Suyeon gave him at the time.

“Well, this is an experience.”

“Hah, yeah. Sure. I guess so. Dowook, you feeling alright?”

“Of course I am. Hungover after so little alcohol? Daemyung’s the weird one here.”

“I don’t think you have the right to say that. After all, you were the one who was in the bathroom for the longest.”

Dowook glared at Maru, making Daemyung smile a little. Dowook got mad very easily, but the boy often stayed quiet around Maru. Daemyung felt like he was looking at a bulldog and its trainer whenever he looked at the two.

“What the hell? Did you three do something without me?”

Dojin jumped into the group, looking at Maru for an explanation. Maru responded ‘we had alcohol with a sexy lady’ with a bored tone.

“What? Why didn’t you call me?!”

Dojin called them all sorts of names in mock anger. Daemyung tried to explain that it was the instructor, but Maru shook his head. Instead, the boy typed something into his phone. Shortly after, Iseul appeared with a smile, urging Dojin to step outside the classroom.

“...You’re evil.”

Maru did a high five with Iseul. Once Dojin was gone, Maru opened his mouth.

“You know practice starts today, right?”

“Am I included?”

Dowook asked with clear annoyance on his face, Maru firmly responded with an “of course”.

“Why?”

“For an off chance when someone gets sick. The end.”

“What?”

Dowook looked incredulous. Then again, the boy joined to be part of the support staff. It seemed like a complete waste to use him as a support member when they had so few club members though.

“Just do something. I think you could do really well, Dowook.”

“Shush. I hate doing annoying stuff. I’m not doing it.”

Dowook glared, prompting Daemyung to look at Maru. He was still finding the boy a little bit difficult.

“Big sis Soojin was a fan, she loved that you were in the club.”

“Why the hell does that woman have such a light mouth?”

“Hey, she’s your sister. You shouldn’t refer to her like that.”

Maru smiled teasingly. Dowook frowned and threw an eraser, which Maru dodged with a slight tilt of his head. Maru was too much, the boy liked teasing other people really subtly all the time. Thankfully, that tease was just enough to make Dowook take back his annoyance a bit.

“...Did she really like it that much?”

“She was so excited that I almost got excited with her. She was in this club in the past, you know. Of course, she’d like it.”

Maru closed the book with a smile, Dowook had a complex look as he stared at Maru. Daemyung realized how close the boy was to being won over with just that. Dowook was a very direct kid, so hesitancy like that was a good answer in itself.

“Just try it. If you don’t like it, you can always quit.”

Daemyung noticed Dowook’s flinch a little bit, Maru was truly a genius at toying at people like this. There was no way Dowook was going to let this go. This was it, the boy was going to act. Right then, Dowook stood up from his seat.

“Where are you going?”

“School store.”

Daemyung waved the boy goodbye.

“Alright, that’s one person.”

Maru smiled proudly.

“Jesus, what if he got mad?”

“I would’ve apologized. Looks like he’s pretty close with his sister now. That’s good.”

“Oh, right. Did you see it?”

“See what?”

Daemyung double-checked that Dowook was gone before opening the boy’s bag, the empty bag had a little cat doll inside it.

“He said his sister gave him this.”

“I’m surprised he’s carrying it around everywhere like that.”

“He is surprisingly kind.”

“How did you know it was from his sister though?”

“I dropped some money on the way back home with him at night. Dowook took this flashlight out for me. The cat didn’t fit him at all, so I asked him about it.”

Dowook’s response was casual at the time, but his voice was more gentle compared to usual.

“Mm, so that’s his weakness.”

Maru looked at the doll with an interested look, Daemyung shook his head and put the doll back inside the bag.

“Don’t talk about this. He might actually get mad.”

“I’ll just remember it for the future.”

“...You sound like a gang leader.”

“Hey, you aren’t going to find a person nicer than me out here. Speaking of which, how’s that thing with big bro Mintae going? Got a good script going yet?”

Daemyung shook his head.

“Nope. It’s hard. I don’t even know where to start.”

“Aren’t you setting your sights too large of a scale? Go easy. Start small.”

“It’s not that easy. Just how do people write? It’s incredible. It’s not like big bro Mintae can help me either.”

Daemyung was full of motivation when he first started, he wanted to create a vibrant scenario that Mintae would decorate the stage with. What he didn’t expect was that taking the first step was incredibly difficult, Daemyung didn’t even know what topic he wanted the play to be about. Love? He didn’t even know it. Political satire? Too difficult. Revenge? Sure, but it didn’t feel like enough.

Looking at other scripts that different writers wrote filled him with confidence, the words used weren’t that difficult and the story wasn’t too complex. Once he grabbed his pen though, he realized he had no idea where to go. Daemyung was the one who came up with the idea to start a play, too. He would take care of the writing, Maru the acting, and Mintae the staging.

To Daemyung, this was his first project. It will also become the first “result” he could show Junmin. He had no intentions of starting poorly, he wanted to create something wonderful. Perhaps that was why he was met with sighs when he looked at the blank sheet of paper before him.

“Writing, huh? I do know two people you could get advice from.”

“Really? I’ll try visiting them.”

Once, Daemyung thought the words “motivated” couldn’t be used to describe him at all, but he realized last year that he wouldn’t be able to change if he didn’t jump into something. Even acting gave him an answer once he turned desperate. Human relationships were the same, he’d be rewarded one way or the other as long as he pushed through.

Maru smiled mysteriously.

“You’re very motivated.”

“Yeah? ...Yeah.”

“Here are their phone numbers. One is an author named Gwak Joon. The other’s my girlfriend’s mom, she’s an author as well. I don’t know if she’s done anything related to plays, but... she’s a writer, so I’m sure she can offer some advice.”

Daemyung saved the two phone numbers on his phone.

“I’ll ask them for permission. I’ll tell you their answers tomorrow, so try calling them then. If they refuse...”

“It’s a bit rude, but I’ll try texting them.”

“Good.”

Daemyung balled up his fists tightly. Maru gave him this chance, he would be the one to make full use of it. In every script and autobiographies he’d read, he always found one line they had in common. A line that he had saved on his phone.

- Inspiration is everywhere. We call those who catch it ‘authors’. Authors aren’t anyone special, they just make use of the inspirations around them.

“Good luck.”

“Yeap, thanks.”

Daemyung’s dream was slowly starting to take form.

Chapter 206

“Alright, let’s go.”

5:32pm. The school was empty, save for a few students. Maru crossed the hallway to make his way to the fifth floor, the auditorium had long since turned to the baseball club’s training room. Their new practice room was an empty classroom next to the student kitchen. The classroom was a space for students to study after school, but it was hardly ever used. Mostly because the baseball club on the other side of the hallway was far too loud.

Maru and Daemyung opened the door to enter, Dowook put the chairs and desks aside. The classroom was small, but they’d have to get used to it.

“Running is practically impossible,” Daemyung commented.

Physical training here would be practically impossible.

“There’s no guarantee that she’ll train us like instructor Miso, so let’s not worry about that. If we really need to, we can just go outside.”

“True.”

Dwook looked up with a surprised expression.

“Physical training.”

“Sorry, were the words too complicated?”

Maru asked with a confused look. He was joking, of course. Dwook was surprisingly fun to tease.

“Don’t joke. The acting club, physical training? Why would we even need exercise?”

“Acting isn’t all about speaking, so it’s essential. The instructor would explain it properly when she gets here, but you start to lose the sense of your body when you get on stage. It’s practice for natural movement on stage,” Daemyung explained.

Dwook didn’t pry further, since the explanation made sense. Daemyung didn’t explain a lot of things though since Miso didn’t use physical training for just training. She tortured their unused muscles in order to increase their ability to express themselves, Maru still remembered the hellish stretches they had to go through back then.

‘We don’t need to be exact.’

At least they weren’t lying, Maru smiled thinking of the justification. Well, even if they told Dwook the truth, Maru was sure that the boy would stay out of sheer spite.

“Sorry, I’m late!”

“I’m here!”

“Sorry.”

The first years entered one by one. Before they knew it, Bangjoo and Aram became very good friends; they must’ve formed a connection from their similar personalities and their love of exercising. Jiyeon entered nervously as always, that attitude of hers would probably continue for a while. Maru had no intentions of telling her to fix it, doing that might do more damage than help. He knew better than anyone that problems like that required either themselves or their friends to fix.

“Alright, let’s organize a bit before we do anything else.”

Maru pointed at the chairs and desks that hadn’t been moved yet, the three first years frantically got to work.

“This should be good enough for moving around.”

They cleared some space after moving all of the desks, Not bad for practice. Maru checked the phone. It was almost 5:40 pm.

“Hello.”

“Right on time.”

Maru spoke quietly before turning to look at Suyeon, the woman came here in jeans and a white shirt. Honestly? Looking at her made him think that she wasn't an actress for nothing.

“Hey, hey, you know those gazes are only feeding my ego, right?”

Suyeon stepped up to the front of the classroom with a smile, she was holding a paper bag in her hand.

“Alright, take one.”

She took out a few small water bottles from the bag, the bottles were filled with a reddish liquid. They tasted a little sweet and a little sour.

“They are plums and goji berries. If you're going to be an actor, your body always needs to be at peak condition, especially your throat. From now on, you'll have to keep drinking water as you practice. This is my first assignment for you.”

The club members all tried a little sip, some clearly seemed to like it and those that didn't.

“Alright everyone, go grab a chair.”

Maru got Suyeon a chair before grabbing his own, Suyeon grabbed a broken piece of chalk from the board.

“The only thing I'm going to teach you guys is technique. I'll have to work with you guys about everything else, from choosing the play to figuring out the blocking in the play. Why? Because this is my first time. I'm only an amateur in this field as well.”

Daemyung widened his eyes at Maru upon hearing that, not like he had an answer though. Maru didn't know why Junmin sent this woman here either. For now, he gave the boy a nod. Daemyung nodded in response before looking away.

“We can start together from theory first, then physically get into it at the end. It has been a while since I've done this, so I'm excited. Alright! The second years probably know what's up, so I'm going to ask you freshmen a question. What's the main difference between a play and a TV drama?”

Jiyeon slowly raised her hand.

“Lee Jiyeon, correct?”

“Yes.” “Alright, give me an answer.”

“I think it's that one is filmed while the other is live.”

“Correct.”

Suyeon wrote the word “live” on the chalkboard.

“Plays are always done live. No recordings. Unlike movies or dramas, plays don't stop until it ends.”

Suyeon coughed lightly before lowering her voice, her voice that reverberated all over the classroom quickly crawled into a whisper.

“How’s my voice? Can you hear it?”

“Yes, somewhat.”

Jiyeon was the one who answered.

“Oftentimes in dramas, actors speak at this volume. Why? Because they have a microphone. It amplifies their voice, so they can act quietly. But what about on stage?”

“I don’t think you can.”

“Don’t think? No, you just can’t. Jiyeon, you’re going to have to fix that way of speaking a little. I hate it when people say they ‘think’ something is possible. Why do you think that’s the case?”

“B-because you probably look unconfident...”

Jiyeon looked down nervously.

“Worse. Using words like ‘probably’ lowers others’ opinions of you. It won’t be obvious, but talking that way affirms to the other side that you’re never serious with your opinions. If that happens, you’ll never be able to change no matter how much you want to. Why?”

Jiyeon shook her head with a frown.

“It’s because the ones that make you aren’t yourself, but rather your peers. Your peers are the ones that shape you. Though of course, some people are free from that. Like me.”

Suyeon was throwing a joke in the middle, but she looked more serious than ever.

“I’ll give you some homework, Jiyeon. Be confident from now on. Don’t sound so wishy-washy. Always be curt and confident. Got it?”

Jiyeon nodded as she bit her lips.

“You want to be an actress, correct?”

“Yes.”

“Then the first thing you need to do is to change how people view you. Once that happens, you can change yourself. This comes from experience, so you know it’s true.”

Maru rubbed his chin as he looked at Suyeon, that was surprisingly good advice. It would’ve been good if the advice came from a private setting, but perhaps it was too much for him to expect that much kindness from her. He appreciated that Suyeon made the effort to explain things in a way that made sense to Jiyeon. If she just told Jiyeon to ‘not be wishy-washy’, then Maru would’ve cut the woman off right there.

“Every actor is, in the end, just a human. I’d like to teach all of you how to become a confident person, someone that can actually love themselves. Life is hard enough as is, so you might as well love yourself while you’re at it.”

Suyeon looked over the students before gripping her chalk again.

“Speaking! It’s the end-all, be-all for all actors! Singers aren’t the only ones to make use of their diaphragm. Some actors in big theaters use microphones as well, but most still rely on their voice alone. Machines can’t carry raw emotion, orchestras are a good example. No matter how perfectly the machine plays back the sound, it can never be as good as the real thing.”

Suyeon motioned at them to stand up.

“Alright, starting with the breathing!”

* * *

They stepped out of the noisy classroom for a second, Suyeon was standing in the hallway with him.

“You’re surprisingly good.”

“There are limits to trying to half-ass everything. Do you think that’d work in this industry? There are tons of women as beautiful as me there. Politics and sex aren’t enough to earn living.”

“It was still a surprise, I really did learn a lot. You explained some things better than even instructor Miso.”

“Is that a compliment? Oh my.”

The two of them walked to a window on the hallway. The classroom was probably going wild inside with the students talking to each other.

“So, what’s your plan on teaching from now on?”

“I’ll teach what I can and we can work on the rest together. I’ll have to think about why Mr. Junmin put me here as well, maybe you guys are my homework.”

“Homework. Makes sense. Mr. Junmin never does things without good reason, after all.”

“Exactly. He never tells me what’s going on either. I’m 90% certain that there’s something wrong with his genitals.”

“Did you actually try to seduce him?”

“Wouldn’t you have, if you were in my shoes? He’s such a big figure in the industry!”

“Mm, I would’ve, honestly.”

“Right?”

Maru took out his phone.

“So I can contact you with this number from now?”

“No, that’s for work. Here’s my personal phone number.”

Suyeon quickly typed in her contacts after taking Maru’s phone from his hands.

“Consider this an honor. Not many men have my number.”

“Yes yes, thank you very much.”

“You’re really bad at flattery, you know that?”

“Life would probably be much easier if I was better at it, honestly.”

“Hah, you’re just a high schooler, you know? Anyway, I think you and Daemyung can go straight into practice, but the others are going to need some work.”

“They’ll catch up quickly, I’m sure. They’re all smart. We can just take care of a few things and the rest they’ll pick up on the way.”

“Alright, I’ll let you two take care of that, then. The competition begins in August?”

“The prelims would begin even before that, though.”

“Man, the nationals, huh? It’s really been a while. Oh, right, I saw you act before.”

“Me?”

“Yeah, that was the reason why I started going after you. Ah, you don’t have to worry about that anymore. I gave up after realizing how boring you were.”

“Thank goodness.”

Maru calculated the days in his head before asking his next question.

“When do we choose the play?”

“Tomorrow. I’ll find a few options and we can pick one from it.”

“Please choose something with fewer roles if possible.”

“Gotcha. But I’m sure the second years can double up on some of the smaller roles, right?”

“We can try.”

Suyeon smiled.

“Geunseok was no fun, but you guys might be. Don’t disappoint me.”

Suyeon walked by after patting his shoulder, right before entering the classroom, Suyeon turned around.

“Ah, the auditioning schedule’s out, by the way. It’ll start after the production crew hands over the script to all the big names, so check it out. There might be some tweaks in the middle though.”

“Gotcha.”

Maru started thinking as he looked at the classroom. Acting was important, but he needed to pay attention to the auditions as well for his personal resume.

‘Movies, huh.’

One thing was sure.

It was going to be a lot different compared to plays.

Chapter 207

Ganghwan stood on the stage, lit by the lights above. It'd been a while since he last performed in a small theater, regardless, their play debuted tomorrow. Practice ended a while ago, but their schedule was pushed back a bit because of the theater suddenly getting rented away by someone else. Money always came first, after all.

"Damn, actor Yang. Looking good under the light," Miso said with a smile.

"I know, I know."

"Get over here and have some coffee."

Ganghwan took the paper cup from Miso, it was coffee from a famous brand. He looked at the cup of coffee as he asked a question.

"How much were these again?"

"Five thou."

"And how much is our theater's ticket on a discount?"

"Five thou."

"As I thought."

"What, does the coffee feel too expensive?"

"No, I just feel like we need to work harder. The fact that this cup of coffee costs the same as a play that's an hour and a half long is a very telling sign of how unpopular plays are. How sad is that?"

"Why so depressed? That's very unlike you."

"I don't know, I'm just worried about money. I need to marry, I need to get a house, and I need to have a kid. The money I'm earning now is nowhere close to how much I'd need to support a family, I'll have to start thinking more about saving up."

"Why don't you make a girlfriend before any of that? Lose it with the strange stuff you're doing too. Being insane is great for acting, but it's not doing any favors for your love life."

"Hah, is there any woman that'd be willing to take care of me?"

"Are you a child?"

"Hey, don't you know that no man ever truly grows up?"

"Who cares."

Miso poked Ganghwan's head with her index finger. Ganghwan looked at the stage, he didn't dislike this life. He sacrificed everything to acting from a young age because he liked it. He found that working for a national theater company was far too boring, so he stepped out to join a smaller one. He built his reputation there and entered a famous theater company in Seoul. Problem was, Ganghwan just wasn't a fan of working in groups. Working there gave him a lot more freedom than before, but he had very little

personal time. Worse, he didn't have a say on the plays he performed in. A pro gets paid on a monthly basis, acting for whatever play that gets assigned to them. Sometimes they needed to work perfectly despite their dislike for it, Ganghwan hated having to do that.

It wasn't like money wasn't important, he just wanted to enjoy what he did to earn it. So, he stepped out of the theater company. Many of his friends told him he was crazy; he stepped out of a government-run theater company, and now, a famous theater company in Seoul. They asked what in the world he was planning on doing. Ganghwan responded, "acting". Afterwards, he met Junmin and started working as a freelancer of sorts. When there was a role he wanted, he did his absolute best to get it. If he found a play he wanted to do, then he invested all his money to produce it.

He had no problems living this way, but he did feel a little bad about it later down the line. After all, even famous actors are easily forgotten if they disappear from the spotlight for too long.

"It'd be hard to live off of doing only the things I want to do, right?"

Ganghwan put a hand over the stage floor. He was 32. He wasn't that late in starting something new, but not that early either. Nowadays, everyone put their thoughts into action very quickly. He noticed a while back that even singers started acting nowadays. The term 'actor' no longer stood for 'a person good at acting', but rather 'a person who acts'.

Though of course, singers still didn't have much influence over smaller theaters. They were usually put into musicals, massive plays, or dramas. Places where they would really shine. A senior of Ganghwan that never gave up on his dreams recently gave up after losing his role to an idol. The senior didn't feel too bad about it, he just said that this was how the world worked. He couldn't fight against the flow, so he just decided to go with it.

The idols that entered the world of musicals got very bad reviews, they got insulted all over the internet. Looking at that, Ganghwan only felt that the industry really was flowing towards the singers. Idols create controversies. Controversies make money and the acting industry desperately needed money. The amount of money that a single idol could bring them was incredible.

Despite their bad acting, musicals with idols in it always sold out. What in the world was going on? If the people were right when they said that musicals should've ended as an absolute failure. But looking at it from the big picture, it was a clear success.

The senior who gave up on his dreams smiled bitterly after hearing the story. "Actors grow according to how many times they've been on stage. It's the number of chances that they've been given that nurtures them. Keep watching. Those idols will soon be even better at acting than me." The man was right. In a flash, those idols became good enough to act professionally. The criticism directed at them disappeared, decisive proof that these idols really were the new future.

The industry didn't let go of this, of course. They started recruiting more pretty idols to be on stage. The actors were very much against it, but who cares? Idols were where the money was. The bigger actors could still choose the people they would work with, but many actors had to act with idols that just slipped their way into the musical.

"Maybe I should sing, too."

“You think that’s easy?”

“A thirty-year-old idol. What do you think?”

“What the hell? Yang Ganghwan, come back to your senses. You’re making no sense.”

“I thought I was known as an oddball.”

“But you’re not being funny. Saying funny odd things is definitely different from saying depressing odd things.”

Miso sat down on the stage next to him. She was a good friend who instantly agreed to act with him. Despite the uppercut she gave him when he told her that he wouldn’t be able to pay her much, she still participated.

“Alright, stop being dumb and think about the play tomorrow. That’s more like you.”

“Hey, come on. I’m thirty. Can’t I start thinking about reality now? Are you trying to look down on me just because you have a boyfriend and the money?”

“Yup. When you stepped out of the national theater, I worked in a factory. When you worked in that famous theater company in Seoul, I stepped on whatever stage I could find. Wouldn’t I feel bad if I still had less money than you after all that?”

“Fine, Yang Miso. Good for you. I’m jealous, so jealous.”

Ganghwan crushed the paper cup in his hand. He was feeling childish today, probably because he saw his senior just yesterday. The man asked him for a drink after a few years, saying that soldering made decent money. After one, two bottles of soju, the senior lay down on the table with a small mutter.

- Why is life so boring? My life is stable, but there’s nothing special about it. Never come here, Ganghwan. If you’re going to die, just die there. Don’t be like me.

Ganghwan didn’t believe people could truly give up on their dreams, because dreams always floated right in front of you, taunting you to come for it. If people say they gave up, it only meant that they closed their eyes. They’re just ignoring their dreams to the best of their ability, because they knew that if they opened their eyes, they’d go back to chasing for it.

“Did you watch Cats?” Ganghwan asked.

Miso nodded.

“How was it? Was he good?”

“Who? That idol called Getit or whatever?”

“Yeah.”

“Mm, yeah, he was. He was double casted and the audience went wild whenever he came out. I thought I was at a concert, I even found a person waving a glowstick. The staff took it away quickly, but... You know, I was surprised. So many young people watching the play with such passion... It kind of felt disappointing.”

Miso was also an actress. She was mostly an instructor, but she was always ready to be on stage. Of course, she'd feel bitter about the idols. Especially after thinking of all the no-name actors that likely tried to get the role themselves.

Miso took a sip of her coffee.

"Five thou for a cup of coffee. As you said, people likely don't come to see plays because they think it's worth less than even this cup of coffee. Though, I do understand the mentality. The industry desperately wants to keep plays afloat and bringing in idols helps sell those tickets. That means they can pay their staff properly and plan out their next play as well. If I were in their shoes... I would've chosen idols as well because pride won't feed you."

Miso looked straight into Ganghwan's eyes before punching him straight in the stomach.

"I can't stand *you* of people being depressed, though! You look the most like yourself when you do what you want, so just don't think about it. Just work harder. Hard enough, so that people start coming to see your plays for you, not those idols. Got it, actor Yang?"

Ganghwan smiled, rubbing his stomach in pain. He was glad he had a friend like this.

"Yup, I should just do my best."

Ganghwan stood up from his seat. He made a promise to himself back in the past, he would fill the national theater with audiences with just his name. It was a dream that wasn't too grand, but it certainly wasn't a small one either. A dream he'd forgotten about after all this time.

"Just don't disappear out of nowhere. It'd be troublesome if the main character disappears," Miso said with a smile.

"I won't disappear when we still have a play on schedule."

"Of course, of course."

"Ah, I got a call from Senior Junmin. They're going to start filming soon."

"I heard about the audition as well. Think they're making posts about it on the internet right now."

"There's going to be so many people from the rumors alone, especially since this is going to be a big one."

"I think Junmin's spreading those rumors on purpose. Besides, I heard most of the actors that got the script said they'd do it as well."

"As expected of Senior Moonjoong, huh."

"Or Senior Junmin. He's pretty remarkable with people after all."

"It's not the budget that's on a blockbuster level... it's the cast."

"Damn it, I would've auditioned if it wasn't for this," Miso said, tapping the floor.

"You're only saying that because I'm here, aren't you?"

“Of course I am.”

“I’ll pay you more if we sell a lot of tickets, will that do?”

“Eh? That’s it?”

“What do you mean that’s it? I’m almost bankrupt as is.”

“Man, you’re incredible.”

“You literally just told me to live like this!”

“Blah blah, do what you want.”

Miso shrugged.

“Ah, did you hear? I heard the new instructor of that high school you used to teach is Ms. Suyeon.”

“...What?”

Miso’s expression turned feral in an instant, maybe he should’ve kept his mouth shut about this?

“Did you... have a bad relationship?”

“I’d be surprised if anyone had a good relationship with that woman. Give me a second, I’m going to call Junmin right now.”

Miso stepped out with a huff, Ganghwan scratched his head for a second before smiling.

“Whatever. She’ll take care of it.”

* * *

Suyeon looked at her phone with furrowed eyebrows. There was a name she didn’t want to see on her screen. Why was this woman calling her so early in the day? She picked up the call with a frown but still made her voice to sound as bright as possible.

“Oh my, Ms. Miso. Did you need anything?”

- Let me just ask you one thing. Are you instructing Woosung High’s acting club?

“Yes. Why?”

- I understand.

The call hung up. Suyeon closed her phone with a deepened frown, she really didn’t like this Miso woman.

Chapter 208

‘Doesn’t look like it leaks.’

Maru checked the container behind the school from the inside. It rained quite a bit last night, a sign of the coming spring. Normally he would’ve enjoyed the rain with no worries, but the container demanded

his attention. There were many wooden props inside, even a bit of humidity inside the container could easily make them rot. Out of worry, Maru arrived early at school to check.

“Eh? Senior! Hello!”

He heard a loud voice from behind him in the middle of his analysis, behind him was Bangjoo.

“You were worried too?”

“Yes. How is it? Is it leaking?”

“Nope, it’s all good. The waterproof paint is doing its job very well, we just need a fan inside to lower the humidity.”

The container didn’t come with its own fan, so they needed to check it on a regular basis, they’d have to keep airing it out whenever it rains. Mm, a schedule may be necessary.

“You’re surprisingly detailed, by the way.”

Bangjoo at first glance looked very disorganized, the type that would meet every problem with pure energy. But Bangjoo managed to catch onto a problem that even Daemyung didn’t notice.

“I started paying attention to stuff like this once I started living alone. Stuff like if I left the boiler on, if I turned off the gas, and such. I thought about this as it rained yesterday.”

Bangjoo smiled.

Living by yourself well, instead of just ordering food every day was a lot more difficult than one might expect.

“You said you started living by yourself this year?”

“Nope, the first year of middle school, to be exact. Grandma’s health started deteriorating around then, so my parents moved down to Jeju with her then. I lived with my sister around that time, but... she practically lived at work.”

“Amazing. So you’ve lived alone for four years. Can you cook?”

“Of course. I wanted to show off my skills when I invited all of you last time. I’m very sad I couldn’t.”

Bangjoo really was something else. He was as polite as he could ever be, but he never ground himself down. He was very confident anywhere, he could make people like him just with his gaze. If that personality of his could shine on stage, the stage would be his.

“Your sister must trust you a lot if she lets you live by yourself at this age. I’d have been worried sick if I were her.”

“...W-who knows. My sister is a complete mystery, so I have no idea what she thinks of me.”

Come to think of it, Bangjoo always became awkward whenever he talked about his sister. He always got quiet whenever her name got mentioned on the table.

“Do you have a bad relationship with her? Ah, if it’s personal, you don’t have to talk about it.”

“That’s not the case. No, we do fight a lot, but she never gets me mad. It’s more like I can’t, she’s very weird. Our parents gave up on her as well. She’s just... well, she’s incredible.”

“I don’t get it, but alright.”

“She just can’t be compared to normal people. She’s a monster.”

Bangjoo frowned like he just bit on a bitter persimmon. It piqued Maru’s curiosity. Just what did she do?

“Eh? You were here.”

Daemyung arrived just before class started, as expected of the boy.

“No problems?”

“Nope, we’ll just have to regularly check on it.”

“Phew, thank goodness. I was worried since last night. Morning, Bangjoo.”

“Good morning, senior!”

Bangjoo shouted as loudly as ever.

* * *

5 o’clock. The acting club all gathered on the fifth floor.

“The instructor will be here in thirty minutes, so let’s stretch a little bit? Here, follow Daemyung.”

Daemyung was good at teaching softly. Teaching was a skill, not many people could unravel their thoughts into words that were easy to understand. Daemyung was good at understanding things and also had an observant eye. He was a stand-in instructor for whenever the actual instructor was gone.

“We’ll do abdominal breathing first. Take a deep breath and once you feel your lungs full, push it downwards. That’s how you put pressure on your diaphragm so that you can take a deeper breath. Relax your shoulders and feel your larynx moving downwards.”

Everyone breathed following Daemyung, the way Miso and Suyeon taught them was no different, aside from the fact that Miso made you breathe until your head was spinning. After the exercise ended, everyone stretched their muscles. Daemyung was still chubby, but he was very flexible. Most of the former members were, as a matter of fact. The result of a year’s worth of harsh training with Miso, even now, they occasionally thought about having to stretch their legs against the wall.

“Alright, after the ankles, then...”

Right then, Suyeon entered the classroom. Today, she had tied her hair into a ponytail. She greeted everyone with her sunglasses lying on her forehead.

“Wow, you were practicing?”

“Mm? Ah, yes.”

Daemyung tried to go back to his original spot before Suyeon stopped him.

“Do it to the end.”

“Me?”

“Who else?”

Daemyung went back to work nervously, the members looked away from Suyeon as well and resumed their focus on Daemyung.

“We’re going to pick up coins from the floor as slowly as possible. We’ll pick up ten hundred won coins.”

Daemyung slowly bowed down as if he was in slow motion as he picked up the coins.

“Don’t just move your hips and arms though, you need to slowly move your center of mass forward like you’re actually picking up a coin. It’s going to be very difficult at first.”

Daemyung slightly altered the exercise Miso had taught them. Moving slowly was easy, but following specific instructions doing it wasn’t. Even walking was the combined effort of many muscles, it required perfect balance and focus to be able to do it slowly. Doing it allowed one to understand their body more thoroughly. The understanding of one’s muscles easily led to natural movements, which in turn brought about natural acting.

Just last year, the acting club members didn’t even know how to act. Maru was the same. They got used to it quickly, but it did take a lot of practice.

“Good job,” Suyeon said with a clap.

Daemyung lost his form a little bit. Hah, he was totally embarrassed. Maru smiled as he looked at Suyeon, the woman was complimenting all of them. Miso was a perfectionist, the contrast was like night and day. She came at you like a storm and barked “again” if she didn’t like it, insults were common and compliments were few and far between. Not that she was bad or anything. The club’s skills improved at an incredibly fast pace thanks to it, receiving compliments felt like receiving an amazing gift as well. Miso’s training was harsh, but she didn’t insult a person directly. She was just rough.

“Alright, let me try as well.”

On the other hand, Suyeon was soft. If Miso was a pine tree, then Suyeon was a reed. Unlike Miso, who was direct in everything, Suyeon gently led a person on until she got what she wanted. It made sense that the two didn’t get along.

“Wow.”

Jiyoong let out an exclamation of surprise, the entire club turned their heads. Suyeon was picking up the invisible coin just like Daemyung, slow enough to make her seem like she was standing still. While Daemyung looked like he had lost his balance a tiny bit, Suyeon really did look like she was picking up a coin, very, very slowly.

Bangjoo and Aram tried the same movement, compelled by their competitive urges, but quickly gave up after losing their balance several times.

‘Not many people can have a body like that.’

She had a smooth curve from head to toe. She wasn't just skinny, she had muscles underneath all over the place. She was the perfect balance between utility and beauty. Maru thought back to what she said, about how it was difficult to survive in the industry with politics alone. She too must've prepared a lot to get to where she was now.

"Daemyung should handle the stretch routines from now on. I'll help you out, so try it."

Suyeon tapped Daemyung's shoulder in a form of encouragement, Daemyung's face immediately turned red. Oh dear, hope he doesn't fall for her.

"You're a student, you know."

"W-what are you talking about?"

"Just date someone your age. It's for the best."

Maru whispered towards Daemyung before looking forward, he had no intentions of revealing to the club what kind of a person Suyeon was. He wasn't looking to ruin relationships. Suyeon was winking at him, he noticed. What a woman. Did she forget that she told him everything already?

"Alright, we've stretched well, so we might as well begin, eh?"

Suyeon pulled out a stack of paper from her bag, it was probably the script.

"Alright, let's take a look at what we want to do. We'll talk about how to practice afterwards. We don't have a lot of members, so I chose something with fewer roles. See which ones you guys like."

"What would you like us to do, instructor?" Aram asked.

"No comment. You guys are going to be the ones that are going to be performing this on stage. It only makes sense that you'll be the ones that choose."

"Can we really choose anything?" Dowook asked, he sounded just a tiny bit rude as per usual.

"Do what you want. I'm only here to support you."

Suyeon handed them the scripts, there were more than six of them. She must've prepared a lot. Maru opened the script, it was lined with a ballpoint pen. Probably from Suyeon. So she didn't just pick it based on the title or anything, Maru appreciated that.

"Um, Maru."

Halfway through, Maru noticed that the pile of scripts was still in front of him. The entire club was looking at him.

"What are you doing, not reading?"

"We were wondering if you could read it first before giving us your opinion."

Everyone nodded in agreement towards Daemyung's words, Maru sighed.

“Shut it with the nonsense and get to reading. Give me your thoughts after reading all of the scripts here. Don’t think about the number of roles or the props or anything. Just judge it based on how fun it seems.”

Maru handed the club the scripts again. Daemyung nodded, but the others seemed to have a bit of a difficult time reading the script.

“You have it hard as well,” Suyeon said.

Maru shrugged.

Chapter 209

Six scripts. Six vastly different stories with interesting characters in each of them, Suyeon clearly spent a lot of time picking them out. So she was surprisingly good at doing her work, Maru instantly lost his suspicion about her.

“Which one did you like?” Maru asked.

Suyeon had stepped out for a second, saying that she had no intentions of interfering with their selection process.

“This was the one that had the deepest impression on me.”

Aram spoke as she handed over the script numbered ‘4’. Dowook chose that one as well, saying that he couldn’t be bothered to choose a different one.

“So we’re all thinking similarly, huh. I liked that one too.”

Even Daemyung joined in. The fourth script was a romance story about a couple that met by chance. The story was set in a train station after they both end up missing a train that comes every two hours and starts talking to each other. They go on a short trip around the station, and part ways when the train finally arrives. The story never explained if the two got together at the end or not, but when done well, it would leave a euphoric feeling to the audience.

“Love is where it’s at.”

Bangjoo raised his hand.

“Is that so.”

There were five cast members. The stage was a platform, so they wouldn’t need that many props either and costumes weren’t an issue as well. It came with a lot of merits and Maru was honestly a fan of that. Especially since the story was pretty good, too. There was no reason for him to not take it, but...

“What do you think, Jiyeon?”

There was still one person that had yet to speak her mind, Jiyeon slowly looked down at the floor as she fumbled around a bit.

“I... Like that one too.”

She closed her mouth with just that.

Maru looked closely at the girl, some people just didn't like to stand out and that tendency only worsened in a country like South Korea. Perhaps Jiyoong's reaction just now was the right one to take in a company, but it really wasn't the case in the club. They were in school, the one place where people were free and encouraged to express all of their opinions. Maru kept getting annoyed at Jiyoong, because of just how much she resembled Daemyung in his first year. He knew she just couldn't help it, but it was annoying regardless. He asked her one more time.

"Really? Do you like this?"

If she says yes here, he'd just go forward with it. He'd already told her once that it was ok to be timid. Timidness implied sensitivity and sensitivity meant that one could express their emotions better, but timidness didn't mean you couldn't be greedy. Maru had no intentions of continuously supporting someone completely unable to express their greed.

There were two main characters in the fourth script, just the couple. There was one more female character that appeared briefly, but she was no more than a passing bystander. The female lead of the play was someone very active and positive as well, just like Aram. That meant that Jiyoong would naturally have to take the role of the bystander.

- I want to be on stage. I want to be an actor.

Jiyoong did express greed in the past, greed doesn't show itself to a static human being. Was Jiyoong really satisfied with being a bystander? Maru's eyes met with Jiyoong's, the girl quickly looked down in surprise. She clearly had something else in mind, but she wouldn't open her mouth.

"Alright, we'll go with this."

Maru had no intentions of feeding the girl what she wanted, he already gave her a chance which she'd failed to take. Now, they'd just need to figure out the roles. But just before he pushed aside the other scripts away, Daemyung opened his mouth.

"Um, Jiyoong?"

"Yes?"

"This place is still a little foreign to you, isn't it? We're hard to deal with."

"N-no, that's not it."

"Really? But it is for me. You're better than me."

Daemyung grinned brightly, Maru shut himself up and stepped away. The boy was trying to do something, so he might as well respect it.

"I'm very timid. I'm also a total coward. And I was bullied a lot because of this. I mean, I look like this too, so it was almost inevitable."

Daemyung rubbed his knees with an awkward laugh, the club members turned to look at him.

"I was also unable to speak my mind in my first year. I hated grabbing attention, that's still the case now. It's difficult to speak to you guys."

Daemyung's cheeks were reddening with embarrassment.

"But you know, if you shut yourself up and give in to peer pressure... It might be fine for now, but that tendency of yours will only continue. If you keep being silent like this, you really won't be able to say a single word in the future. No matter how much it hurts."

Daemyung rolled up his hands into a fist.

"Of course, not much might change if you voice your thoughts now, but you'll feel much better if you do. I know it's difficult to open up. Believe me, I've been there. That's why I want to tell you, it's important to express your thoughts with words."

Upon realizing that the entire club was looking at him, Daemyung quickly lost his composure.

"So I mean... Uh... Don't think too much and just say your thoughts out loud. Because I won't be laughing no matter how weird it is. Ah, uh, of course, that includes all of us. Probably..."

Daemyung sighed exhaustedly. The boy was so natural on stage, but he hated receiving attention offstage. Maru knew how tiring that must've been for the boy. After all, he was the type that liked to help from the sides. It must've taken a tremendous amount of courage to speak out in front of everyone like that. Perhaps Daemyung saw himself in Jiyeon, enough to give advice in the middle of a meeting.

Silence enveloped the classroom, but it still felt warm. Maru took a look at the club members one by one, they were looking away from Jiyeon as best they could to avoid pressuring her.

Maru turned to look at Daemyung, he himself couldn't give this sort of advice. He was too old mentally, so he only knew how to speak directly to people. He could prop a person up with all sorts of lies, but he honestly didn't want to do that to a companion. He didn't want to use lies to try to improve a relationship.

Unlike him, Daemyung was soft. He was someone who could use gentle words that came from his heart to coax a person. Indeed, Daemyung was a better fit to be the president of the club. No, he had to be the president.

Maru turned to look at Jiyeon, Daemyung had set the stage for her. It must not be very easy for her to talk, but if she stays silent here... she wouldn't ever be able to change. He could only hope that the girl didn't disappoint Daemyung.

"I... Like this one. I'm sorry."

Jiyeon spoke as she bit her lips. The phrase "I'm sorry" was glued to her tongue, her habit just didn't seem to go away. Daemyung gave Maru a little glance, he clearly was begging Maru not to scold her. Maru shrugged before opening his mouth.

"Tell me why you liked it. Just an impression is fine."

Jiyeon nodded, seemingly having made up her mind. Maru saw the girl fight against injustice about two times now. Both times involving Geunseok, actually. In any case, the girl did have the courage inside her. She breathed a bit before speaking.

"I liked the variety of characters in this play. They all have similar amounts of screen time as well. I thought everyone would be happy with the roles they got. The props are good too since it's in a modern setting. That's why..."

Jiyoon's voice crawled back into her.

"Hey hey, we don't bite, so just keep going," Aram said, punching Jiyoon lightly on the shoulder.

Jiyoon put the script between her arms as she continued.

"There's two female characters and four male characters as well, so I thought it'd be easier to manage. It doesn't have many props either, since it's set in a prison cell. The others all seemed fun, but they either require too many props or have too many roles."

"But the first play we talked about doesn't have a lot of props either," Maru criticized.

Daemyung gestured at him to stop, but he just ignored it. Jiyoon looked down nervously, but she didn't close her mouth this time.

"...The first play only had a lot of lines for the main characters. That isn't a bad thing, but... I'd like for our first play together to be in harmony. I think that'd be fun. No, I know that'd be fun."

Jiyoon's voice assumed absolute confidence at the end. Maru smiled, The girl was pretty persuasive. He wouldn't have changed his mind if her arguments were all over the place, but with her last line...

"I like this script as well. So it's four on two?"

Maru put his vote on the third script as well. He was also a fan of the play being set in a prison cell, with the characters looking back on their lives with regret. Moreover, there was a character he wanted as well. A character he almost felt like he needed to play.

"Mm, I think I like this one as well," Aram said.

It seemed like the girl was pushing for her friend, but whatever.

"Choose whatever, I don't care," Dowook said, lying back on the floor.

Bangjoo and Daemyung were the only two left at this point.

"Come to think of it, I wouldn't have any lines on the fourth one, so I'll go with three!"

Bangjoo raised his hand, Daemyung smiled like a buddha as he said "let's go with three then".

"Alright, three it is."

Maru stood up, it was time to call Suyeon back in. He opened the door and looked left and right, he saw her standing at one end of the hallway. She wasn't alone though, there was an all too familiar person conversing with her.

'Why is instructor Miso...'

Maru walked towards the two with a small frown.

Chapter 210

"I didn't think you'd come in person. Would you like some tea?"

Miso smiled looking at Suyeon.

"We might as well talk here, since you're probably very busy. Plus, we're not close enough for tea now, are we?"

"Is that so? Here I thought I got pretty close with you."

Suyeon smiled with relaxed confidence. Miso reacted with an even larger smile, probably out of competitiveness.

"I'll be direct. Why are you in charge of this club? I don't think this would benefit you."

"Why would it not benefit me to raise the future generation of our industry? Well, I suppose it makes sense that you'd look down on jobs like this. Since you're already so successful and all."

"You have a real talent for misunderstanding people's words, don't you? If you're not completely twisted inside, then I'm pretty sure you have hearing issues. I have a doctor friend I can recommend if you'd like."

"I'm fine. I've no issues since I'm young. Ah! I suppose you'd have to take care of it though, with you being in your thirties and all."

Miso prepared a lot of comebacks, but all of those went straight out the window as soon as she heard 'thirties'. She wanted to grab Suyeon right there and push the woman to the ground, but could only grind her teeth when the woman brushed it off as 'just a joke'. This person was too talented at making people mad, Miso decided to give up on arguing for now.

"Again, back to the point. Why are you instructing the club? I thought you wouldn't be interested in something like this."

"Why would you care about what I decided to do? Before that, how dare you judge me without knowing anything about me? That sounds incredibly unpleasant to hear from someone I barely know."

A shadow formed over Suyeon's face, Miso stared for a second before sighing.

"I'm sorry. That was my mistake."

Miso felt ashamed that she just judged Suyeon out of baseless rumors, her emotions were always an issue. She wouldn't even be here right now if she allotted a few seconds for rational thought.

'But I just couldn't stay still.'

It was Blue Sky! Where she found her dream and honed her skills! It was a place very close to her heart. She would've been very mad if the new instructor was only here for the money or some other ulterior motive.

"I'd still like to know. Why did you take this job?"

Suyeon leaned back on the wall with crossed arms, she opened her mouth after a moment of silence.

"It was a request from Mr. Junmin. You know as well as me that he doesn't give out jobs for no reason, right?"

"Of course, of course. But did you take the job just because of that? That can't be..."

"That's right. There was no other reason. I was free at the time as well."

"Really? That's it? Just because someone else told you to do it?"

"Just because'? This is Mr. Junmin we're talking about. The normal response when he asks you to do something is to just do it. I've never had a loss by following his orders. Even if I did, he always repays me with something more. That's why I trust his decision. It's like having a winning lottery ticket every time."

Suyeon paused as she stopped crossing her arms.

"Of course, I didn't take this job to just kill time. Don't worry about that. I'll deliver the best results so long as I'm here. I don't know why you came here with that expression, but if you're here to just mess with me... I suggest you leave."

Miso flipped her hair back, she didn't have much of a comeback. Logically, Suyeon was correct. She was the one that gave up on the job due to her other obligations, she was the one who asked Junmin for help too. Looking at the big picture, it was easy to see that all of her problems were solved. But honestly speaking, she just didn't like seeing Suyeon being her replacement. It wasn't like she saw the woman messing about men herself, but she'd heard enough rumors to know enough about it. One can even say she hated her since she was acquainted with the people who Suyeon messed with.

A woman who sells her body for profit, Miso got such an offer in the past as well. Just about any woman in the industry got the offer if they looked attractive enough, it was an open secret. People in power ask for anything from a simple meal to sex, Miso always refused such requests. She needed money, but she earned that through a factory. If there was an opportunity, she ran to take it with her own ability. She had many moments of despair, but in the end, she reached her goals on her own terms.

Perhaps that was why she couldn't understand Suyeon, people like her gave pretty women in the industry a bad name. The woman went against everything Miso stood for and it's for that reason that she didn't even want to acknowledge the woman as an equal.

"I really don't like that look of yours. I don't think I've done anything wrong to you."

Suyeon asked with a raised eyebrow, Miso felt like something inside her could snap in an instant.

"You didn't do anything to me directly, no. I've heard many detailed things about you from people I know nonetheless, so I don't have a choice but to respond this way. You know what I'm talking about, don't you?"

Suyeon's eyes twitched with a mocking smile.

"Did you come here to lecture me?"

"I just want what's good for the club."

"Oh my, and who do you think you are to judge me like that?"

Suyeon stepped forward, seemingly ready to lash out physically at any moment. Miso stepped forward with a glare as well. She'd never lost in a fight and there was no way she was about to step back in this one.

"You're quite something, Ms. Yang Miso."

"I can say the same about you, Ms. Kim Suyeon."

Miso definitely couldn't leave the club to a woman like this, she thought.

"Not even kids fight like this."

Miso turned her head in surprise at the new voice, Maru was looking at the two of them calmly. Suyeon stepped back as well.

"If you raised your voice anymore, everyone in the club would've heard you. If you care about your pride, I'd suggest that you lower it."

Ugh, that's right. Miso forgot that there were kids here.

"Sorry. I've acted totally immature, no thanks to someone over here," Suyeon said with a smile.

Miso felt her insides start boiling over again.

"If you want a fight, we might as well head to the back of the school. I'll be the judge. Why don't we make it so that the first to get a nosebleed is the loser? Shall we go now?"

Maru stared at them with irritation written all over his face. Being told something like this from a high schooler would've normally made her very mad, but Miso wasn't mad at all right now. The boy had a strange ability to persuade those around him.

"I get it, so calm down," Miso sighed.

There was nothing worse than being told off by a child, what made it worse was the fact that she had no excuse.

"It just won't do to have the old and new instructor fighting each other. We're lacking people as is and this really isn't helping. Don't you know businesses can only run well when management has a good head on their shoulders?"

"Fine, fine. Ugh, you know it all."

Even Suyeon gave in.

"I think it'd be good to end it with an apologetic hug here. What do you think?"

"Are you crazy?"

"Do you want to die?"

The two responses came out at the same time, Maru shrugged.

"You two clearly have nice chemistry together, maybe you can get along in the future. Ah, instructor, we chose on a script. Could you go talk to them about it?"

Miso watched as Suyeon gave her one last glare before heading back to the classroom, Suyeon looked back about halfway back.

“If you want to talk about me, I’d suggest you actually learn a bit about what I’m like first.”

She was picking a fight until the very end, Miso tried to say something but stopped after seeing Maru shake his head.

“You’re still as passionate as always.”

“I’m going to settle it with that woman at some point, don’t try to stop me.”

“Settle it?”

Miso looked at Maru.

“That’s right. You should know as well, don’t you? You must’ve heard about her from Ganghwan.”

“I think I have an idea.”

“Are you okay with it?”

“With what?”

Miso stared at Maru dumbly, surely the boy didn’t misunderstand her question.

“Don’t you know what I’m talking about? You just said you know about her.”

“That’s right.”

“...Am I the weird one here?”

“Yes, very much so.”

Maru looked back for a second, Suyeon was already gone inside.

“First, Kim Suyeon is our current instructor. Second, Yang Miso gave up on her role as the instructor due to her busy schedule. Third, the acting club needs an instructor. Where in any of these can you put personal feelings into it?”

Maru spoke in a professional tone, Miso felt something come up inside her but stopped herself.

“No one knows what that woman might do. She may sound serious for now, but that might not be the case later on. She might just leave out of nowhere.”

“Why do you think that?”

“Well, that’s because...”

“Work ethic and one’s sex life have nothing in common. I know you get emotional easily, instructor. I know you’re just worried about us as well, but I can’t help but feel a bit annoyed by this right now. If you make instructor Suyeon give up on this job, will you fill in for her?”

Maru asked with a slight frown, Miso was unable to answer.

"I understand that you're doing this with good intentions, but you should understand that we never asked for your help. If you don't like instructor Suyeon, I suggest you talk to her about it somewhere private. It's only been a few days, but she's done a fantastic job so far. I'd rather not lose her over petty arguments."

"So you don't care about what this woman has done?"

"Radically speaking, yes. She didn't commit a crime, she just has a different way of going about life. I've no intention of judging that. Frankly, I don't care as long as that aspect of her doesn't damage the club."

What should she say to those confident eyes of his? Miso pulled her hair for a second before letting out a sigh.

"I came out of worry, but it seems I was completely foolish."

"Next time if you're worried, just give me a call. You don't have to come here without warning, especially with your busy schedule."

Ugh, she knew this would happen, but she still couldn't help but be surprised when she got pushed back in an argument with him. In an ethical standpoint, she was correct too... But she too understood that some things came first before ethics, so she could only shake her head.

"Also, please bring some snacks next time. What do you think your juniors would think when their senior comes to see them empty-handed?"

Miso threw a punch with a smile at the boy's stomach. She would've felt a bit better if he took the hit, but he just blocked it.

"Oh?"

"I'm against violence, sorry."

"I'm not, so why don't you just take a hit from me real quick?"

Miso only stopped after getting a hit on his head.

"Please don't look at instructor Suyeon too badly," Maru said as he scratched his eyebrow.

"What, you fall for her or something?"

"I knew you were childish, but you've only gotten worse, haven't you?"

Maru ran back to the class with just that, Miso thought about following the boy for a second before turning towards the staircase. She remembered what Maru had just told her.

'Fine, I'll buy snacks.'

She came to save them from a villainess but nearly ended up as one instead... Miso stepped down to the first floor with a bitter smile.