

## Once Again 501

### Chapter 501

“Sir,” Suyeon said cheerily.

The elder made a kind smile and looked at her.

“Don't Geunsoo-oppa and I suit each other?”

Geunsoo, who sat next to her, tried to stand up and leave, but Suyeon's hand was quicker and grabbed him. Unable to leave, Geunsoo made an awkward smile.

“Suyeon, let go of me.”

Maru sipped a bit of the ginseng wine while exclaiming. It seemed that she had finally gotten to talk with Geunsoo properly. Geunsoo always called her ‘Miss Suyeon’, but it seemed that her persistence was effective.

“You do, you do suit each other.”

The elder, who was pleasantly drunk, laughed saying that they should get engaged. Even Ganghwan, who would usually clap and agree with him, was staying still. That was because the opponent was Suyeon. Above all, Ganghwan was unable to leave his place right now. That was because he had to hold back Miso, who had a faint smile on her face.

Miso was demonstrating just how scary a smile could be. If the elder wasn't here, she might have flipped the table over. Fortunately, Miso was aware of the occasion, so she refrained as much as possible and stayed obedient in front of the elder. Thanks to that though, Suyeon was on a rampage.

“See? Sir Yoon says we suit each other. Geunsoo-oppa. You'll be hated if you keep toying with a woman's heart, you know?”

“I don't remember ever toying with anyone's heart though.”

“See? He ignores me despite my attempts to woo him. Sir, I'm really sad. I also feel rather humiliated as a woman. Am I that unattractive?”

“Suyeon, you are very pretty.”

“Really? Sir, let me pour you another glass. This cute junior would like to pay her respects.”

Suyeon approached the elder with a smile on her face and poured a bit of the ginseng wine into his glass. Suyeon seemed to be perfectly aware of how to suck up to people without getting on their bad side. With the elder completely doting on Suyeon, no one was able to say a thing.

“When did they get so close?” Ganghwan asked in a small voice.

“I heard that she visited frequently during Twilight Struggles. She was his conversation partner a lot of the time too. He practically gained another granddaughter. Oh, now that I think about it, she was his granddaughter in the movie too.”

“How scary.”

“It’s probably Geunsoo-hyunngnim who’s the most scared right now though.”

“That’s true.”

While Geunsoo was laughing, Maru could clearly see that he was not at ease. Suyeon was perfectly toying around with Geunsoo since he couldn’t run away like he usually did. It was as though she was venting her pent up frustration.

“Uhu, uphew....”

Maru saw Sooil, who was lying down in the room next to them, open the door and crawl out. He quietly stood up and dragged Sooil by the legs back to the room. Being dragged back to the blanket, Sooil kept spitting out breaths that stank of alcohol.

“Why did you drink so much when you can’t even drink?”

“Maru, living in this world is so hard.”

“Yeah, yeah. I’m sure it must be. Even a newborn has a hard time living in this world. Stop talking nonsense and get some sleep already.”

“All I want to focus on is acting.”

“No one’s stopping you, though?”

“God, dam... grandpa....”

Sooil mumbled that before falling back asleep. Maru warned him when the elder first gave him a glass of ginseng wine, but when he was distracted for a moment, Sooil drank a full glass before becoming completely drunk. Maru didn’t know that he would be looking after this guy in a place like this on a day like this. From the way his luck was turning out here, it seemed that this year was going to be a difficult year as well.

He always thought that drunk people should be left on the streets to fend for themselves whenever he encountered situations like this. He covered Sooil with a blanket before closing the door.

“Is the boy okay?”

“Yes. He should sober up once he gets some sleep.”

“Looks like I made a mistake. I made assumptions after drinking with you all the time. I should’ve realized that you were strangely good at drinking.”

“He’s the idiot for not knowing how much he can drink.”

The seats had changed while he went to look after Sooil. Ganghwan and Geunsoo were enjoying drinks together, while Miso and Suyeon, who were practically enemies with each other, were giving each other cold smiles. In the middle of the two groups was Junmin. It was obvious who placed them in those seats.

“Are you sure those two won’t get into a fight?”

He sat next to Junmin and asked in a small voice.

“They should get close to each other since we’re in the same family.”

“I think they might shed blood before that though.”

“Then I guess they should decide who’s superior. We can’t have them behaving like cats fighting over territory every time they meet. They should probably get things sorted out today.”

“I bet 10 thousand won that Miso-noonim will win if they fight with strength.”

“I’m betting another 10 thousand on that.”

Ganghwan chimed in. The elder was talking quietly with Geunsoo.

“That bet’s invalid. Even I would be scared of fighting Miso,” said Junmin as he put down his glass.

At that moment, Miso stood up and left the house through the door. Suyeon snorted before following her out.

“They didn’t take knives or something with them, right?” Ganghwan asked suspiciously.

Maru nodded and replied that they were empty-handed.

“I’ll take a peek. Miso might pick up a rock or something once her switch is flipped.”

From the way Junmin didn’t stop Ganghwan from leaving, it seemed that he too judged that such a scenario might happen. Of course, Miso wouldn’t actually pick up a rock to fight, but she might start pulling Suyeon’s hair out.

“When did you say the shoot began?”

When the chaotic mood died down a little, Junmin asked.

“It starts on the 8th.”

“It seems to have been delayed since I heard that it was originally going to start airing in January.”

“The get-together before the shoot was at the end of December, so I don’t think they ever intended to air the first episode in January in the first place.”

“Well, that time slot on a Saturday is usually taken up by re-runs, so they shouldn’t be that urgent.”

Junmin picked up the soju bottle. Maru grabbed his glass with both of his hands.

“You are actually doing better than I expected. I feel like I’m profiting since you keep looking for your own work by yourself.”

“I do owe you 300 million won. I have to do my worth at least.”

“I see. I hope you continue that and raise the value of our company. I’ll give you some stock options once we decide to go public.”

“I guess I should do my best then.”

He turned his head to drink before picking up the soju bottle. Junmin reached out with his glass.

“Have you talked to Suyeon?”

“Not regarding the shoot, no.”

“You should learn from her once the shoot begins. They say that TV programs are a battle of money, but the ones that survive that battle are the ones with skill. Suyeon managed to gain a lot in a short period of time. Not all of it is from making men fall. There are her acting skills and her social skills too.”

Junmin emptied half of his glass before continuing to speak,

“Suyeon does not make enemies. In that sense, Miso’s rather special. This is the first time I saw someone express their hate so much to Suyeon. That’s why I thought that the two might actually become good friends. Well, from the way things are going now, I don’t think it’ll be that easy.”

“I think the reunification of the country might come sooner.”

“Maybe. Anyway, you should watch her. I’m a little worried about you since you seem to draw the line too well, but it won’t be that bad to learn a thing or two from her. Well, I’m sure you know better though.”

Junmin smiled in satisfaction. Just then, the door opened before Miso came in with a refreshed expression. A while later, Suyeon appeared with a rather sour face. Just from that, the outcome of this ‘battle’ was clear.

“Let’s get along well from now on.”

“Yes, yes. *Unni.*”

Of course, the two were still glaring at each other.

\* \* \*

“Be careful on your way back.”

Maru said goodbye to the elder standing in his yard before turning around. Junmin, Ganghwan, and Geunsoo remained behind as they seemed to have something to talk about.

“I wonder if Sooil went back properly.”

“Byungchan-hyung is probably having a hard time.”

“True. I should beat Sooil up in the future if he grabs a drinking glass. He’s someone who shouldn’t drink,” said Miso while sighing.

“Ah, what do I do about the car?”

Miso crossed her arms in front of her car. She couldn’t drive since she drank quite a lot. Maru and Miso naturally looked at Suyeon.

“I’m going to take the taxi though?”

“Don’t say that. Why don’t you drive for me?”

“Why would I?”

“Listen to this unni’s words for once, hm?”

Miso opened the door to the driver’s seat before forcefully pushing Suyeon into it. Suyeon did not drink saying that she had a bad stomach. Well, she did drink until she passed out the day before, so she probably didn’t want to drink.

“I’m going to get some sleep. I feel dizzy. My house is on the GPS so please take me there.”

Miso lied down on the back seats and soon fell asleep. She looked completely fine when she left the elder’s house, but it seemed that she was only acting tough in front of the elder.

“I really hate this.”

Suyeon started up the car.

“I’ll take the taxi home.”

“Shut up. Get on.”

“What? I live in Suwon though.”

“My studio is in Suwon too, you know? Forget about it if you want to have an easy time.”

“Let’s minimize the casualties, shall we?”

“Oh, you’re going against me?”

Suyeon narrowed her eyes and stared at him. Maru got in the passenger seat with drooping shoulders. He had a hard time ignoring her gaze since she looked like she might actually do something bad if he left her alone.

After starting the GPS navigation, Suyeon started driving.

“Oh yeah, what did you talk about outside? I feel like something happened since you’re obediently giving her a drive.”

“I was hit.”

“I see, what?”

“I was hit.”

“Ah... really?”

“I’m joking. We can’t fight like kids until the end of time. It’s not like that ahjumma is completely incompetent, and she has a lot of connections too. There’s nothing to be gained from being at odds with her, so I made some sacrifices.”

Miso, who was lying down in the back, said that she wasn’t an ahjumma. Suyeon retorted that all married women were ahjummas.

“You should try to get along with her.”

“That’s the plan.”

Suyeon opened the window slightly.

“How long has it been since the car was cleaned? Why is it so smelly?”

“I guess it is a little bad.”

“Sheesh, whoever is marrying that woman is not sane.”

“I think Miso-noonim will say the same thing about you when you get married.”

“Me, married?”

Suyeon chuckled.

“Why would I marry anyone when I don’t trust men?”

“You’re going to live by yourself then?”

“I might get married since I don’t know what the future has in store, but right now, I can’t imagine such a thing.”

“What if Geunsoo hyung-nim wants to marry you?”

“That sounds attractive.”

“What a light-hearted person.”

“People think that everyone else other than themselves are light-hearted. But marriage, huh. Would I be able to get married at all?”

“If you live a quiet life from now on and spread rumors about how your dream is to become a faithful wife, I think it might be possible.”

“Maybe. Men are all idiots who believe me when I say that I’m not the person they think I am and that they should trust me. Just like how I trusted that man. Maybe this is why first love is important.”

“What good is complaining about past matters? You won’t get anything from it.”

“Ooh, I felt better now since you tried to console me in some way.”

“I’m only telling you that to tell you that we should get along well in the future. I feel good since I scored some points.”

“Right, do just that at the shoot too. This big sister will dote on you.”

“I’m asking this just in case, but you won’t actually touch the kids, right?”

As soon as he finished his words, Suyeon turned the wheel violently. The car shook a little and Maru shut himself up as he grabbed the handle above the window.

“I can’t guarantee what will happen if you touch the sensitive part of this big sister.”

“Yes, I will shut up now.”

“That’s right. That’s a good boy.”

After looking at Miso once, Suyeon kept driving while singing a pop song.

Maru thought that he should really have taken the taxi home as he made an awkward smile.

## **Chapter 502**

New Semester - Maru looked at the title at the top of the script. Below were the names of the main staff involved in the production of the drama. He looked a little lower. To Mr. Han Maru. The script felt rather new to him since it had his name on it.

“The script will arrive before the shoot for a while. This means that you’ll have the time to leisurely read them at home. However, you’ll have less and less time as the drama reaches the second half. You see the name Lee Hanmi on the script right? She’s well-known for her scripts for dramas, but she has a critical flaw. It’s that she’s very very slow.”

Byungchan explained while he was driving. Very very. He emphasized that she was slow twice, so Maru could imagine the speed. Byungchan even went as far as to describe her as the god of last-minute scripts.

“Thanks to that, it’s the shooting staff and the actors that get busy. I found out this while working as a manager, but apparently, she was the one responsible for the legendary three-strike last-minute scripts.”

“The legendary three-strike last-minute scripts? What the heck is that?”

“She changed the script of a daily drama three times in one day. She brought a fixed version of the script during the shoot three times. Apparently, no one was able to say a thing to her because she’s a big time scriptwriter.”

“Why is such an amazing person doing a youth drama then?”

“That just goes to show how much effort YBS is putting into this project. I also had a look at her interview, and apparently, she feels responsible for the conflict between generations these days. That’s why she supposedly wants to create an opportunity for parents to talk to their children.”

“Wow, that’s incredible. And here I’m only thinking about the money.”

“Apparently, people do care when they have enough money. Rather than that, how are you feeling?”

“I had a good sleep and my voice is normal, I’m completely fine.”

Byungchan nodded as he drove the car.

Maru closed the script and looked outside the window. The first shoot of the drama in which he played a supporting role was about to begin. He went to the website for New Semester that was synchronized with the TV station yesterday, and his profile picture where he was wearing his school uniform was there. There was also a bulletin board for the viewers, where there were a lot of posts cheering the actors on. Most of them were for Kang Giwoo.

“We’re here.”

The shooting location for New Semester was a middle school located in Seoul. The building looked clean as though it was just built.

It was 8 in the morning. It was just around the time the sun rose in the winter.

There were people standing in front of the entrance of the school who were changing the middle school plate to 'Myungnang High School'. He went inside with Byungchan on foot. Maru greeted everyone he came across. There were people that greeted back, and some people just walked by with awkward smiles.

"I'm just a part timer though."

The man he greeted replied with a rather embarrassed expression.

"Please take care of me anyway. We might see each other later. Thanks for your work."

He didn't care if the person he came across was a staff member at the TV station or not. It wasn't like lip service cost money anyway. Who could tell for sure that that man would never become his superior in this field?

"There's the producer."

He saw producer Park Hoon, who was talking to a man wearing a thick padded coat. When he went up close, he saw that the man was the assistant director he saw during the audition. From his memory, he went by the name Kim Minjoong.

"Good morning, producer."

"Ah, yes."

"I'm from JA Production. And this is Han Maru, who's participating in the drama. I wonder if you remember him?" Byungchan asked cautiously.

Park Hoon made a relaxed expression as though he understood the situation.

"Of course. This fella left a deep impression on me."

"Ah, I see. My name is Lee Byungchan. I'm in charge of the child actors in JA. Of course, there's no need for you to remember me. I'm just here to say hello. But I'm asking just in case, may I give you a business card?"

"Go ahead."

"Thank you. Please call me any time if you need me."

Byungchan handed over a business card while bowing.

"This fella's waist won't last. Stop it there."

"Y-yes."

"JA, huh. President Lee has a good eye for people. I wonder where he found a smart kid like that," said Park Hoon as he looked at Maru.



“Our Maru is really good at work and is smart. He won’t disappoint you when it comes to acting either.”

“I know, I know. I picked him because he was good.”

“Also, please take this. Take it whenever you want something in your mouth during the shoot.”

What Byungchan gave him were some cough sweets. Maru realized what all the candies, drinks, and chocolate bars in the back seat were for.

“Thanks, I’ll take it.”

“Please take care of our Maru.”

Byungchan smiled and stepped back. Maru also bowed towards the producer before turning around.

“Phew, thankfully, he’s not a picky person.”

“You’re going through hard work.”

“This isn’t even considered hard work. A person with a dirty character might have sworn at me for saying hi.”

Byungchan frowned as though just imagining it displeased him before patting Maru on the shoulder.

“Come with me. The camera director is over there. I got to know him while taking Sooil around before, so it should be easier.”

Byungchan smiled before starting to walk. Seeing that, Maru thought that Byungchan would become really well-known in this field. Of course, his own dream was to become an actor, but no one knew what the future had in store for him. Byungchan’s way of leaving behind a good impression of himself on the people he came across was a big talent when it comes to being a manager. Once he was promoted into someone like a head-manager, he would definitely shine even more.

‘Ah, maybe that’s why I was sworn at a lot when I was a manager, huh. Because I give off a bad impression?’

Just as he was thinking about such a thing, Byungchan’s voice could be heard.

“Maru, come here quickly.”

“Yes. I’m going.”

Maru also made a business smile and followed Byungchan.

\* \* \*

“Let’s do it with your glasses on. It suits you more.”

He heard those words from Park Hoon during make-up. Maru quickly put on his glasses.

It was 9 a.m. The shoot looked like it was going to start soon. Maru picked up his script and stood in front of the 2nd year class 1. He saw the other actors getting some warmth from the heater placed in the corner.

“Wow, it’s cold. Okseon, don’t you feel cold?”

“I don’t.”

“Really? I’m freezing. Are you really okay?”

“Yes.”

Lee Joomin and Kim Okseon had met each other for the first time since the get-together. Joomin was still as outgoing as ever while Kim Okseon had a hard time talking. Seong Dongho was grumbling as always in a small voice.

“The shoot began over there,” said Joomin as she looked outside the window.

That was the scene where the three main characters: Kang Giwoo, Ahn Yeseul, and Park Jichan came to school. Students wearing school uniforms were acting as the background in groups of three to five.

The microphones, cameras, and reflectors moved according to the route the three were moving. The producer seemed to have shouted cut as the actors stopped and talked to each other before walking back to the entrance again. They repeated the same scene around six times before the camera and the actors moved towards the left entrance of the main building.

“Since we don’t have anything to do, should we go over the lines?” Joomin suggested.

Everyone gathered with their scripts since they didn’t have anything to do.

“But even if we want to, there are a lot of gaps since those three aren’t here.”

“They are the main characters after all,” Okseon said in a small voice.

“Let’s just ignore those lines. It’s not like we can’t act if the main characters aren’t here.”

Hearing Dongho’s words, Joomin made an awkward smile.

“That’s true, but we really don’t have any screen time in the 1st episode huh. Even though the supporting characters are supposed to be right below the lead characters.”

“If we aren’t going to start, I’ll just do one by myself,” said Dongho suddenly as he left the group.

Joomin didn’t say anything before laughing awkwardly.

“Let’s take it slow, to exercise our voices too. It looks like they’ll need some time over there. Dongho, why don’t you join us?”

Hearing Maru’s words, Dongho made an annoyed expression but still joined the group. It was good that he was easy to handle, Maru smiled as he looked at Dongho. Dongho looked at him sourly before turning his gaze to the script.

He did not want discord to occur on the first day of the shoot. Burning up in passion wasn’t something he wanted, he just wanted things to go smoothly. There wouldn’t be any noise as long as he showed some interest to the kid that wanted attention, and left the girl who wanted to stay quiet alone.

“Noona, let’s begin.”

“Oh, okay. L-let’s begin.”

As long as he gave Joomin, who wanted to lead everyone else as the eldest, a little push from the back, it would be much easier to gather everyone into a group.

“Then I’ll start.”

Joomin opened her mouth and said her first line.

\* \* \*

“Everyone please move to the 1st floor,” said a staff member who came into the classroom.

It seemed that the shoot outside the school was finished somewhat.

“Noona, let’s go down.”

“Alright. Everyone, let’s go down.”

He let Joomin walk ahead and followed suit. When he went to the central staircase on the 1st floor, he saw cameras. Giwoo, Yeseul, and Jichan were there as well.

“Well then, please gather round, our little dreamers.”

Park Hoon called the child actors ‘little dreamers’. Maru moved in front of Park Hoon. After looking at the seven people lined up in a row, Park Hoon spoke,

“Well then. We are going to show your characters off here. Okseon and Yeseul will get into a staring contest. You know what a staring contest is right? Glare at each other like you’re going to rip each other’s hair out. You know, that feeling you get when you see someone you hate. Try to express it in your own ways.”

“Yes.”

“Good answer, our little Okseon dreamer. Well, then. Let’s get into position.”

This was the scene where Okseon blocked Yeseul and a minor actor in the corridor and picked a fight with them. This was the scene where Okseon said her first line and the first scene where Maru, Dongho, and Joomin appeared on camera.

Maru took a short breath before concentrating. All of his senses became sharp before becoming dreamy just like he was about to fall asleep. Maru always went through this process before he immersed himself in acting. That sensation of everything calming down, and at the same time, the appearance of another self inside him. A rational Han Maru who would look at the state of the staff and the actors around him at all times stood a step behind him, while a Han Maru fully immersed in acting stepped forward in front.

Maru could feel those two selves at the same time, and he could control them as well.

‘Myungnang High School, 2nd year, class 1, Lee Chan. He’s similar to me, but he has more childish characteristics.’

Creating a character boiled down to endless conversations with himself in the end. Once he created a topic, a long conversation where rebuttals tailed one another began between the self immersed in acting and the self rationally looking around the world. Once that conversation neared the end, a suitable character he could be satisfied with was created.

Maru finished his preparations to become the character known as Lee Chan in the drama New Semester. He pushed up his glasses a little and stood crookedly.

“Hm, good. Let’s begin the shoot,” said Park Hoon as he walked towards the monitor.

Maru waited outside the camera angle. He was in a position where he would be in the corner of the screen if the camera followed Yeseul. Next to him was Dongho. He had placed his hands politely in front of his stomach as though he was being scolded. It was completely off the mark for a scene where the students were supposed to be talking and laughing together with their friends. Maru didn’t want the shoot to drag out due to NG scenes, so he poked him with his elbow before giving his hands a glance.

‘Oh, no.’

Despite the look, Dongho maintained his posture as though he was frozen stiff. Now that Maru thought about it, Dongho did say that this was his first drama shoot. He should have received camera massages in other places since he got the role of a supporting character, so Maru was surprised that he was frozen stiff like someone standing in front of the camera for the first time. He signalled to him once again, but it seemed that Dongho didn’t even have the time to pay attention to his surroundings. He was probably busy reciting lines in his head.

“Yeseul, were you at the arcade yesterday? Someone apparently saw someone smoking and that person looked just like you.”

That was pretty decent. Maru nodded as he looked at Okseon’s acting. He was a little worried since she wasn’t good with words usually, but her atmosphere had changed now that they started the shoot. The producer seemed to be satisfied as well as he continued with the shoot.

“Seri, I never did such a thing.”

Kim Seri. That was the name of the character played by Okseon. The three main characters, Ahn Yeseul, Kang Giwoo, and Park Jichan used their real names in the drama.

After Yeseul’s line, the camera moved to the side to capture the two people in a single frame. Maru, Dongho, and Joomin would be located between the two in the background.

“Cut. Dongho, relax your hands. You’re not being scolded here,” said Park Hoon.

### **Chapter 503**

“Yes.”

Dongho immediately unclasped his hands and stood properly. Park Hoon’s gaze returned to the monitor. Maru thought that the shoot would resume, but Park Hoon stood up again.

“Dongho.”

“Yes!”

“Look at me.”

Park Hoon took a step away from the monitor before hopping.

“Do as I do.”

“Eh?”

“I said, do as I do. Here, loosen your hands and start hopping. It might be too embarrassing for you to do it alone, so let’s have everyone do it.”

The shooting location turned into a gym class all of a sudden. Everyone started hopping around like the producer after hesitating for a while. Maru also jumped lightly. This continued for around 30 seconds. Everyone seemed confused at first, but they eventually started chuckling as they looked at each other.

“Okay. Dongho. Stay completely still.”

Dongho stood naturally as he exhaled. Park Hoon told him that his posture was good before shouting ‘ready’. The shoot immediately started. The camera skimmed over the main entrance before putting Yeseul and Okseon in one frame. After the two exchanged lines, Okseon snorted and turned around. When Okseon climbed about half of the stairs, Park Hoon shouted cut.

“That was good. We’re going to do the same thing again, but this time, the camera will focus on Yeseul. Okseon, you can keep doing what you were doing.”

The shoot was repeated to get more cuts for the edits. After shooting the same scene about five times from different angles, Park Hoon nodded and said that they should go up. Maru and Dongho stood in one corner of the corridor like mannequins during the whole shoot.

“Can’t he let us rest? It’s not like we’re in the camera angle anyway. I’m fine by myself.”

It seemed that Dongho had calmed down a little as he started grumbling again. It also seemed that he didn’t even remember becoming totally stiff in front of Park Hoon.

“You should understand. They’ll have to do the same when you start acting later.”

“Who says I don’t understand?”

Maru shrugged before avoiding Dongho’s gaze. He decided to let him be since he wouldn’t listen no matter what Maru said to him.

They moved to 2nd year class 1. The students wearing school uniforms were seated throughout. Okseon, who finished her cut without an NG, was mixed among them without her sour expression from before.

“Sorry, I’m late. Sorry, sorry. I was on the wrong schedule. Am I late?”

The one that appeared while making a nasal laughing sound was Suyeon, wearing a neat suit. She looked like a stereotypical teacher-in-training.

“You’re just in time. Let’s go over there. We’ll take a look at the movement lines,” said Park Hoon as he pointed at the podium.

Suyeon replied ‘of course’ before standing behind the podium. While those two talked to each other, a rather short lady approached Suyeon and touched up her hair. Her neat hair was ruffled which created a rather immature image.

“I’m tying up my hair, right?”

“You won’t look like a teacher if you untie it. Also, isn’t your make-up too heavy?”

“I’ll tone it down a little.”

The lady touching up her hair took out some cosmetics before fixing Suyeon’s make-up in a flash. Suyeon looked a little more immature than before.

“Is this okay?”

“Let’s keep that image in the future.”

“Okay.”

“Well, then. We’re going to start again. Since it’s the first shoot, let’s finish things off quickly and go home.”

Maru sat in his designated seat. He was at the back of the class. It would be his real seat at school if he was right next to the door. The others sat around him as well. At the center were Kang Giwoo and Ahn Yeseul. The two sat next to each other. Dongho and Joomin were in the next column over, and they sat next to each other as well. Okseon sat at the front of the class. The camera director climbed a low ladder. It seemed that he was trying to get the whole class in one shot. Park Hoon explained the scene before starting the shoot.

“This is the teacher-in-training who will start listening to class with you all starting today. Okay, let’s introduce you to everyone.”

Suyeon made a confused expression before carefully walking forward. The nervousness of her first time at work could be felt. It was as Junmin said: she didn’t gain everything through putting men to bed. The way she licked her lips slightly didn’t look unnatural at all. The fear and expectation harbored by someone that was between a university student and a teacher were expressed perfectly by her small actions and slight trembling.

“I’m Park Chaeyeon and I’ll be studying with all of you throughout May. Although it might be short, I hope I can get along with everyone.”

“Applaud.”

When the actor in charge of the teacher’s role started clapping, everyone else started clapping as well. The applause did not stop until the cut sound.

“Good, Suyeon. Keep that up.”

The camera director climbed down from the ladder and shot Suyeon from the front. During that time, the people positioned behind the camera sighed in relief.

“I should be like that too.”

Yeseul practiced her lines with different expressions as though she was provoked after seeing Suyeon’s acting. Maru also looked at his script during his waiting time. Drama scenes changed by the second when watching, but there were many occasions where a single cut would take more than an hour to shoot. If a producer who was very greedy for a good picture was in charge of directing the scene, or the script was delayed and they were running out of time, shoots through the nights were the norm. There were many cases especially with daily dramas where shoots would happen 24/7.

“Let’s do that again.”

Suyeon’s acting looked decent, but Park Hoon didn’t seem satisfied with it. Park Hoon looked at the monitor with a sharp gaze, while Suyeon talked as though she was talking to an invisible person. The lights on the camera turned on again and the film started rolling.

“That’s quite strict.”

“He wasn’t that strict with us though.”

“Maybe he has different expectations.”

Everyone nodded at Giwoo’s words. Despite the fact that there was no NG, Park Hoon kept saying that they should shoot again. Only on the fifth try did his mouth utter the word ‘okay’.

“Director, aren’t you being too strict with me?”

“Just consider my expectations of you that high. That’s my bottom line. If you go below that line, I’m going to shoot again, so it’s up to you to do what you want.”

“Yes, yes, director.”

Everyone laughed when they heard Suyeon’s nonchalant reply. Thanks to Suyeon who smiled at everyone, the atmosphere became more relaxed.

“Let’s go. Get ready, little dreamers. Also, Yeseul.”

“Yes.”

“Come here for a sec.”

Park Hoon called Yeseul out of the classroom. A moment later, Yeseul came back in again, looking a little dejected. It seemed that she was given directions in a place others couldn’t see. The director was being considerate of her, in a sense. If she was pointed out where everyone could see, she would have been even more dejected.

He told the actors he trusted upfront, and was considerate of the actors he did not. Producer Park Hoon showed everyone that that was the way he treated people.

“There’s a scene on the school field as well, so let’s hurry things up,” shouted Park Hoon as he sat on the chair.

The camera moved towards the front of the class and shot everyone in their seats. This was the scene where Okseon, the class president, fought with Jichan. Yeseul would interrupt the fight midway and reveal more of the relationships between the characters.

“Why don’t you stop talking since we’re in the middle of class?”

“When did I talk?”

“You shouted in front of that teacher-in-training. You might think it’s cool, but it only makes you look dumb, you know?”

“Hey, do you want to interfere with everything since you’re the class president?”

Okseon and Jichan glared at each other as they said their words. Yeseul, who was watching the situation, quietly walked in between the two. Just as Yeseul was about to say her line, Park Hoon shouted cut.

“Kids, you aren’t here to play around, right?”

Park Hoon’s mouth was smiling, but his eyes weren’t.

“Concentrate. If you don’t have the confidence to get your emotions together when the shoot starts, then you should get them together beforehand. The reason I respect actors is because they do their job. You see the actors standing over there? Even they are trying their best to get into their roles before the shoot begins. Do you think you can get into your character immediately once the camera starts rolling after laughing and talking while the camera isn’t? Why don’t you have a look at the monitor and see what your expressions were like?” Park Hoon said as he waved his finger up and down.

He looked a little angry.

“This is a year-long drama. Please allow me to send you off with a smile when the last episode airs. This is a big opportunity for you too, isn’t it? 800. That’s the number of people who participated in the audition in order to get a spot in this drama. Why not at least be aware of the fact that you deprived them of their opportunity? You’re here in the shooting location, and as long as you stand in front of the camera with a character assigned to you, you are a professional no matter what your age is. This is the last time I’ll say this. Today, I’m only doing this because I’m a senior on the scene and it’s the first shoot, but if I don’t see any improvements even after I give you directions next time, it’ll be an endless loop of shoots. If we run out of time to edit the scenes, then the drama will look like shit.”

Park Hoon signalled the camera director before walking in front of the monitor again.

“Bear this in mind. There’s a limit to how much editing can do. Although they say editing can make or break the drama, you guys are the ones providing the source.”

After saying those words, Park Hoon apologized loudly for saying nonsense.

“Standby.”



The assistant director shouted. Park Hoon crossed his arms and looked at the monitor.

It didn't feel like a burst of anger had gotten the better of him. It felt as though he had been holding back for quite a while. Perhaps he was feeling that way since the first time the camera started rolling in the morning. If it was just one person doing bad, he would've called out that person separately just like he did with Yeseul, so he probably did that because he thought that everyone was doing bad.

Maru fixed his glasses. Park Hoon had just given them a warning, telling them that it was up to them to scoop the rice out and eat it. When he looked next to him, he saw everyone waiting for the cue sign nervously.

'Yes. This is actually better in the first run.'

It would be harder to make the atmosphere strict again if they were let loose since the get-go. Although it was the actors that created the atmosphere at a shooting location, that was usually limited to the adult actors. With child actors, who couldn't talk back to the producer in any shape or form, especially if they just entered the entertainment industry, the producer would direct the atmosphere at a shooting location.

Maru looked at how the adult actors were drinking coffee and laughing with each other. That strict atmosphere only applied to the child actors who were relaxed without knowing what they were going against. The veterans capable of perfectly digesting their part were just watching this place with interest. Producer Park Hoon did not say anything about them either. The respect that the producer mentioned was based on skill after all.

"Ready, cue!"

Park Hoon's voice struck the shooting location.

\* \* \*

Jichan felt his voice cracking. He raised his voice recklessly since he just had that type of character, but that seemed to have backfired on him. It was the second NG scene already. He felt as though he was sweating cold sweat on his back.

"Jichan, watch your diction. Also, control your emotions a little more."

Ever since he shouted at everyone, producer Park Hoon spoke in a small voice. Jichan found that even scarier. When an NG happened and everyone looked at him, he felt like he had sinned and couldn't raise his head. This wasn't what he thought a shooting scene would be like. If he made a mistake, he thought that the staff and the director would encourage him as long as he apologized. That was the dream shoot he had in his mind. However, the drama shooting scene that he participated in as a main character felt completely different. He wondered how the actors he saw before were able to endure such gazes.

"Let's go to the next scene."

They finally went on to the next scene. Jichan sighed. The next scene was where the supporting characters talked to each other by the window in the class.

He saw Maru, Joomin, and Dongho sit down by the window. Dongho, who played the role of Dongwook, a prankster-type character, was muttering something to himself with a smile for a while now, but he didn't look like he was having fun at all.

Joomin, who played the character of Yeonjeong, Yeseul's best friend, kept uttering her lines as she stared at the script. It seemed that she had a hard time memorizing her lines.

Finally, Maru, who played the character Lee Chan, nicknamed the 'professor', just sat there calmly unlike the other two who were busy doing something. He looked strangely leisurely.

"Tell the Jimmy jib to wait once they're done setting up. We're going to go down right after I do this scene. Well, then. Let's get ready and start."

The camera moved in front of the three. Jichan was never as scared of the camera as he was today. It was thanks to producer Park Hoon's words. The others sitting next to him were also busy looking at their scripts. Yeseul looked like she was about to cry, so he didn't dare talk to her. The one that seemed to be the most normal was Okseon. She always had a poker face on.

"Let's start."

The coordinators stepped out and the three looked at each other in their positions. Producer Park Hoon's start sign fell and Joomin immediately started acting.

#### **Chapter 504**

"Hey, Lee Chan, let's go to the noraebang after school."

"We have tests soon. Go after the exams."

"The tests are ages away. Don't say that and let's go. Yeonjeong, you are going to go, right?"

"Me? I'm not sure. I was planning to go home with Yeseul."

"Dongwook, you should go home as well. You should raise your scores."

"Hey, why don't we play around a little? We're only in our 2nd year of high school."

Jichan looked at Maru, Joomin, and Dongho saying their lines. Although it was an everyday conversation which was nothing hard, producer Park Hoon's expression wasn't that good. Jichan opened the script. Next to Dongho's line was this: As though frustrated from not playing around for a long time.

Dongwook, the character Dongho played, was supposed to be a prankster character, but Dongho looked a little awkward. Even he could see that Dongho was hesitating, so the producer must have noticed that a long time ago.

"Cut, let's do that again," said producer Park Hoon.

The three got into position again. After one more round, the producer shouted cut again.

"Let's do that again. Relax your shoulders. You should relax a little more. Think that you're in your actual classes at school. We need you to look natural. Get ready."

Again, again, and yet again. As the shoot repeated, everyone's acting became stiff. Producer Park Hoon no longer said anything either. He only parroted the word 'again'.

"Let's take a little break," said producer Park Hoon while stretching his arms out.

The people holding the lights and the reflectors yawned before doing some stretches. Jichan cautiously looked at producer Park Hoon. He was chatting with the other actors and the camera director. He didn't even glance at the three people sitting by the window.

'This is the worst possible first shoot.'

It would be his turn again once this scene ended. If he didn't want to be given the cold shoulder like those three, he had to do something now. He opened his script and went over all of the directions, situational contexts, and his lines. He even read the narration several times. He could feel that he wasn't qualified to be worried about someone else.

At that moment, he heard a voice from the window side.

"Dongho, stand up for a sec."

Maru was talking to Dongho. Dongho, looking nervous, signalled him to not talk to him. He thought that that side was in chaos as well. Joomin-noona didn't say anything as though she was feeling rather complex as well.

"Stand up for a sec," Maru said once again.

For some reason, though, his expression looked scary. Was he about to pick a fight? That would cause even more chaos.

'No. I guess it might be better for me if they get into a fight?'

Giwoo, Yeseul, and Jichan himself were the three main characters. These three wouldn't get scolded if those three caused trouble. No, perhaps this was an opportunity. Wouldn't his evaluation rise if he showed everyone that he stopped a fight and encouraged them?

Just as he was thinking that, he saw Kang Giwoo standing up. Jichan intuitively realized that Giwoo was thinking the same thing as him. He was such a cocky guy. Jichan always believed that guys that acted gentlemanly were never good at heart, so he did not see Giwoo in a good way. Actually, he was aware that he was only jealous of Giwoo since he had more popularity, but didn't want to admit that.

Giwoo slid on his chair loudly. The noise was quite loud. Jichan inwardly exclaimed. He was properly gathering everyone's attention. He could see that some people were looking at him. From now on, everyone would watch as Giwoo stopped those three, between whom there was a bad atmosphere. He could practically hear everyone saying that Giwoo was a good boy. He looked at Yeseul through the corner of his eyes. She was staring at her script in a daze as though the scolding from producer Park Hoon had gotten the better of her. She had a really cute face, but she was really stupid.

Giwoo started walking towards the three.

'Why is he acting like that!?'

Maru had grabbed Dongho's collars before forcefully making him stand. Jichan inwardly screamed. He thought that Maru would fight in a quiet manner, but it looked as though it was going to break out into a proper fight. He thought that Maru was a quiet kid when they first met, but maybe his personality was just as vicious as he looked?

Giwoo also flinched and stopped on the spot. This must have been an unexpected situation for him as well. Dongho looked at Maru with shock, while Joomin stood up from her seat, even more surprised than Dongho. Although not everyone had noticed this situation since they were in a corner, it would be big trouble if Maru started beating Dongho up or something.

Those idiots - Jichan signalled Giwoo. Everything would go down the drain if those two fought here. They had to stop that at all costs.

"WAAAAAAAAAAA!"

Maru suddenly peeked out the window before shouting. Jichan didn't understand what was going on. He looked at Maru, half standing up from his seat. Everyone was looking at him now.

"Sorry about that. I was just exercising my throat while I took a break. Please don't mind."

Maru bowed before bringing the dazed Dongho near the window. Jichan walked past Giwoo who was standing still and approached those three.

"What are you doing?" He asked Maru while grabbing his shoulders.

"Exercising my throat."

"What?"

"There's nothing better than that when it comes to unsinking your voice."

"Why would you do that here?"

"Is there a reason for me to not do it?" Maru asked directly.

Jichan couldn't say anything. When he thought about it, there was no reason to stop him. An actor was exercising his voice. Why should he be stopped?

"There are seniors here too."

He squeezed his mind to utter one reason.

"They don't seem to mind though?"

Maru pointed at where the producer and the actors were standing. They looked at Maru for a while, but they soon lost interest and went back to talking amongst themselves.

Jichan no longer spoke and stepped back. He felt a little embarrassed because he felt like he made a big deal out of nothing. He watched Maru with his lips twitching.

"Seong Dongho, time's passing. Do that quickly," Maru said as he pushed Dongho's shoulders.

"Why would I do something like..."

“You feel embarrassed?”

“What the hell do you mean?”

“Are you embarrassed about shouting outside?”

“Why would I feel embarrassed about something like that?” Dongho said as though he was throwing a tantrum

However, his voice was very weak.

“Then do it.”

“Why should I?”

“You can’t do it?”

“I can.”

“Then do it.”

Dongho’s cheeks twitched and he looked flabbergasted before placing his hands on the window sill. Was he about to shout? However, Dongho peeked out the window, but only mumbled something to himself and did not produce any sound.

“So you can’t do it.”

Maru stood next to Dongho before shouting as though he was demonstrating. His voice was very loud and clear. Jichan could hear producer Park Hoon saying that he had a good voice.

Dongho gritted his teeth and looked around before opening his mouth again. However, what escaped his mouth was a weak sound.

“Why are you wussing out? Just spit it out. Or do something like this instead.”

The next moment, Jichan subconsciously muttered ‘that lunatic’ when he heard Maru’s words.

“YOU SON OF A BIIIIITCH!”

That was what Maru said out the window. Dongho made a flabbergasted expression. Joomin looked at Maru while covering her mouth.

Jichan couldn’t look behind him. He didn’t have the confidence to look at the expressions of the director, the actors, as well as the staff. He felt as though producer Park Hoon would be walking towards them with a scary face. He shrunk his neck and glanced behind him.

‘...No one’s looking here.’

Some of the staff were looking, but the rest looked uninterested like the first time Maru shouted. Producer Park Hoon was laughing and talking with the assistant director.

“Do it,” Maru said as he placed his hand on Dongho’s back.

Dongho was uncooperative at first, but it seemed as though he had changed his mind after seeing Maru do ludicrous things. Well, even Jichan himself would give in to the pressure if he was standing there.

'He's a complete lunatic.'

Dongho grabbed the window sill and took a deep breath in again. This time, his voice was much louder than before. He was just shouting 'ack' though, instead of swearing.

"Much better."

Maru sat down while smiling. Dongho was panting with his face bright red. After that, the shooting location was peaceful for five minutes as though nothing had happened.

"If you're done resting, let's continue," said producer Park Hoon.

The camera started rolling and started shooting the three again.

"Please wait. Sorry about that. Let's try that again after I get myself together," Dongho said those words as soon as the shoot started.

Producer Park Hoon unexpectedly said that it was okay and waited for him. Maru brought his face against Dongho, who was tapping his chest with his hand before grinning.

"Should I show you my balls? Are you going to smile if you see my twin jewels?"

Although it was a small voice, Jichan could clearly hear it. Giwoo and Yeseul should have heard him as well. Joomin, who was sitting right next to Maru, made a flabbergasted expression before laughing while slapping Maru's back, and Dongho also looked at Maru like a madman before shaking his head.

"I think you guys are ready, shall we start?"

"Yes! I'm ready."

Dongho's voice contained power.

The shoot began, and Dongho, who was sitting on the desk, said his line to Maru as he kicked at empty air. His shoes touched Maru's clothes and dirtied them, but neither of them minded. No, in fact, Maru naturally dusted his clothes off with his hand as he naturally said his line.

"We should really go to the noraebang."

"Let's just study."

"Damn model student. Hey, play around a little."

Dongho coquettishly shook his shoulders as he said those words, and he looked like he was really close to Maru. That kind of mischievous action did not look unnatural at all, and perhaps thanks to that, Jichan had a much easier time looking at the three. Joomin's acting looked like it hadn't changed at all, but thanks to the overall change in atmosphere, she did look a little softer than before.

"Okay."

Producer Park Hoon gave the okay sign.

“Keep that up, you three. It’s good to look at. Well, then. Let’s go to the next place.”

That was the first compliment after the scolding.

\* \* \*

Dongho and Maru hung their arms around each other’s shoulders. They were shooting their way home from school. It was a simple scene where they just had to walk behind some background actors. The camera and the microphone were pointing at Yeseul and Giwoo.

“Let’s walk energetically,” said Maru as he pulled Dongho closer.

Dongho looked at Maru with a displeased gaze.

“Don’t act close to me.”

“Are we doing this again?”

“Last time I was....”

Dongho was about to mention what happened in the classroom, but he didn’t say anything. He found it absurd even when he thought about it now. He was worried about what the producer or other people would say, but fortunately, none of them said anything.

The producer’s cue sign came. Maru walked forward with a big smile on his face. As they were hanging their arms around each other, Dongho had to walk as well.

“Can’t I act close to you? We have to act like we’re close to each other for a whole year, you know?” said Maru.

“It’s just a TV program.”

“Exactly. It’s just a TV program, so let’s pretend that we’re close. It’s not like I truly want you to like me or something. That sounds creepy. But at least make the people watching us think that we’re on good terms. Can you act like you’re close to me immediately after the camera starts rolling without talking to me even once off camera? I sure am not that skilled.”

Dongho glared at Maru who stroked his face with his hand. As the camera was rolling, Dongho had to speak without snapping at him.

“Just cut corners.”

“You’ll become sick if you get money from cutting corners, you know?”

“Then what do you want me to do?”

“I want you to at least pretend to be close to me. I know that you aren’t serious about it, so just pretend to do so. Is that so hard?”

“Hard? It’s not hard at all?”

“That’s that then. Well then, what shall we start off with? Do you have a girlfriend?”

“Uh, what?”

“Ooh, look at this guy. Your reaction told me everything. Who is it? Someone from the same school?”

“Wh-why would I tell you something like th....”

Just as Dongho said up to those words, the producer signalled them to walk back to the school field. They walked to the entrance with their arms around each other.

“Then let’s see. Do you have a cute little sister or big sister?”

“What the heck are you saying?”

“Nothing in particular. Don’t you want to know anything about me?”

“Nothing.”

“Then I’ll keep asking the questions then. What do you like? Video games? Soccer? Porn? Japanese? Western?”

“You lunatic, what are you saying?”

“That’s it, react to me like that. I don’t want to be talking to a wall. For me personally, I like western,” Maru said with a grin.

Dongho narrowed his eyes and looked at Maru.

The only thought in his head was that Maru was a complete madman.

## **Chapter 505**

“Wow, fan service from the first shoot?” said producer Park Hoon as he waved the cup in his hand.

On the disposable cup was a photo of Kang Giwoo smiling, and inside the cup were pieces of fruits cut into bite sized pieces. Giwoo smiled in embarrassment.

“Looks like there’s a reason why the popular ones are popular,” said Dongho as he twirled the pieces of fruit inside the cup.

He didn’t know what was going on when a truck suddenly entered the school premises just after lunch, but it turned out it was something like this.

“Being popular sure has its good sides.”

Joomin ate the fruits with a bright smile on her face. Dongho just licked his lips and hesitated for a while before putting down the cup without eating any.

“You aren’t eating it?”

“You can eat all you want.”

The first shoot didn’t go well. Actually, he didn’t want to treat Joomin so coldly. Who would want to distance himself from a cute noona?

“Uh, okay.”



Joomin smiled awkwardly and avoided his gaze. Dongho inwardly sighed. He didn't want this to happen, but nothing was going the way he wanted. If the shoot went well at least, he would have spent the break in comfort and maybe even joke around with Joomin. However, right now, he felt very stuffy inside.

"If you aren't eating it, I will."

Dongho looked next to him with a displeased face. Maru chewed on the fruits with a face that didn't look worried at all.

"Noona, being famous does really have its benefits. The fans give you dessert, and even if they don't prepare anything, they can boast about you. Maybe this is why people are so hung up on popularity."

"Right? I didn't care about things like these when I first started acting, but I came to realize after working for a while. In the end, what I want to be is a popular actor. Acting is fun, but it would be even better if I am loved by the people, right?"

"You're right. The more you have the better. It'll be great if you can catch both popularity and acting. Being a popular star is much better than being a tragic actor. Honestly speaking, how many things are more important than money in this world?"

Maru was speaking while winking one eye. Dongho snorted.

"How many things are more important than money? Is that what you're thinking? Well then, our Mr. Grumbly Dongho. What kind of mindset do you have when acting?"

"Mr. Grumbly?"

He was flabbergasted. He was going to ignore Maru since he thought that there was nothing to be gained from talking to him, but Maru hooked his arm around his shoulders.

"Tell me. There are two people listening to you here."

Dongho felt stuffy in his mouth as though he just ate a handful of sand.

"Why would I tell you anything?"

"Your acting philosophy. I'll listen to you."

"Like I said, why would I tell you something like that?"

"Then try telling Joomin-noona only. I'll just stay quiet on the side."

How can someone be so shameless? This Han Maru guy was completely unpredictable since there were so many discrepancies between the first impression of him, his actions during the shoot, and this situation now. Dongho didn't get what he was thinking or what he wanted to do at all.

"It's break time anyway. We should talk about something."

Maru was creepily attached to him. Dongho tried to push him away, but he didn't budge as though he was made of stone or something. Going by body figures alone, there wasn't that big of a difference, which made it so strange.

“You know? Acting is the act of expressing the impossible. It’s creating what there isn’t.”

Dongho said what he heard in class. He even plastered those words on the wall since he found them so deeply engraved in his mind.

“Wow, what good words. I feel like that touched my heart. Noona, don’t you think so too?”

“They are good words,” said Joomin.

Dongho felt proud. Now you get it? I’m different from you. Just as he was making a smile of victory, Maru spoke,

“But that’s that. I was asking what your acting philosophy was. Don’t define what acting is, and tell me what you act for. It must be as cool as the line you just said, right?” Maru said as he crossed his legs.

His gaze was directed towards the sky. Dongho became speechless.

“Why do you act, noona?”

Maru changed the target of the question.

“Because I want to be popular.”

“That was fast. For me, I want to earn money. I want to earn a lot of money and feed my family all the good things, and buy only good clothes for them. That’s the best kind of life, don’t you think?”

“It is, it is.”

Maru spoke again,

“So, Dongho, what’s yours? Why do you act?”

“So, I....”

“So, you?”

“I-I act in order to reflect on myself.”

“Wow, self-reflection. That’s one good word after the other. So what is this self-reflection about?”

“Self-reflection is self-reflection, what else can it be?”

“I’m not that smart so I don’t understand difficult jargon like that. Liking money, liking fame. How simple is that? Even a dumb kid like me can understand easy things like that. But I don’t really get self-reflection. I don’t know what you’re trying to say, what you’re trying to do, or why you act.”

He sweated. Dongho tried to find a suitable answer before becoming angry.

“Why do I need to tell you something like that!” He shouted in a fit of anger.

When he did, Maru smiled back instead.

“That’s it, that’s more like it. If you don’t like it, you don’t like it. If you like it, you like it. If you’re annoyed, you’re annoyed. If you hate me, then hate me. Let’s make things easy and actually say what’s on your mind. Why do you need to tell me something like that? Do you think I’m asking because I have

some big interest in you or something? Of course not. I might be much better off asking what Joomin-noonna likes and doesn't like instead."

Maru's face closed in on his.

"You asked me why I kept asking you questions, right? Because I need to know. Only when I know will I decide if I'm going to pretend, snap out at you, or whatever. The director said, didn't he? This will be a year-long shoot. We'll be seeing each other from now on whether we like it or not. You know? This is my first time doing a supporting role. This is a golden opportunity for me, and I don't want to ruin such a precious opportunity."

"It's also an important opportunity for me as...."

Before he even had time to finish, Maru interrupted.

"Then why is that all you can do? Do you think you can do things half-assedly just because you're a side character and not a main character? Or are you that good? Are you good enough to be acknowledged by the director?"

"That's...."

"Because I'm not. I'm not good enough at acting to get an okay from him when I don't take it seriously, nor have I made myself known to enough people that I'll get another opportunity even if I miss this one. I have nothing, so I have only one conclusion. I will do anything it takes. You asked me why I kept asking you questions? I did so because I want to be closer to you even if it's just a little. I'm not expecting something like friendship. I just want to be at a level where I can pretend to be close to you in front of the camera. I told you right, we should at least pretend. You told me you can do it."

After saying those words without even breathing, Maru picked up the cup with fruits in it with a sour face.

"You said you aren't eating this, right?"

"Uh, yeah."

Dongho could only stutter.

"Someone I really respect once told me, yeah?" Maru said as he looked in front of him.

"That person said that I shouldn't put on a lie when I act, that I should stay true when acting. But that is actually something incredibly difficult to do. It's easy to say, but I wouldn't survive if I wanted to do something like that. I don't dare to either."

After chewing on something, Maru spat out a persimmon seed.

"What can I do if I can't stay true? I can only pretend. Pretending to be close, pretending to cry, pretending to be sad. But 'pretending' by myself gets me nowhere. My partner should match my pretense."

Maru forked a piece of pineapple and gave it to Joomin. Joomin made a confused expression before accepting it. Dongho frowned.

“Here, say ah.”

Maru gave him a strawberry. Dongho shook his head, saying that he didn’t want it, but Maru was forceful. He eventually gave up and ate it.

“I know you don’t like me. I would be an idiot if I didn’t. But the thing is, I can tell that even when the camera is rolling. If it is obvious to me who’s right next to you, how blatantly obvious would it be to the director? No, it would actually be okay if you actually expressed your hate towards me openly. However, you smile awkwardly at me since you’re in front of the camera, and you have a weird expression on your face all the time.”

Maru closed his eyes and scratched his brows. Dongho couldn’t find any words to reply.

“You know that you, I, and Joomin-noona are a bundle. There are many scenes where the three of us are together. If the director gets mad, he will snap out at all three of us, but I don’t want to be wrongly accused.”

Maru emptied the cup before chewing it vigorously.

“That’s why we should get to know each other. You can swear at my face. You can also talk bad about me behind my back. But you have to at least look like we’re close friends when the camera’s rolling. That’s what the script says, doesn’t it? That we are best friends.”

“...So what do you want me to do then?”

“I’m saying that we should have a talk. Even if you hate me, you have to hate me after you get to know me properly. If you hate me awkwardly because you don’t know anything, it will show when the camera’s rolling. Either you completely turn away from me and make this into a business relationship, or we stay close normally too. Let’s decide on that first. Don’t get upset all by yourself and drag others down with you when you go down. Joomin-noona, you’re alright with that, right?”

Joomin said that she was okay with it as though she didn’t even need to think about it. Dongho sighed.

“I really don’t like you.”

Maru then replied,

“Who said I liked you?”

\* \* \*

“Look at them.”

Park Hoon tapped on the new producer, Kim Minjoong’s head, before pointing at the young actors. Three people, standing next to the goalpost, were talking to each other.

“They’re getting along well.”

“Does that look like they’re getting along well to you? I’m not sure about Joomin, but Maru and Dongho are practically swearing at each other. It would be fun if they got into a fight.”

“Oh, really? Should I go and stop them?”

“Nah. They’ll take care of themselves. They aren’t popular enough to receive care from their agencies, so if they get into a fight, we just cut them off. I really don’t like that guy. Geez, was I wrong in the head when I did that audition? Why the hell did I pick that little shit?”

“You mean Seong Dongho?”

“Then did you think I would be talking about Han Maru? If he looks like he won’t improve after we shoot the 2nd episode, we should just cut him off. If we roll team B and edit the scenes, it will be easy to fill up a supporting character.”

“May I go and give them some advice?”

“You can try. But you sound like you have a lot of time, minding people like that. From what I know, you are supposed to be remaking the time schedule since Kim Suyeon can’t come to some of the shoots.”

“Oh, that? We just have to get one scene early Wednesday.”

“Really? That’s strange. Senior Kim Daesik, who’s in the same scene, said he can’t do early mornings. Am I the only one who got told that?”

When Park Hoon narrowed his eyes and said those words, Minjoong turned pale in fright before standing up.

“Work properly will you? Before you have time to care about the actors, you have to look after your own work.”

“Y-yes!”

“Get it adjusted quickly. Don’t just leave a gap.”

Park Hoon rolled his script up and hit Minjoong’s head lightly with it.

\* \* \*

“Yeseul, that girl. I wonder if she’s a kind girl, or just a little lacking in the head.”

“I’m not sure about Yeseul, but I get that you sure are a little lacking in the head.”

“Lee Chan, that’s how you treat me?”

“What ‘that’s how you treat me?’. Forget it and just give me back my notes from yesterday. Though, you probably didn’t study at all.”

After Maru’s words ended, the camera moved off to the side. Producer Park Hoon gave the okay sign.

Okseon quietly looked at the two people. The two were terrible in shoots in the morning. But ever since lunch, the number of NGs decreased, and now, they were getting okay signs faster than anyone.

Did that mean the two got along well? Well, that wasn’t it either.

“You should have rolled your tongue a little more there.”

“Shut up. What I did was right, you know?”

“Even if I advise you, you don’t take it seriously.”

“Is that even advice? ‘Roll your tongue?’”

While the staff members moved the equipment in order to switch locations, Maru and Dongho kept quarrelling in one corner. Who’s better and who’s not - they were being childish. What was funny was that even though they looked like they were about to fight, Maru would hang his arm around Dongho’s shoulders, and Dongho would strangely smile even while being frightened out of his wits.

Are they perverts? Okseon could only think of it that way. Those two were an incomprehensible duo.

‘Though, he’s strange too.’

Okseon looked at Giwoo. He looked polite and was smiling on the surface, but from time to time, he would make an evil grin. Though, she didn’t care that much, since it wasn’t like she was going to become close to him. Okseon lost interest and looked at the script. She didn’t really care. As long as the shoot went well, that is.

\* \* \*

“Okseon might actually be quite a lonely girl,” Joomin said.

“Why would you say that?”

“We met eyes a couple of times. She looks expressionless on the surface, but perhaps she’s waiting for us to talk to her?”

“I don’t think that’s what it’s about though.”

“You think?”

When Joomin tilted her head, Dongho added.

“I know. Girls like her think about strange things in their minds.”

“Okseon is not a pervert like you,” Maru interrupted.

“Why do you keep picking a fight with me?”

“Then do you want me to whisper love into your ears?”

“Urgh, you’re making me puke.”

Joomin smiled faintly when she saw the two talking. What she thought was going to be a horrible relationship looked somewhat better now. It would be great if the two got closer in the future.

“Hey, hey. Let’s go,” Maru said as he grabbed Dongho’s arm.

Dongho grumbled but still moved.

Joomin looked at the two before following them.

## **Chapter 506**

“How’s Jeyeol?”

“Jeyeol? He hated the thought of doing that underwear advert, but he actually likes it now that he actually did it. When I showed him his appearance on a comic ad, he turned his eyes away, saying that he can’t look at it. He looked like he would look at it in secret when I’m not there. He’s so cute.”

“Look after him carefully. I had a hard time persuading his mother.”

“Understood.”

“What about Gyuho?”

“I think the movie audition fell through. I think they decided to go with a kid they found through connections with other agencies. I wanted to look further into it, but I wasn’t able to since everyone didn’t want to talk about it.”

“President Park told me that we should have a drink together a few days ago, so that’s what this is about huh. I guess we can’t help it. It’s a bit of a pity, but it’ll only ache your arms if you wave at a bus that already departed. I heard that RBS decided on a mini-series. Try to send a video to that producer before the audition gets announced.”

“Yes. Gyuho, video, got it,” Byunchan noted that down on his notebook as he muttered to himself.

“What about Sooil?”

“He finished shooting the public service advertisement, and he’s now shooting an ad for an educational program. I heard that it was a day-long shoot, but it seems like some of their equipment died on them since they told me I should empty his schedule until tomorrow. I agreed for now since there’s no other schedule.”

“If they want something from us, don’t agree immediately and drag for some time instead, before you give them the okay. We should take the upper hand in this tug of war while we still can. If we let go or pull suddenly, they will get startled, so show them early on.”

“Yes, understood.”

President Lee Junmin, who had buried himself deeply in his chair, yawned before standing up. Byungchan also relaxed a little. The business meeting was now over.

“How is it these days? You have a hard time looking after all of them, don’t you?”

“Not at all. I seem to be blessed with my work when I listen to what my colleagues are going through.”

“Minors rarely have overnight shoots. Their parents will get mad if they do. Also, there’s a rumor circulating around about a law that will forbid minors from night shoots. Apparently, it will also restrict the shoot times to under 30 hours.”

“Will that really work?”

Junmin snorted before sitting down on the sofa on the other side. Byungchan received a green plum drink from him.

“Like hell it would. They might as well stop minors from doing shoots altogether. They’re just making a big noise about rights and whatnot. They look like they’re doing something if they look like they are

taking action. If some journalists write something about that, the masses will think that 'oh, the drama/movie industry of this country is also developing', or something."

Hearing that, Byungchan took a sip.

"Are you preparing your acting?"

The drink that was going down his throat came back up. He coughed a few times before looking at Junmin.

"Why are you so surprised? Did you do something wrong or something?"

"No, it was just unexpected."

"Now that I think about it, I don't talk with you that much huh. That's just how it works. People that quietly do their work well aren't looked for that often. They do well even if I leave them alone."

"Ah, yes."

Junmin crossed his arms.

"I really don't like talking about things like this, but I don't think acting suits you."

Byungchan wiped his lips.

"I think so too."

"But you're still trying?"

"Yes, I am. I'm still twenty five, so I think I still have an opportunity."

"Really? Then have a look at this."

Byungchan had a look at the copy of a scenario that was placed in front of him.

"What's this?"

"A scenario for a one-act play. It's somewhat of a filler for YBS, and they wanted me to recommend someone. Go try it out."

"President."

"Honestly speaking, you'll probably get rejected."

"R-rejected?"

"The characters aren't that hard. What's left is the acting skill, and it'll probably be hard for you. That producer, although he just became a full-fledged producer from an assistant director, has good eyes. He will probably use everything he can since it's his first work, so he probably won't pick someone he doesn't think is perfect. It's not like he's running out of time either."

"Then why did you give me...."

"To try doing it. And then think about your decisions afterwards."



Decision - Byungchan felt that the stack of paper in his hand was very heavy.

“Twenty-five. You are at an age where you can try anything. Even if you fall, you will be able to get back on your feet right away. But you know? The world is becoming harsher by the day. Debuting is a red ocean, but surviving is an even deadlier blood ocean. Actors? They’re good. Receiving the spotlight, having journalists tail them all the time, receiving attention. Everyone dreams of that. But these days, everything is becoming more and more systemized. Kids are learning ballet and whatnot to learn to use their bodies when they’re still infants, and they undergo all sorts of care from child actor-specialized agencies. They will become young stars just like that and achieve beautiful success. We live in an era where the prepared gets what’s prepared for them.”

Byungchan slowly nodded. The children under his care mostly took those same steps to become an actor. The days where stars appeared out of nowhere and lasted a long time were long gone. There were times when an actor over 30 years old suddenly became popular, but even such people had at least 10 years of experience when you dug into them. The so-called top stars had enough experience to match. The current entertainment industry was one where a windfall star will not continue receiving the spotlight for long. There were more things to see, and even more actors. The audience chose very rationally between new things and what they were used to seeing. In that process, many actors lost their titles and left the field.

“You told me that you shot your graduation piece before you went to the military, right?”

“Yes.”

“Did anyone contact you after that? A lot of them must have gone to Chungmuro. Did anyone ever call you to play a minor character, or heck, to help at all?”

“Not even once.”

Byungchan smiled bitterly. He was aware that he didn’t have the talent. But he kept trying with the mindset that he should try hard enough to cough up blood before giving up.

Junmin sighed in a low voice.

“I really talk unpleasantly when I start to talk about personal stuff. That’s why others don’t usually like me. I am aware of it, but I probably won’t try to fix it. There are many people who still try to suck up to me even if I live like this.”

It was just as he said, his words weren’t that pleasant, but he looked cool for some reason. People who had deep thoughts really were different when they said something like that.

“Since I’m like this, let’s go even further. What do you think effort is?”

“Effort, you say?”

“Yes, effort.”

“Doing your best.”

“What’s doing your best?”

“Seeing blood at least.”

“Are you acting enough that you’re seeing blood?”

“I plan to.”

“When?”

“I’ll have a look at the scenario and do that until the audition....”

“No, you probably won’t be able to. Of course, you might do it. But from what I’ve experienced, that isn’t so easy. You think that acting is something you can improve if you try hard enough, right?”

Byungchan nodded. Acting was a realm of talent, but he also thought that effort could make up most of it.

“Is it not?”

“Let’s say there’s a swimming athlete. Is swimming a realm of talent or of effort?”

“I guess there’s a talent element to it since long limbs and a sturdy body gives them an edge.”

“Then what about studying?”

“Studying? I think that’s about effort. Your grades will rise as long as you do your best.”

“Then what’s the difference between swimming and studying?”

“Swimming is something you do with your body while studying is something you do with your head. I think that’s it?”

“Then what about acting?”

“...You use your body and your head.”

Byungchan gulped down his drink in one go.

“Studying is the realm of effort, huh. Never in my life have I thought that way even once. Sitting down in a chair for a long time is a talent in and of itself. There are people that, like you said, try their best to the point that they cough up blood to get what they want. But how many people actually get what they want?”

“Do I really lack that talent?”

“Take it from an actor who stayed nameless until I was over thirty - you are worse than me.”

“You are being too harsh.”

“If we are talking about work, I would tell you to put your effort in, that you will be able to do well if you try. But this is just a personal conversation. It’s not my style to give people useless hope.”

“I see.”

“People ruin themselves by trying to ape their betters, and yet we say that there are such things as ‘beautiful challenges’ amidst a difficult situation. These two contradict each other, but we accept both.”

And then, we just use the more convenient one according to the situation. Talent and effort. For me, I believe that both of them are the same. It's an extremely personal opinion of mine, and I might be entirely wrong. However, seeing as how I became quite successful, it's highly likely that I'm right."

"What should I do then?"

"Do what you want first. Do it before coming to me. For now, there won't be a huge problem being a manager and practicing your acting at the same time. I didn't give you a lot of work after all. But I can't always leave you hanging in the middle like that. If you come to a decision to focus on this work, I am going to give you a lot of work. You'll meet a more diverse range of people, and your public position will naturally climb as well. I'll set you up with a whole department, not just a corner desk in the office, and give you a nameplate to match. I climbed up all the way here with my talent to discern people and raise them. I was also quite lucky and didn't experience that many failures. From what I see, you aren't someone that should act, but someone that should lead those that act."

Byungchan had a look at the scenario.

"I'm not telling you to decide right now. Decide after you see that. Though, you probably won't make it."

"Do I not have the slightest bit of hope?"

"If I was the producer, I wouldn't use you."

"I see."

"Should I have given you some instead?"

"No. I think it'll be better if I hear that there's no hope for me. I'll be happier if I do get picked after all."

Byungchan tightly grabbed the scenario.

"I will do it."

"Alright. They say the young will look for pain of their own accord. It was nice talking to you today. Do you have any work to do today?"

"Yes. I need to pick up Maru."

"Today was the first shoot, wasn't it?"

"Yes."

"Alright, you can go. There's a phone number behind it so try calling during the day."

"Thank you."

Byungchan quietly closed the door and left.

\* \* \*

"Cut! That's it for today. Let's wrap up."

"Thank you for your work, everyone. We are done."

Maru looked at the sky when he heard that everything was finished. He felt rather exhausted even though he didn't do anything much. He looked at the staff members that were folding up the equipment before walking out of the school entrance. He waved his hand at Dongho and Joomin who took the taxi. Okseon was walking towards the bus stop.

"Thanks for your work."

When he turned around, he saw Giwoo, Yeseul, and Jichan. Yeseul and Jichan were getting ready to go back in their parent's cars.

"You too."

"Everyone doesn't really listen to you, do they?" Giwoo smiled as he spoke.

Maru just shrugged.

"Tell me if you find anything hard. We are friends, after all."

"Alright. I'll tell you once something comes up."

He smiled and waved at Giwoo, who was walking towards a van. He felt his neck aching even more. Playing with the others was even more tiring than work.

"Maru."

Byungchan brought the car to the school entrance.

"I thought you had work to do. I can just take the bus home."

"I'm going to go home as well after giving you a lift. What about dinner?"

"I haven't had one yet."

"Then do you wanna go eat first? We have the almighty company card with us. It's the magical key to eating anything below 50 thousand won."

"If it's on a company card, of course, I'll take up that offer. Do you have anything you want to eat, hyung?"

"Me? I want to eat something spicy."

"I thought you didn't like spicy food."

"Not today."

"Something stressing you?"

"Stress, huh. I guess you can call it that. I just heard 'you are no good' said right to my face. But I was so clearly dismissed that I didn't even feel angry. In fact, it even sounded relieving."

"Haha."

Maru got in the passenger seat.

"How was it for you today?"

“Me? Playing around with the others is hard.”

“Was the shoot easy, then?”

“Yes. I wonder why it’s so hard to get close to kids these days.”

“Do you know that you are included in those ‘kids’?”

“I do. Maybe that’s why, but I also want to eat something spicy. How about chicken feet?”

“Sounds good to me. Chicken feet to heal two stressed souls. Sounds nice.”

Byungchan laughed before driving off. Maru turned on the radio and switched channels for a while before letting go when he heard familiar music. It was Let It Be by the Beatles.

“Maru.”

“Yes?”

“Do you think that people should follow the order and know their place when they live their life?”

“If that’s easy, then sure, that’s probably for the better.”

“What if they have something they want to do?”

“Then they should do that.”

“What a backbone-less life.”

“Lives with backbones break easily so that’s not good.”

“Goddammit. The president told me not to continue acting.”

“Then don’t do it. Apparently, listening to adults has its benefits.”

“Cheer for me, will you?”

“Waa, go~ Lee Byungchan. I’m not sure if you’ll succeed or not, but go~.”

“Forget it. It was my bad for expecting anything from you. Let’s just go get chicken feet.”

Byunchan laughed as he turned the wheel.

## **Chapter 507**

“Maru, it’s starting!”

“Oppa, what are you doing?”

He was in desperate need of some earmuffs right now. Maru tried blocking his ears with his hands, but he could not block out Bada’s voice since she spoke right next to his ears.

“I said it’s starting. Let’s watch it while we have dinner.”

“I’m not watching it.”

“Why? Let’s watch it together.”

Maru looked at Bada through the corner of his eyes. She had an evil smile on her face and was clearly enjoying this situation. Bada, who never watched a TV program without her favorite celebrity, was talking about how today was the first episode since the morning for some reason. It must have been for this moment.

“Do you want to watch my acting that bad?”

“I want to see you curl up like a squid. Come quickly. It’s starting now.”

Maru was dragged by Bada to the living room.

“Mrs. Lee. Wasn’t our family motto to eat at the table?”

The food was on the sitting table in the living room instead of the dining room. It was good that his favorite dubu muchim and jeyuk-bokkeum were on the table, but he felt like he had a bad stomach already when he thought about how he would have to eat dinner while watching the first episode of ‘New Semester’.

“From now on, we are going to eat dinner here on Saturdays at five.”

“Five is way too early. We usually eat past six, don’t we? Bada will screech at night because she’s hungry. Are you okay with that?”

“I can just give her some snacks when she says she’s hungry. Sit down already. The ads are almost over.”

Since both the mother and the daughter were acting against him, he was helpless. Maru gave up and sat down. The phone he brought with him was getting messages and calls since ten minutes ago, and they were all from his classmates. He checked the first text message just in case, but the content was quite a spectacle to look at.

-I shall watch your acting and give you an evaluation. Look forward to it.

The texts after that were about the same. He didn’t know that the rebellious and adolescent high school students would all be thinking about the same thing. It was lamentable. He ignored the texts and the calls and started eating.

“Aren’t you getting calls?”

“I can ignore them. It’s just my friends who decided to tease me. Mom, this is a drama for young people, so it won’t suit your tastes.”

“Forget about tastes. My son is in it, so I have to watch it.”

Maru wanted to go hide in a hole or something.

“It’s starting.”

Maru raised the TV volume. After the phone ad finished, the screen turned black, and following that, Yeseul’s face appeared.

“Who’s that unni?”

“Ahn Yeseul.”

“You close to her?”

“No.”

“What the heck.”

Bada quickly asked a question before focusing on the screen.

“You should focus on the food when you’re eating.”

“Don’t mind me. I can eat with my eyes closed. Right, mom?”

Even his mom, who would scold Bada for it usually, just replied to her with a smile. If it was going to be like this, it would’ve been better if he didn’t mention anything about the first episode at all. It was still too embarrassing for him to watch himself appear on the screen. If he thought of it as work and watched it by himself, he could watch it no problem, but watching it with someone else like this, especially his family members, was something he would not get used to in his entire lifetime.

“That school looks good. Where is it?”

“It’s a middle school in Seoul.”

“Wow, why is it so different from our school?”

He ate a spoonful of rice before looking at the screen. The camera slowly backed away from the scene where Yeseul, Giwoo, and Jichan walked through the school gates together, and the OST started flowing out of the speakers. Then it faded out. On top of the blacked out screen, the title of the first episode appeared. Just What is a Friend? - that was the title of the first episode.

“When do you come out, son?” His mom asked after watching it.

“Mom, it’s only been thirty seconds since it started. Wait a bit.”

“I thought you were a supporting character. Aren’t you going to appear really quickly?”

“I’ll probably appear soon.”

The first episode, which he shot two months ago at the beginning of January, aired in March just like the title ‘New Semester’. He didn’t know why it was delayed from the original January airing date, all the way to March, but the internet seemed to think that the decision was well-made. Since it was a youth drama, the main target audience was naturally young people. The reason it was airing at 5 on a Saturday was also to target that student demographic.

He was chopping up some tofu when Yeseul’s narration started and the three people went into the left entrance of the school.

So it will come soon. Maru put the slice of tofu in his bowl before looking at the screen. He was originally going to watch it by himself later, but now that this happened, it would be okay to ask his mother and his sister for their opinion. He planned to ask them what about him looked awkward, and what he could do better.

The camera shot the corridor from the main character's perspective. It then switched to an overhead view when the three reached the central door. This was the scene where Yeseul and Okseon confronted each other.

"I'll be appearing soon, but only for a brief moment."

Okseon talked to Yeseul with a proud expression, and Yeseul replied with a nonchalant face.

He remembered that it took about ten tries to do this scene. Yeseul and Okseon looked cute in the frame. Okseon was a little tanned, while Yeseul, as expected of a child actress, looked very bright. It was the makeup that differed according to the character, and it was emphasized under the lights and the camera.

"Oh! There you are!" Bada said.

The rice grains in her mouth flew outwards. He pitied Dowook when he looked at his sister who didn't have the slightest bit of feminine charms. He was even worried if Dowook was being bullied by her or something.

"Maru, Maru. You are right there. Oh, my word. Oh my word."

Maru clasped his arms with his hands. His mother slapped his arms with a giggle, and her hands were quite harsh. Bada's harsh use of her hands was probably inherited from their mother.

That's one goofy-looking person - Maru rubbed his nose as he looked at himself on the screen. He looked quite good in glasses. Her aesthetic senses had shone. There she goes again - his first line as a supporting character flowed out through the speakers. Of course, he didn't say that line while the camera had its attention on him. It was more like background noise.

"Your voice is too small."

"I'm talking from the side after all."

"When are you going to appear again?"

"Mom, watch for the plot. Do you watch dramas just to look at your son?"

"Well, I sure do. So, when are you going to appear again?"

"In the classroom scene, probably."

His mother was watching TV while on her phone, and she was sending texts at a speed that did not lose out to a high school girl.

"Who are you texting?"

"My friends."

"What are you telling them?"

"Don't mind. It's just a mom-chat-thing."



He peeked at her phone screen, and it was all about telling her friends to watch New Semester. He wanted to tell her to stop, but she wasn't someone who would listen just because he told her, so he decided not to.

"OMG! Han Maru is on TV! He has glasses on! This is insane, insane. He's actually there."

After hopping around with a spoon, Bada approached him before putting her spoon before him.

"Mr. Han Maru. What do you feel now that you've become an actor?"

"Hey, put it away before I start hitting you."

"Pop star Han Maru! Are you saying that you are going to use violence? If you do...."

He smacked Bada on the head. For some reason, she didn't snap out with 'Maru hit me' like usual and just grinned from ear to ear. Maru once again realized that smiles could be really unpleasant at times. At the same time, he pitied Dowook even more. He even thought that he should give Dowook a warm hug the next time he complained to him about Bada.

The scene was now where Jichan and Yeseul were talking in the corridor. The background song was sung by a popular idol group. Their name was....

"It's the Change-oppas!"

That was right, Change. Maru clicked his tongue as he looked at Bada. She practically read his mind this time.

A lot of NGs happened in this scene as well. Yeseul froze up from time to time, and Jichan stuttered a lot here.

The camera shot the classroom and it showed the students taking a break in class. This scene was also taken about seven times. The audio for this scene was taken separately with everyone gathered around the microphone. In this scene, Producer Park Hoon said that the classroom should look natural and at the same time, like a model classroom. In the end, he just said 'do whatever you want' and chatted with them.

The morning HR started when a senior actor, who played the HR teacher, appeared, and then Suyeon appeared.

"It's Kim Suyeon."

"You know her too, mom?"

"I do. She appeared in a weekend drama before. Mom really liked it. She was really nice to her parents. In moms talk, the model good kid refers to her."

"Oh, really?"

"But how's she really? Is she really kind?"

"I'll leave that to your imagination."

"I'm sure she is. People can't hide their true thoughts. The bad ones will look spiteful even if they act a good character, and a good person will look somewhat pitiful if they act an evil character."

"You know that?"

"My boy, mom has had 20 years of experience watching dramas. Morning dramas, daily dramas, weekend dramas. If you watch for a long time, you can see all of it. In that sense, I'm sure Kim Suyeon is normally a polite and cautious girl."

"Ooh, mom's good."

Since actors and actresses lived off the fantasies of the audience, he didn't see the need to correct her. At that moment, Bada spoke.

"Right, mom. Suyeon-uni is really kind. I saw her in the hospital. She replied to me when I thanked her."

"You know Kim Suyeon?"

"I do. Oh, didn't I tell you back then? When oppa was in the hospital, Suyeon-uni made a visit."

"Oh my word."

Maru turned his head around. His mother's gaze was quite uncomfortable.

"You know Kim Suyeon?"

"Yeah."

"How?"

"We belong to the same agency."

"So my boy Maru was doing really well, huh."

"Mom. Miss Kim Suyeon over there is a super popular actress while I'm at most a sidekick so don't look at us like we're the same."

Maru ate a spoonful of doenjang-guk and looked at the screen. The woman that liked wearing tight clothes, liked wearing red lipsticks, and talked about how legs were meant to be revealed had now become an immature teacher-in-training. The kind that looked air-headed and awkward, but funny for some reason.

"Amazing."

"What is?"

His mother turned around and asked. Maru told her not to mind. Since he was aware of her real personality, he felt that she was wearing clothes that did not suit her, but an ordinary viewer would never notice the difference.

"Suyeon-uni looks so pretty. Oppa, get me an autograph of her later."

"Mom, she only calls me oppa when she wants something from me. What do you think?"

He looked at his mother with pleading eyes to side with him, but unfortunately, it seemed that he wasn't able to break the mother-daughter alliance today. He sighed and looked at the TV. The scene that he shot after he grabbed Dongho by the collars aired.

"Ooh, Han Maru. you look pretty decent."

"My son looks handsome."

Maru twitched his toes when he was flattered so openly. Why was it so embarrassing to hear good words from his family? Even after all the years he lived, that did not change.

-Cut the nonsense and get back to studying.

"Cut the nonsense and get back to studying, gee."

Bada turned her head around and imitated the line. Maru looked for a cushion around him. He wanted to throw one at her so bad. However, the quick-witted Bada had already taken all of the cushions.

-I will be able to go to Seoul U if I maintain my grades.

"I will be able to go to Seoul U if I maintain my grades... pfft. Mom, Maru thinks he can go to Seoul university! That's funny. What a cocky character. Fine, you can be good at studying in dramas."

Bada lied down on the floor and started laughing her ass out.

"Credit card."

"Ah, why that again!"

"Don't laugh. I'll take it back from you if I see your teeth."

"How petty of you. But today, I'm going to do it!"

Maru had to listen to Bada saying his lines after that as well. At first, it was utterly horrible to the point that his hairs stood on their ends, but he got used to it after a while. Bada also lost interest after a while and stopped.

"You're quite good though. I was going to tease you about it if you looked strange."

"I'm getting paid for it, so naturally I have to do well. Oh, mom. I won't appear anymore after this."

As soon as he said those words, his mother stood up.

"Then I guess I should do the dishes."

"Now that makes me sad. Aren't you going to watch until the end?"

"No. It's not fun anymore."

"How cruel of you, Mrs Lee. So? What do you think? Do I look awkward?"

"I'm not sure, since you didn't even appear that much."

His mother went to the kitchen with the plates and said that he did well in a small voice. Maru smiled when he heard that.

“Mr. Han Maru. I hope you do well in the future too.”

Bada patted his shoulder before going back to her room.

Maru watched the episode until the end in the quiet living room. He thought back to the memories of that day and thought about the framing of the scenes, and checked his own acting to see if he found anything he was lacking.

‘I guess I look decent. There was nothing until the 7th episode.’

The 7th episode of the drama had been shot already. Although he had an easy time attending the shoots since he was on holiday, the morning scenes would now be shot on the weekends and the afternoon scenes would be shot after school on a weekday starting the day after tomorrow since he, as well as many people, had to go to school. Byungchan also told him that he might have to skip classes to attend shoots. Someone would have to make sacrifices when they adjusted the overall schedule, and since the schedule priority was based on experience, the new actors would suffer most of the time.

“Looks like I’ll get busy.”

Maru turned off the TV after seeing his name in the ending credits.

## **Chapter 508**

A burly guy suddenly leaped at him as soon as he went into the classroom. Maru dodged to the side. After the guy waved in the air for a little, he turned around and sat down again. He was one of Maru’s friends from the 2nd year.

“Hey, hey. The actor is here!”

Everyone rushed at him and congratulated him by giving him a smack on the shoulders, and each hit was quite painful since they were all high school boys with a good build.

“Let me go already.”

He dusted his hands before sitting down. It had been one day since the new semester began. Since there were only two classes for electric engineering, he knew all the faces in his class. One thing that changed after he became a 3rd year was that he was separated from Dojin, Dowook, and Daemyung. Those three were in the next class over. Though, they came over every break, making him wonder if they actually belonged to the other class.

“Lee Chan! Don’t do it!”

“That’s right, Lee Chan!”

“Lee Chan! Chan Chan Chan!”

He gave a solid smack to everyone who approached him to annoy him like flies.

“Lee Chan just hit me!”

“You’re that type of guy?”

“Call Yeseul here! No, get the class president here. Bring Kim Seri here!”

“Yeseul is better than Seri. Yeseul is cute.”

“Hey, hey. Yeonjeong is better than Yeseul.”

“Who the heck is Yeonjeong?”

“You know, the girl next to our Channy over here. The tall one with a slightly bigger chest.”

“Oh, her! Joomin, that’s right. I actually researched online and found out her name.”

Maru hung his bag next to his desk before leaving the classroom. When he kicked at the people that followed him out, they flinched before taking a step back. Of course, these people wouldn’t stop just because of that, so he quickly fled to the 5th floor classroom.

“I thought you’d come here.”

Daemyung was there already. He greeted Daemyung who welcomed him as though he knew of Maru’s struggles before sitting down. He was a bit tired after running up the stairs.

“I will probably not live my full life like this.”

“They’re like that today too?”

“I thought they’d calm down since they spent the whole day yesterday doing it, but I feel like this will last a week if it’s like this.”

“My class was in an uproar too. Dowook barely managed to hold back everyone from going to your class and teasing you, so I think you should take refuge here during lunch.”

Daemyung threw something at him. When he caught it, he saw a sausage. So this was what he was munching on for a while.

“I thought enduring a day would be fine, but this is a real pain.”

“Everyone’s like that because they find it curious.”

“You mean because they find it fun to tease me.”

“I guess that’s true too.”

“Why are these boys clinging to me? It’s creeping me out.”

“Don’t worry. The design class will also make a visit too. Our friends there have spread the rumors there too.”

“My lord. Enemies everywhere.”

“But doesn’t it feel good? You’re experiencing what it’s like to be a popular actor.”

“Do you want to be in my shoes instead?”

“N-no.”

“I’ll be very disappointed if you really meant that even though you saw people calling me Lee Chan in the bathroom.”

“That’s true. Sorry about that.”

Daemyung threw him another sausage as an apology. Maru clearly saw his friend hesitating a little when he was about to throw that sausage.

“Let me ask you something. You’re going to tell noona where I am if she asks while treating you to a hamburger right?”

“I’m not that cheap. Though, I will spill everything if there’s coke too.”

“I can’t trust a damn person.”

“Enjoy it. You can’t help it. Everyone’s excited because of an event.”

He understood it for the first day of school. He laughed with anyone that blatantly teased him. He thought that their interest would die down the next day after all. He thought that it wasn’t such a bad thing to enjoy the popularity for a day.

But nothing had changed after a day. No, it was worse. People from other classes were going to make a visit. This was unforeseen. He would at least find it worthwhile if someone came up to him and told him how his acting was, how his character was, or talked about the plot at least, but literally everyone was parroting ‘Lee Chan Lee Chan’ at him, so he wanted to close his ears off.

“I think quite a lot of the kids in my class watched it.”

“Did they say it was fun?”

“They said it’s funny.”

“That’s fortunate.”

“Some said it was childish.”

“That’s understandable.”

“But everyone talked about how instructor Suyeon was pretty.”

“I’d like to see their expressions when I tell them that she came to this school wearing a jersey when they were going home. It would be quite helpful in my acting as well since I can use it as reference.”

“There will be an uproar.”

Daemyung chuckled. Maru looked at the clock. It was 8:30. He woke up early in the morning, did his vocal exercise, and came to school early since he didn’t want to daze out at home, but he thought that he should make it just in time so that he wasn’t late starting tomorrow.

“How are studies going?” Maru asked.

“I was at the desk until school started, and it sure was hard. I think I’m getting used to it though. You kinda have to force yourself to get into the habit of staying seated.”

“It is. Since you managed to persuade them, do your best at it. Your tuition is paid for too. You don’t have to rely on your parents for that.”

"I will. Oh, I'm watching the movies and dramas recommended to me by teacher. He told me it'll help with studying direction."

"It's that person right? The one that did Appu's script. I can't remember his name right now."

"Writer Bae Chulho."

"Right. Writer Bae Chulho. He's a thankful person. Giving you tips like that."

"Actually, I'm more comfortable around him than Joon-hyung. Joon-hyung is really merciless after all. Also, he's a little scary when he doesn't say anything."

"Gwak Joon-hyung does have that kind of side to him. Anyway. Do your best. Since you've made a decision, you have to get top scores at this school at least."

"I hope I can."

"You will since you are smart. Oh, did you travel around with Jiyeon during the holidays?"

"Wh-what?"

"Damn kid. You really can pretend to not have heard people. If you don't wanna tell me, you don't have to. I was just curious."

When he had a look at the clock, he saw that it was almost time for morning HR. The HR teacher for his 3rd year was the kindest teacher among the teachers for his major and did not scold him even if he was a little late. Actually, rather than kind, he was someone that couldn't be bothered with anything. Though, to a student's eyes, that was pretty much the same thing.

"Let's go then, shall w...."

"I kissed her first."

Daemyung said those words when he stood up about halfway. Maru was flabbergasted. What did he just hear?

He stared at Daemyung. Daemyung, beet red up to his ears, told him to meet during lunch before leaving the classroom in a flash. He was very agile, unlike his body figure. Maru chuckled once before fully standing up.

"He acted all naive, and yet he does everything, huh."

Maru wondered if he should gift him some condoms. The naive and pure ones were the ones that would take it all the way once they were in the mood, so he didn't think it was a bad idea. Maru closed the classroom door before walking down to the 3rd floor.

"Lee Chan, where have you been?"

"Lee Chan!"

That name struck his ears without fail as soon as he entered his class.

\* \* \*

“Isn’t 15% pretty decent?”

“Youth Generation had below 4% when it was nearing its end.”

“Then this is huge, huh.”

“Not really. Youth Generation also got more than 10% when it started off. It fell when Blue fell apart. Teenage girls were in an uproar and stopped watching.”

“I’m not sure since there aren’t any girls in our class, so how do you know that?”

“I heard about it when I hung around with the girls from the girls high.”

“Hey. If you went to a place like that, you should have brought this big brother there t...”

Maru turned around.

“Are you guys related to the drama industry? Stop it already. Aren’t you guys tired of it?”

“Maru, I mean, Lee Chan. This is only the 2nd day. There’s still a long way to go. Also, we thought about it, and if New Semester wants to be a huge jackpot, I think Suyeon-noona needs to wear a sexy outfit.”

“It sounds like we’re joking to you, right? That teacher outfit is way too old-fashioned. It’s out of date. A mini skirt, black stockings, and a white blouse.”

“This fucker must have watched porn. But I think I prefer that too.”

“Right? It’s a form of art.”

Maru shook his head in resignation. He underestimated the fantasies of high school students. Whenever they spoke, they were talking about some absurd things, and it made him rather embarrassed that he was once a ‘high school boy’ as well. He must have acted like that before he was reborn, huh. Maru wanted to rip his hair out.

One of his classmates hung his arm around his shoulders.

“Maru.”

“What?”

“Suyeon-n...”

Maru blocked his mouth.

“Hey, I might turn crazy if I hear the name Kim Suyeon one more time.”

“Ooh, Han Maru, you still think that will work after knowing us for two years?”

“Lee Chan, I’ll take responsibility if you go crazy.”

Maru glared at his grinning friend before slowly closing on his lips. When the two pairs of lips neared each other, his classmate screeched and jumped backwards.

“I’m planning to shoot a homosexual movie.”



“You lunatic! That doesn’t mean you can....”

“Come at me. I’ll show you how tongue techniques can make you go limp.”

When he licked his lips and took a step towards that guy, everyone looked like they chewed on sand and shut their mouths. Maru sighed.

“You guys don’t even watch dramas properly. Let’s just stop it here. You must be bored of it by now, aren’t you?”

“Fine. Hey! Let’s go get food.”

Hearing the word ‘food’, everyone rushed away. Maru, who was left by himself, scratched his eyebrows before starting to walk.

“You’re having a hard time.”

“Why didn’t you smack their chins or something.”

Dojin and Dowook walked up to him.

“It sure is hard. You guys getting food?”

“Yeah.”

“What about Daemyung?”

“Don’t even talk about him.”

Dojin turned around and pointed at Daemyung. Daemyung was walking across the corridor, and Jiyeon was standing next to him. The two were holding hands, and they let go when they saw a teacher and held again when the teacher passed while smiling at each other.

“There goes their bullshit,” said Dowook as he saw the two.

“They look good.”

Maru smiled and waved at them to come quickly.

“If you’re jealous, you should hold hands with Iseul too.”

“I don’t want that. She’s way too into it that she scares me,” said Dojin as he trembled.

They walked to the cafeteria with Daemyung and Jiyeon. They sat down after getting the food on the food trays when they felt a gaze from afar. At first, Maru thought that he must have felt wrong, but he saw that some were blatantly staring at him.

“Maru, I think they’re looking at you.”

“They didn’t react when I was on Youth Generation and The Chaser. So why now?” Maru said in a small voice.

There were so many people that blatantly stared at him to the point that he felt uncomfortable.

“That’s because they didn’t know it was you back then. Even we didn’t know and we were in the same class. How would anyone from another department know?”

Everyone nodded when they heard Dojin’s words. Daemyung followed up.

“Also, I told you this morning. That people are spreading rumors.”

“What good is it for them to spread rumors?”

As soon as Maru said those words, Daemyung, Dowook, and Dojin all said ‘because it’s fun’. Meanwhile, Jiyeon said that some of the first year students knew about it as well.

“What a star.”

“I think we should stop eating with him tomorrow. We might throw up if we eat like this.”

“Don’t abandon me.”

“Why is the almighty Han Maru acting like this? Just act as you usually do.”

Dowook patted his shoulder in pity.

“If it’s like this for the first episode where you didn’t get to do much, things would be even worse when you are at the center of the story in a later episode. The shoot has progressed quite a bit right? Do any of the episodes have a lot of you in it?”

Maru nodded when Dojin asked. The 7th episode was centered around himself and Dongho. It was the episode where a prank turned into something serious. He had quite a lot of lines so there were many scenes where he appeared by himself.

“They’ll lose interest in due time. Maru, don’t worry about it,” Daemyung consoled him.

The other two just giggled and told everyone that Lee Chan was here. He only appeared on TV for a brief moment as a supporting character, yet he was attracting so much interest. He could finally understand why the top stars frequently had psychological consultations.

It would be easier if he had a personality that enjoyed such a thing, too. Maru tried his best to ignore some of the girls that were whispering to each other while looking at him and tried to focus on his food.

He emptied his food tray earlier than usual before returning to his class. Thankfully, his classmates seemed to have lost interest and no longer looked for ‘Lee Chan’.

“Maru.”

Daemyung came to his class.

“Yeah?”

“I’m here to give you the application form for the acting club. The recruitment starts today.”

“Ah, that’s right.”

He wrote down his class, his seat number, and his name before returning the form to Daemyung. He wouldn’t be able to show up that often since he had a drama shoot most of the time, but he would be

able to help out from time to time, so he decided to stay. Just like how the previous third years remained in the acting club despite preparing to get into college.

“Also, Joonghyuk-seonbae made a visit yesterday.”

“He did?”

“Yeah. He gave me some money to treat the new members.”

“Geez, that guy.”

He faintly smiled as he thought about Bang Joonghyuk. He was the only one among the previous 3rd year seniors that frequently made a visit. Yoonjung came from time to time, but she mostly laughed and chatted together with the others before leaving. Lim Danmi and Choi Minsung came for a brief moment at the beginning of the semester and never showed up again.

“Apparently, Joonghyuk-seonbae joined the acting club at his college.”

“Didn’t he say that he was going to become a salaryman?”

“You know he isn’t that type of guy.”

“Well, I guess that’s true. He liked acting so much, so he should continue doing it.”

Daemyung smiled at him before speaking cautiously,

“Uhm, Maru.”

“Yeah?”

“Can I use your name a little?”

“What the heck do you mean?”

The bell for 5th period rang at that time. When he turned around saying that they should talk later, he saw the application form in Daemyung’s hand. Maru realized what he was talking about.

“Don’t deceive the kids. Also, using my name won’t have that much of an effect. I’m not even that famous.”

“You never know. My wish is that we had a lot of members just like Hwasoo High or Myunghwa High. I really felt it when I watched their performance that having few members is a critical weakness.”

“Alright, do as you see fit. I don’t know how many of them have watched New Semester though.”

“There should be some effect if I tell them that one of our members appears on TV. I’ll be leaving for now. Talk to you later.”

Daemyung waved the application form before leaving the class.

## **Chapter 509**

“Hello, we are Blue Sky, the acting club.”

The teacher standing by the window told the class to applaud. The first year students started clapping with a dazed face. Daemyung, standing at the podium, waited until the claps ended before speaking,

“Since it’s class time, I’ll make this short.”

“No, no. You can take your time. I want a long rest.”

Since the teacher was quite well-known to have a good relationship with the students, he was quite generous. Daemyung thanked him.

“Then I’ll introduce us first. Does anyone know that there used to be an acting club here at Woosung High before you enrolled?”

Not even one raised their hand.

It wasn’t surprising. Maru signalled to Daemyung who just laughed with a slightly stiff expression. He came back to himself and started talking.

“Hm, the acting club was founded when the school was open for the first time, and this is the fifteenth year since it was founded. I am the 13th generation, and the people standing next to me are the 14th. Hahaha.”

“Summarize,” said Maru in a small voice.

There were still ten classes to go. They would only finish making rounds to every class if they took around 3 to 4 minutes in each class.

“Oh! The generations aren’t important. What I want to say is one thing. If you have any interest in acting or want to create a play, then I hope you will come to the acting club’s classroom on the 5th floor after school without hesitation. We don’t have an acting room since it’s a temporary classroom, but we’re practically using it all the time, so you might as well call it that.”

Maru tapped Daemyung’s waist. Daemyung stopped speaking when he realized that he was digressing. He was someone who didn’t know nervousness on top of a stage, but it seems like presenting in front of others was still quite nerve-wracking for him.

“Does anyone have any questions about the acting club?” asked Daemyung as he raised his hand above his head.

The first year students only looked at him with expressionless faces.

“N-nothing?”

“Yes.”

“...Okay.”

Daemyung smiled and said goodbye before stepping down. Maru showed everyone the application form for the club before speaking.

“I’ll put this next to the blackboard. Come and visit if you have any interest. There’s no pressure. Just think of it as getting some snacks. Sorry for interrupting your class, and thanks for listening.”

Maru said his goodbyes just like he planned beforehand before leaving the class. As soon as he closed the door, Daemyung spat out a deep breath as though he just surfaced from within the deep sea.

“That was unnerving.”

“Think of it as acting. There’s no pressure. Also, you’re using way too little time. You must attract their interest at least. It’s promotion after all,” said Maru as he looked at his watch.

“Seonbae! Do your best!”

Aram slapped Daemyung’s back. She probably did that to cheer him up, but Daemyung’s shoulders drooped even more when she did so. This happened last year as well when they were recruiting, but Daemyung was really not good around strangers. He formed a good relationship with anyone as long as he got past that first barrier, but that first barrier was hard to cross.

“But not a single person recognized Maru-seonbae, huh,” Aram said as she tilted her head.

“Of course not. Only the people that pay close attention will notice.”

“No. I heard it clearly when I went home yesterday with Jiyeon. There’s someone in the first year that knows you. Isn’t that right, Jiyeon?”

“Yes, there definitely is.”

He remembered what Jiyeon said during lunch. Some of the first years knew about him. Maru just shrugged. He was not wearing his glasses right now. On top of that, they might know the name Lee Chan, but not the name Han Maru. That first year Aram mentioned who knows about him probably overheard some third years talking about him.

‘There was all that fuss at the cafeteria yesterday, so I wouldn’t be surprised if some of the first year students caught that.’

Dowook pointed at the next class.

“Hey, we’re running out of time. Let’s go.”

“Uhm, Dowook.”

Daemyung frowned as he placed his hands on his stomach as though he had a stomach ache.

“I’m not doing it.”

Before Daemyung could even say something, Dowook refused.

“You’re the club president, so you do it. I hate stuff like this.”

“Y-yeah. I should be the one to do it.”

And yet, he was looking at Maru when he said those words. Maru scratched his eyebrows. People did not change easily, and it seemed that it was a bit of a stretch for Daemyung to continue the presentations in other classes. Even the bold Aram was shaking her head, while Bangjoo was avoiding his gaze.

“Should I do it?”

The one that said those words was Jiyoong, who had said it after gulping. She clearly looked nervous but looked like she was up for the task if Daemyung had a hard time. Now that he thought about it, Jiyoong was much more stable and was bolder compared to Bangjoo and Aram when they performed at Miso’s acquaintance’s café.

“Wh-what am I supposed to say?”

But it seemed that she was feeling a little confused since she was about to do something she hadn’t prepare for.

“Forget it. Let’s go. We’re really running out of time.”

Maru walked ahead and knocked on the door. Since he already made himself known through the window, the teacher inside knew what was up and did not ask why he was here. He first greeted the teacher. The teacher made room, telling him that he should get things done quickly.

“Hello, we’re here to promote ourselves. It might not be that fun, but it should be more fun than studying, so I hope you all can listen.”

He attracted attention to himself first and revealed his purpose here.

“We are Blue Sky, the acting club at Woosung High. People who like acting, and want to do acting, have gathered to create plays. There are many extracurricular activities at the school, but only a handful have specific objectives.”

It wasn’t that there was a club without any purpose, but since he was here to sell his product, he had to advertise his as the best. There was no such promotion that went like ‘I’m not sure if this product is good or not, but you should use it’.

“Does anyone here have experience watching a play, or have an interest in it?”

None of the students raised their hand. Though, it would’ve been quite a hassle if anyone actually raised their hand. Maru quickly scanned the faces of the students before pointing at a boy who looked back at him with confidence. It was the boy sitting right in front of him, and he looked defiant and judging as though he was expecting Maru to make remarks.

“Hello, there.”

“Yes?”

“Don’t you need to pay me back the 10 thousand won you borrowed from me last time?”

“What? I borrowed money?”

“Don’t you remember? You borrowed money from me in a hurry in front of the school saying that you had something urgent. This isn’t good.”

Maru used all sorts of actions to express his disapproval and that he was in a fix. The boy in front of him started panicking, and the kid sitting next to him asked if he really borrowed some money.

When the entire class looked at the boy who was desperately shaking his head, Maru smiled and apologized to him.

“That wasn’t much, but that is what acting is. To become a you that’s not you. There are a few things you can get through acting. First up, you can become iron-faced. You won’t feel a thing even if you talk to a complete stranger like how I did just now.”

That wasn’t entirely true.

“And you can gain confidence.”

This wasn’t entirely true either.

“Also, your pronunciations and expressions can become more diverse.”

That depended on the amount of practice.

“If you make some time after school today, we’ll be happy to explain how much acting can help out in everyday life, how fun school can become, as well as our experiences when we managed to put on a performance that we painstakingly prepared for.”

He didn’t lie since he did say that it was ‘painstaking’. Most of what he said now was true. There were just some individual differences.

‘Somehow, I remember assistant manager Park who told me I should get into selling insurance.’

After finishing his speech, he stepped down.

He didn’t see the need to introduce each of the members here. What was important was to get as many people to the 5th floor classroom after school.

“I’ll put the application forms right here. Don’t feel bad and you can leave after eating some snacks, so come around. Oh, and dating is free in the acting club.”

Some of the first year students changed their expressions when he said that suspicious line, regardless of gender. Actually, what he said just now would be more effective in mechanical and electrical engineering department classes rather than the design department class he was in right now. Those two departments barely had any girls after all.

They left after saying goodbye.

“I can clearly imagine the honeybees attracted to the sweetness of dating and finding out about the hardships of labor. Pfft,” Aram said in excitement.

“I didn’t lie though.”

“That’s right, seonbae-nim. You didn’t lie at all.”

Maru and Bangjoo high-fived before moving to the next class. The next class was the computer department. The ratio of girls was quite high in this department as well. Actually, the acting club was more in need of girls than boys right now. The boys around this age were too awkward at expressing their emotions and were more likely to become a stiff stick when they went up on stage. Above all, girls

could crossdress to become boys on stage and still get emotional sympathy from the audience, but the opposite couldn't happen. It would become a comedy at best. Of course, boys who could make stage props were welcome.

'A five-to-five or a six-to-four ratio is the best.'

Maru signalled the people standing behind him with his eyes before knocking on the next class. He heard a 'come in' from the inside. The one that greeted him warmly and made way for him was the teacher in charge of the acting club and a history teacher, Taesik.

"I'll take ten minutes of your time."

"That's a no-go."

"What a pity."

He smiled and said the same words as he did before. It seemed as though Taesik had notified his class beforehand as the students were listening quite earnestly this time. There didn't seem to be a need to talk about some stories in order to attract attention.

After making a brief speech, he looked at the time. Thanks to everyone's attention, he was able to finish early, so he decided to take questions for the remaining minute. He was going to leave if he didn't get any.

"Does anyone have any questions?"

Maru expected there to be none. Someone broke that expectation though. A boy asked him a question.

"Doesn't it take a lot of time to practice acting?"

"More than your average school club, yes."

"Ah, I see."

"There might be times when you stay at school until midnight. But staying in a classroom late at night with no one else is quite memorable in itself. If you want a new experience, then please come to the 5th floor. We'll tell you about it in detail. Okay then, anyone else?"

The classroom was quiet. Actually, one question was a lot. He nodded and was about to wrap things up when he heard a voice.

"Are you really Han Maru, seonbae?"

The question was from a girl sitting at the back. It seemed that she had heard Taesik calling him Maru when he came in.

"Yes, I am."

"You appear in New Semester, right? I mean the drama."

The students started murmuring. It seemed that quite a few of them knew about the drama.

"I do."



“So you are.”

Maru smiled and looked at the other students.

“If no one has any questions, we’ll take our le...”

“Uhm!”

The girl that just asked a question raised her hand again.

“Yes, go ahead.”

“Do you know Ahn Sungjae-oppa from TTO?”

That was a rather random question, but Maru replied without hesitation.

“I don’t.”

“I see.”

The girl shrugged and no longer spoke. Everyone around her asked her what it was about, but the girl just shook her head and smiled. Maru glanced at the girl once before stepping down.

“Come around after school. It’s on the 5th floor. You’ll get to hear a lot of the things you haven’t heard here.”

“Well then, give a round of applause for the acting club.”

Thanks to Taesik, the acting club was able to leave amidst applause.

“Do you know her?”

Daemyung asked after leaving the class. Maru shook his head. There was no way he knew a girl who was a middle school student up until last year.

“She seems to know you though,” said Aram.

“Maybe she’s mistaken.”

It was rather unexpected that she brought up Sungjae. Well, a hardcore fan of TTO might know about it. They should be aware that Sungjae appeared in Twilight struggles, and if she knew that he was in that as well....

‘No. There’s no way she knows that I was there.’

It was a bit strange, but Maru decided not to mind it. She might be someone who just knows a lot of trivia.

“So that proves that your popularity has spread to the 1st year students, right?” Aram asked as she stood up proudly.

“Fine, you’re completely correct and you da best. Next is mechanical, right?”

It didn’t look like he was going to run out of time. Maru walked leisurely.

## Chapter 510

"Sit down over he.... Oh wait!"

Jiyoon felt very chaotic right now. After the last period ended and she came to the 5th floor, half filled with expectation and half filled with worry, she was greeted by an empty classroom. So not even one - just as she felt rather sad, she heard some sounds from the staircase. A bunch of first year students came at once. Five came at first, and then ten, then another three and two. People kept coming, and by now there were over forty people.

"Maru-seonbae."

There weren't enough seats in the classroom. This was a classroom left for the third year students who wished to stay behind and study, so there weren't that many desks here. Just as she was flustered and did not know how to handle the students, Maru-seonbae had come up the stairs.

"Wow, I guess we lucked out."

"Seonbae. What do we do? There aren't enough seats."

"Then they can just sit on the floor."

"Ah!"

Jiyoon nodded. She was so flustered that she thought that everyone had to sit down in chairs.

"What about Daemyung-o... I mean, seonbae?"

"You can call him oppa. I think they might be a little late. Their homeroom teacher seemed to be investigating something. What about Aram and Bangjoo?"

"Aram will be late since she's on cleaning duty today. Bangjoo went to the cafeteria because we didn't have enough drinks."

"No wonder."

Maru peeked inside the classroom before speaking in a loud voice.

"Hello everyone! I'm sorry to tell you this, but everyone will have to sit down on the floor. We'll lay out some blankets so please leave the classroom for a bit."

His voice was bright and clear. The juniors all left after hearing Maru-seonbae's words. Jiyoon stroked down her chest in relief.

"Jiyoon."

"Yes?"

"You're their senior. You are supposed to be leading them."

Maru smiled and laid out the blankets. Jiyoon shook her head. It didn't suit her to guide or lead someone.

"Seonbae-nim!"

“Hey, hey. Keep your voice down.”

Bangjoo’s loud voice startled the first year students and attracted attention. Some of the girls looked a little scared as well. Jiyoong frowned and slapped Bangjoo’s arm. Bangjoo avoided her gaze and laughed awkwardly.

“Well then, come back in. Sorry for making you all wait,” said Maru as he pointed at the classroom.

The first year students entered. After looking around for a while, they realized that it was no different from an ordinary classroom and just stared at Maru who was at the front.

“I guess we should start the event we do every year, right?”

“Event?”

Maru told her to wait before leaving the classroom.

Jiyoong made an awkward smile when the first year students all looked at her.

“Bangjoo, do something.”

“Should I do some falling moves?”

“N-no, that’s a little.”

“Should I sing then?”

“That’s a bit too....”

“Fine. Then I’ll talk to them for a while.”

Bangjoo clapped.

“Uhm, everyone. Thank you for coming. Hm... nice weather today, right?”

The weather was gloomy since it had just rained. Jiyoong sighed and stood next to Bangjoo. It seemed that she had to step up here.

“I’ll be receiving questions since you might be bored until the seniors come. Does anyone have any questions?” asked Jiyoong as brightly as possible.

She was worried that no one would ask a question just like when they made rounds, but thankfully, that didn’t happen. Ten or so people raised their hands at once. Jiyoong felt a lot better when it looked like people were eager to participate.

“Over there, please ask.”

She decided to take a question from the girl sitting at the front.

“You said you participated in competitions right?”

“Yes. There’s one in the Summer and one in the Winter.”

“Have you ever taken 1st place?”

“Hm, unfortunately, the answer is no, at least for us. The seniors before got the grand prize a lot of the time, but from some time onwards, we didn’t get it anymore.”

Then what’s the highest place you’ve ever ranked? - A question came from the back. Jiyoong fiddled with her hair and replied.

“3rd place in the regionals. If we got 2nd place, we would’ve been able to advance into the nationals, but we didn’t make it. If you join us, we might actually take first place this year.”

She gained confidence after she talked for a while. Her shaking hands had calmed down somewhat as well. She took the next question from a boy sitting in the middle.

“The seonbae-nim that introduced the acting club to us during the day said that you can gain confidence through acting, right? Is it true?”

She could answer that question for sure. She nodded vigorously.

“He’s right. It’s true. I was so nervous in my first year and I couldn’t imagine standing in front of so many people like this. I got nervous whenever I opened my mouth, and I would start shaking. I would freeze up when so many people paid attention to me, and I wouldn’t know what I’m talking about at all. No, in the first place, I would barely be able to speak. Is there anyone similar to me here?” she asked cautiously.

Quite a lot of the juniors raised their hands.

“You can’t help but become nervous the first time. Speaking is hard too. But if you continue acting, you’ll get into the habit of speaking in front of people. You’ll get more used to it, and from some time onwards, you’ll gain confidence as well. Oh, it doesn’t matter if you have an introverted personality. I’m really shy too.”

Jiyoong remembered back to what Maru told her during her first year.

“Being introverted means that you are just that more sensitive, apparently. It can also help with your acting since you are able to observe other’s emotions in more detail. You remember the seonbae that spoke for us during the day, right? That’s what he told me. So don’t think that you aren’t fit for acting just because you are introverted and shy. You can still do it.”

After taking a short breath, she looked at the first year students.

The juniors that looked at her in a daze soon started talking with the people next to them.

“I was really impressed,” Bangjoo said from the side.

Jiyoong nodded. She did not think that the juniors would start applauding or something like that. She thought that they would show at least a bit of interest though. She felt a little embarrassed and looked at the door. She wondered when her seniors would come.

Just then, she found a shadow cast on the door. After looking at the lights in the corridor, Jiyoong left the classroom thinking ‘no way’. The seniors were standing there with big grins on their faces.

“We were about to go in, but the atmosphere was so good.”

Maru appreciated her for her efforts before going inside. Dowook then followed and showed her a thumbs up.

“Uhm... well done.”

Daemyung patted her. Jiyoong felt her face go hot as though it would explode. She felt so embarrassed when she realized that everyone heard what she said.

“You should’ve come in immediately if you were here.”

She pouted at Daemyung. Daemyung only awkwardly smiled.

“What’s this? Was there something fun?”

Aram, who had just arrived, widened her eyes as she asked. Jiyoong did not speak. She didn’t feel much when she received questions from the juniors, but now that she looked back, she wondered how she was able to say all those words.

“Let’s go in for now. We should show them this as well.”

What Daemyung was holding in his hands was an album.

So that was it. Jiyoong realized what the ‘event’ was that Maru was talking about. She also remembered being surprised when she saw that album.

“Let’s go! Let’s look at our cute juniors,” said Aram as she pushed her back.

\* \* \*

It seemed that their interest was piqued. Maru took a bite out of the choco pie as he looked at the acting club talking to the first year students. Yakult and choco pie. They could have bought something different, but they didn’t change the menu since it was somewhat like a tradition at this point.

The atmosphere in the classroom was very good. Daemyung, who began to talk to people after getting to know them, became a splendid presenter and induced everyone to talk. Ever since the mood became soft enough for the first year students to talk, they kept asking questions. If there were too few people, they might not have said anything out of shyness, but since there were more than fifty people here, they seemed to feel no pressure. There were around forty people when the conversation started, but quite a lot more had joined them after cleaning duties.

“Eleven? Are you even allowed to stay at school that late?”

“We can if we get permission. We stayed until 1 a.m. during the summer holiday. Buying food outside the school and eating it inside the school is a really nice experience.”

Daemyung enticed the juniors while listing things that couldn’t be experienced in other clubs. Of course, he also emphasized that it would be laborious. After all, there might be trouble if they made some of the first year students join without letting them know about the hardships.

Maru peeled off the yakult lid a little. He sipped on the drink as he looked at the clock. It was 6. Since there was no shoot today, he could take his time here. Starting tomorrow though, he would have shoots all the way into the weekend.

“You should say something too, seonbae.”

Maru, standing in a corner of the classroom, shook his head when he heard Aram’s words.

He now had a TV drama that he showed up regularly on. If he received more work on top of this, he would barely be able to show up at the club at all. That was why he was planning to go home after doing the trivial stuff. He neither thought about receiving the senior treatment nor acting like one. He was planning to stay as the guy that only helped out the club every once in a while, so it would be better if he wasn’t remembered. He would practically be a ghost member after all.

Aram made a sour expression before turning around.

After the lightweight talk was finished, the serious stuff began with the album. The ones that decide to join and those that decided not to would probably be decided after this. It wasn’t like they could accept everyone here anyway. There was no limit to how big a club could be, but having too many would become uncontrollable.

Daemyung wanted around twenty-five to thirty. If all of the juniors gathered here decided to apply, about half of them wouldn’t make it.

‘The clubroom is a problem too, huh.’

They couldn’t use the self-study classroom as their clubroom forever. If anyone came around wanting to study, they would have to vacate the classroom without complaining. As for the clubroom matter, they would have to consult with Taesik about it. It would be great if they could get an empty classroom, but Maru wondered if that was even possible. After all, the acting club had a horrible reputation among the teachers.

“Will Maru-seonbae over there teach us acting if we enter the acting club?”

Maru raised his head. He had heard his name being mentioned among the juniors. He looked at the girl that looked at him straight in the eyes in a daring manner. He remembered her. It was the girl that asked if he knew Sungjae.

“I was curious about that too.”

“Me, too.”

“You are on TV, right?”

The people that glanced his way, thought that this was an opportunity and all started speaking. Maru looked at them. Even the people that didn’t know about him started talking about it.

“For acting, we’ll invite an instructor to teach you. There will be a great person coming so you don’t need to worry about that.”

“But you’re an actor too, seonbae.”

“I’m not good enough to teach anyone else. At most, I can give you some advice.”

“Ah, I see. Also, can I ask you a personal question?”

“Sure.”

“What landed you as a supporting character in New Semester?”

“I took the audition.”

“Then you can become a supporting character if you take the audition?”

“You must be lucky too, and skilled.”

“Then was it your skill that got you the role? Or luck?”

“I’m not sure. I never asked the producer that picked me, so I can’t say for sure.”

“No way. Can’t you tell us more confidently if you have confidence in your skills?”

“I don’t have that much confidence.”

“Then it’s luck after all?”

“Yes. I think it was luck.”

Maru finished the conversation with a smile. She had a slightly offensive tone in her words. She sounded like she wanted to dig into him, so he just stopped there. The girl grinned as though she had expected this before turning around again. The juniors that took interest in him turned around to focus on Daemyung again, seeming to have lost their interest.

That was rather good for Maru though. It would be quite a pain if someone entered the club because of him. From their expressions though, no one seemed to be like that. Well, it would be weird if there were any.

“There are many times when you get exhausted, and sometimes, you might regret, thinking about why you started this, but if you still want to try acting despite that, please write your name and self-introduction on the application form here.”

When Daemyung handed out the application forms, the fifty-plus first year students all stood up and took the paper. Maru exclaimed in a small voice. He didn’t think that all of them would take a form.

Was the three-year-long member problem finally solved? Maru stuck his thumbs up at Daemyung who made a happy expression.