

## Once Again 571

### Chapter 571

“My first impressions of the theater were literally the worst. The seats were cramped, the air was damp, and there were even some cracks on the wall, making me feel uneasy. But what could I do? I had no choice but to go there since that girl was there.”

Joongjin faintly smiled.

“On my first day in Daehak-ro, I met Haejoo, and after that, I followed her to Yecheon. The small theater that I thought I would never get used to made me realize that smaller theaters had their own charms after I went there a few times. Going to that building where Yecheon was after work and filling an empty seat - this became my schedule every weekend. I watched the same play over and over again, and I naturally got to know the people of the troupe as well. I wasn't that social, though, so most of the time I went back home after watching. Of course, the reason I went there is also because of Haejoo. But as I said earlier, I wasn't honest with my emotions. That's why I made up an excuse. I told them that I wanted to help them because I liked the theater troupe so much.”

“How romantic.”

“It might sound like that, but I was actually just afraid. I sort of realized that I would get hurt if I approached that girl and got rejected. The reason I probably didn't choose to take the straightforward path was perhaps because I was afraid of getting hurt. Back then, I didn't know what it meant to clash head on and get kicked. I told you before, right? That I hate the word genius. However, in terms of earning money, I actually accept that term. Back then, I was receiving more benefits than I was putting in. I was quite timely with my work as well. I only knew that the vague thing known as failures existed, as I never actually experienced one for myself. Perhaps that's what made me even more afraid. I wasn't sure if I would be able to return to my ordinary life once I fell over.”

“Is that why you kept circling around us?”

Jinjoo had joined in on the conversation as well. Her daughter Gaeul had left the store just a while ago. It seemed that she went back home.

“That's how it was. Also, why does it feel like I'm in a confession session at a church? Do I need to keep going?”

“I want to keep listening,” Maru quickly said.

Junmin and Joongjin, while he had some interest in the events that occurred between these two, he was more interested in the lady named Jung Haejoo. Junmin, Joongjin, and also Joohyun. He was curious about the identity of the person, who these three people who were known to be top-rate in their respective fields, kept reminiscing about to this day.

“Keep going. When else would I be able to get you to talk about something like this?”

Some light snacks were placed on the bar. Joongjin made a sour expression before continuing the story after putting a piece of jelly in his mouth.

“Circling around, the expression you used is the perfect fit, Mrs. Jinjoo. It was true that I was attracted to Haejoo, but it was a bit vague, and I didn’t have the courage to resolve that vagueness. When I got closer to the other members of the troupe, I kinda started feeling that that kind of situation wasn’t so bad. It was around that time that I started helping the operation of the theater troupe financially after hearing that they were having a hard time.”

“I heard that it was several months’ worth of rent. Your help was really big.”

“It’s not like I had anything else to use it on.”

Maru exclaimed. It was unimaginable for him to pay several months’ worth of rent out of goodwill alone.

“Unfortunately, some problems appeared after that. There was a sense of distance. The way the theater troupe treated me changed and it reminded me of how I treated my clients. I really gave that money without thinking, but they seemed to think that the money contained a lot of meaning.”

“Well, I guess it did feel like that a little,” Jinjoo said.

Maru asked Jinjoo about it.

“Were you perhaps at Yecheon as well?”

“I wasn’t affiliated with the troupe. I went there a lot because my husband over there had been working there for a while. I was still in college back then. Daehak-ro is filled with romance, right? I practically lived there during holidays, and I helped out when I could. That’s when I met our director Park over here and talked to him. Ah, this makes me think of Joohyun.”

“Was senior Ahn Joohyun also a member of Yecheon?”

“No, she was a student back then. She was a peculiar girl who came around every day. Though she strangely didn’t meet Joongjin-oppa that much, I think? Joohyun usually didn’t visit on weekends, when Joongjin-oppa came the most. Well, the two were close though. Isn’t that right, oppa?”

“I’m not entirely sure about that.”

Joongjin shrugged.

Jinjoo crossed her arms after saying hm.

“Anyway, back then, we talked about a lot of things internally. Someone who was no different from a complete stranger suddenly gave us a lot of money. Honestly speaking, Yecheon back then wasn’t some great theater troupe that was worth investing in. When my husband was working there for a brief moment, he was saying that it was finally going to go out of business that year. After all, the members were doing part time jobs and collected what money they had to pay for the rent. They only lasted because they loved Yecheon. Otherwise, we would have been thrown out a long time ago.”

“So smaller theaters weren’t that good back then either.”

"I didn't major in acting, so I can't comment about other theaters, but with Yecheon, they were in a really bad situation financially. My husband also just went there to help because someone asked him to. He didn't get any payment besides food expenses. In that sense, he's quite cool."

Jinjoo waved at Jincehol who was sitting by the window. Jincheol stared at her for a while before waving back. Maru looked at the two and thought that they were a couple that suited each other.

"Then something happened. I think that was when you started coming less and less, right?"

Joongjin silently nodded when Jinjoo said those words.

"What happened?" Maru asked.

"Someone ran off with the money. I think it was around 1 million won back then."

1 million won during the mid 80s was a considerably large sum. Some money suddenly appeared for the theater troupe who were in a bad financial situation, and a member ran off with that money. Joongjin would feel very awkward about it. After all, the money he gave them out of goodwill caused problems.

"That kind of thing happened, but the members didn't make a big deal about it. In fact, they apologized to me, saying that they lost some of the money I gave them. Of course, I found out not too long later that it was stolen, not lost, but they did not resent or report the member that ran off with the money. It was pretty amazing."

"Everyone had similar feelings after all, and everyone had it hard," Jinjoo said.

"Even though it was called the 3-low era, not everyone had the benefit of that after all. Whether then or now, people who do acting have glass wallets. It's because I knew that that I didn't feel that bad about it. In fact, I came to like them even more because they were honest with me about it and because they just forgot about the member that left them to focus on their work. However, from that moment onwards, I never handed them my money directly. It would be quite troublesome if the same thing happened again after all. Instead, I only gave them money on the day they had to pay rent to the landowner. The people of Yecheon refused my money after that, but I wanted to give them the money. That place was my resting place after all."

Joongjin quenched his thirst with some water. He looked past the window when he talked about the past.

"However, that incident did make me feel a little cautious. It was just as Mrs. Jinjoo said. I didn't go there for a month, thinking about our future relationships. When I went back after that, that person was there. I'm talking about president Lee Junmin who was wearing that worn-out yellow suit. Oh, of course, back then, he was just the president of a small agency without any achievements at all."

"So the president got to know about Yecheon back then, huh."

"He came to the theater for Haejoo, just like me. A man, who quit his life as a nameless actor and started a management business suddenly came up to Haejoo and told her that she couldn't act in a place like this."

Joongjin laughed self-loathingly.

“It was incredibly rude. Even I was angry and I didn’t even belong to Yecheon. What would the other people of Yecheon think? There was total chaos. The place they’ve tried so hard to maintain, even going as far as giving up their ordinary life became ‘a place like this’ due to a few words from a man wearing a worn-out suit.”

“The president had a sharp tongue back then too, huh.”

“That’s his nature. He was chased out of the theater, but he kept knocking on the doors persistently after that. When he paid for the ticket and came as a customer, the troupe couldn’t say anything to him either. Lee Junmin, that man, kept talking to Haejoo. That she could improve further, and that she had to go to a bigger stage.”

Joongjin looked a little angry as he said those words. As for who he was angry at, Maru didn’t know.

“They say sincerity is the way of heaven, right? It was the theater troupe that started saying that they should listen to that man even though they’ve been giving him the cold shoulder this whole time. When I saw that, and I’m being honest here, I didn’t think anything of it. That was because I didn’t know anything about acting back then after all. I did get the impression that the acting displayed in Yecheon lacked something to attract more audience, but I didn’t have a solution to that. Supporting them financially was the only thing I could do.”

No, that’s actually not it - Joongjin smiled with a sigh.

“I felt that they couldn’t improve further. To be precise, I never thought that Haejoo’s acting was anything special. She was definitely an attractive girl, but if you asked me if she was charming as an actress, I would hesitate to answer. Yet in that situation, Lee Junmin, that man had such confidence in himself when he said that she can do better. Now that I think about it, I was perhaps just jealous of that man who could talk to Haejoo with such confidence. After that, Haejoo changed, surprisingly. On top of the charm she gave off as a human being, she gained the charm of an actress. I even felt weirded out by her. I wondered if it was really possible for someone’s skill level to rise so dramatically. It wasn’t just Haejoo. The entire theater troupe improved. Of course, they didn’t have that many customers so their skills weren’t really known by others, but I had a feeling back then. Ah, a star will be born here in Daehak-ro.”

The first actress that president Lee Junmin nurtured. Maru thought back to the figure of the lady in the photo again. What kind of acting did a woman, who the president did not hesitate to use the word genius for, do?

“I stayed close with the theater troupe back then. President Lee Junmin was always with us as well. However, he and I didn’t talk that much. That was the case even while drinking. The reason I didn’t talk to him was because Haejoo was next to him. The reason he didn’t talk to me was probably because he noticed my feelings towards her. When I saw with my own two eyes that president Lee Junmin was the one next to Haejoo, and realized that the relationship between the two wasn’t that ordinary, I finally became honest with my own feelings. Ah, I am in love with this woman.”

Joongjin gulped down some water.

“Not too long later, Haejoo’s debut piece was set. President Lee Junmin was good at running a business back then too, so he actually managed to snatch a pretty good piece considering that his business had

just taken off. We held a party in the theater troupe. I congratulated her as well. I could no longer like her, but a pretty close acquaintance was making her debut after all. Furthermore, on that day, I was confessed to.”

“Confessed to?” Maru asked.

Joongjin, who had a heavy smile on his face this whole time, looked like he had shaken everything off for the first time.

“By Haejoo, that is. She actually liked me. I felt like I was smashed on the head with a hammer. It meant that I would be the one standing next to her had I had the courage. However, human nature was devious and I also had this thought - why did she not tell me before? When I asked her that, Haejoo told me this: that confession was not a challenge but a confirmation. I understood after hearing her words. It was me who just funded them from afar while not expressing my feelings towards her even once. In a time I didn’t know, her one-sided love had reached its end, and president Lee appeared in front of her. Moreover, president Lee was someone who knew her true worth. It was clear who she would choose.”

Joongjin stopped and checked the time. He said ‘it’s dinner time’ in a small voice.

“I’ve talked a long time about such an old love story, huh. To wrap things up, it’s simple. I dislike president Lee. I dislike him because he was the man who received Haejoo’s love, and I dislike him because he couldn’t take responsibility for her until the end. Ever since Haejoo passed away, he had become a cold businessman who never experienced failure. However, it was already too late for him. He had to be a businessman who did not fail before Haejoo passed away. I hate it so much that the first ever failure he made was Haejoo.”

Joongjin stood up from his seat, saying that he wanted to go to the bathroom. Maru looked at Jinjoo, who was sitting in front of him.

“May I ask how she passed away?”

“Hm, it was a traffic accident. When the accident happened, my husband and I had left Yecheon and were focusing on college, so I didn’t hear specifically what happened, but that I can be sure of. On the day of the accident, Haejoo met president Lee Junmin. That’s why back then, we even talked about how she might have lived if she did not meet the president that day.”

Maru groaned. If it was like that, he could understand Joongjin’s hostility. ‘What if’ was a really useless assumption, but people couldn’t help but think about such things after all. Had she not met Junmin that day - everyone who loved the woman named Jung Haejoo should have thought about the same thing that day.

He was then reminded of president Lee Junmin’s strict expression.

Perhaps that was a mask he put on?

Perhaps, there was a man who still struggled in the agonizing sadness beneath that mask?

“Phew, it’s time for dinner, huh,” Jinjoo said.

## **Chapter 572**

Jincheol brought the standing sign inside and flipped the status sign on the window. The hand-written 'open' sign now could be seen from the inside. Just as Jincheol was reaching up the glass door to lock it, two women, who seemed to be customers, came around. Jincheol poked his head out of the door and talked to them with a smile. He seemed to be apologizing for closing early.

"Give us some freebies next time."

"Yes, of course. I'll give you some buns the next time you're here."

"Have a good day."

The women turned around after saying goodbye. They didn't seem to feel unpleasant at all as though this happened frequently. It probably meant that the café was just that comfortable for the customers.

"Don't your sales take a hit if you close so early?" Maru asked Jinjoo who was busy inside the kitchen. It was 6 p.m. It was the golden hour when they could attract people going home from work and school, yet they had closed the store and were preparing to eat dinner. He was a little envious seeing them being leisurely, but he was slightly worried as well.

"We don't need to be in a hurry since we don't have to pay rent. Well, normally, we stay open from 9 till 8, but we should close early on a day like this when we have some people around."

He had forgotten. Forgotten that this place was run by the landowner as a hobby. Maru realized that there was nothing more meaningless than worrying about these two so he decided to mind his own problems.

"Don't pull too much," he said as he looked down.

Two children were sticking to a leg each. They were Jincheol's children who had come back from nursery. The one quietly grabbing his left leg was a boy, while the one mercilessly shaking his right leg was a girl. It seemed that the girl inherited traits from her mother. This little one had a very strong gripping strength.

Maru walked around the store with the two children in his arms. The kids giggled when they were lifted in the air.

"I was always worried because those two didn't like strangers, but I'm glad to see that they're obedient in your arms," Jincheol said.

Joongjin, and Geunsoo, who were drinking beer next to him, were also looking at Maru with interest.

"Perhaps I was a childcare worker in my previous life."

He lifted the children up high and ran around the store. He was soon surrounded by cats, and the ones that were playing around on the 2nd floor were around him as well. There was a total of 11. It seemed that the ones from the 2nd floor were the bosses as they were on the sofas meant for customers. The spotty one was one of them.

"Dinner's ready."

A savory fragrance could be smelled from the counter. He brought the two children over. A large bowl of red-colored bibimbap, miyeok-guk, and stir-fried potatoes were there.

“Bada, Haneul. Come to mommy and get ready to eat.”

The two children that left Maru’s side walked to the counter. Gaeul sat next to Jincheol.

“She has the same name as my sister.”

“Who?”

“Bada.”

“Really? Is your sister a tomboy like our dear Bada?” Jinjoo asked as she pinched Bada’s cheeks.

“She’s a tough one alright. Father named her such intending for her to become like the calm sea, but she grew up like a storm.”

“I hope our Bada becomes a little more obedient. She always causes trouble at the nursery. I heard she goes around beating up the boys or something.”

“I don’t!” Bada denied it in a loud voice.

Maru quietly laughed. Girls were bigger than boys when they were very young. It wouldn’t be strange if a girl like her made boys around her cry. Compared to her, Haneul was very calm for a boy. He could tell at a glance that he didn’t make his parents worry.

“Bon appetit, everyone. Don’t leave any behind.”

Maru looked at the two children who were using their little hands to use a spoon to scoop up food before picking up his chopsticks. He thought that he wouldn’t have any appetite since he ate a lot of things, but it came back to him when he ate a spoonful of bibimbap. The spiciness of the gochujang was just right.

They talked about a lot of things over dinner, and most of it was about children. They look the cutest around that age - he thought that as he looked at the children and time passed by in a flash.

“Honey. I’m going to go back first with the kids so come home after you clean up. Don’t be too late.”

“Alright.”

Jinjoo took the three kids out of the store. While Jincheol and Geunsoo cleaned up the store, Maru washed the bowls. After putting the bowls in the cupboard, he shook off the water from his hand. He suddenly had the thought that it was not a bad idea to open a store like this. Of course, he knew that running a business was akin to war, so it was very unlikely that he would do so. Though, he might consider it if he earned an uncontrollable amount of money as an actor.

“Looks like you wash your dishes a lot at home, yes?” Joongjin, who was watching him from the counter, asked.

There was a strangely large number of cats around him. Perhaps he had a smell that attracted cats.

“If there’s a pro license, I would get one.”

Jincheol and Geunsoo also finished cleaning the store and came back to the 1st floor.

“I wish I was born a cat.”

Geunsoo said that as he looked at the corner of the store. A large cat was sleeping. Maru smiled and left the counter.

“Sorry to make you work when I called you here as a guest,” Jincheol apologized.

“I ate for free, so I should at least do this much. Is it all done now?”

“We don’t have any more things to do. Oh, wait.”

Jincheol, who went behind the counter, took out a bag of coffee from the display. He then put the coffee bag in a paper bag along with some other things.

“Take this home with you. You just have to put one scoop on a filter and brew it with some hot water. Do you want one too, hyung?”

“I don’t.”

Joongjin shook his hand.

“Hyung-nim, why aren’t you asking me?”

“You can drink here. You’re gonna have to be here every day once the shoot starts.”

“Now that makes me feel tired already.”

Geunsoo laughed. Joongjin looked at his watch.

“Looks like I’ve been held up here for longer than I expected. Jincheol, thanks for the food and drinks today. Mr. Geunsoo, Mr. Maru. See you later.”

“Have a safe trip back home.”

Joongjin left while dragging his slippers. Some of the cats followed him to the door and meow-ed at him.

“We should get going too.”

Geunsoo picked up his jacket. Maru looked at the store once more. He liked this place. He decided that he should visit this place, if he had the time, and enjoy some coffee. His gaze moved along the wall and stopped on the staircase that led to the 2nd floor. He was reminded of Jung Haejoo, who wasn’t here but was mentioned more than anyone.

“It would’ve been good if I could see her.”

He talked to himself in a small voice. The actress that stole the hearts of geniuses. He wondered what her acting was like. However, it was impossible to see the acting of an actress who died 16 years ago. Hearing about it from someone else wouldn’t give him first hand experience, so it would be meaningless.

“If you’re talking about Haejoo’s acting, there’s a way you can see her.”



He heard a voice right next to him. It was Jincheol, who was holding a cat.

“I can?”

“We have some videotapes we recorded while I worked at Yecheon. I can’t guarantee the quality, but there shouldn’t be a problem with just watching it. I was feeling a little sorry since I only gave you coffee after you came all the way here, so I guess this is good now.”

Jincheol told him to follow him and left the store. He locked up the store and went around the building. He opened a glass door and went in. An iron door leading to the store and a staircase appeared. On the iron door was a sign that said ‘no entry’.

“The 3rd floor is my house.”

TV sounds could be heard from above. When they arrived at the top of the stairs, a door with a heart-shaped sign that said ‘Jinjoo’s’ on it could be seen.

“Wait a bit.”

Jincheol went inside first. After a while, the commotion died down and the door opened.

“Come in.”

Maru carefully walked inside. There was a soft mat at the entrance. In the living room were two toy slides that were shaped like an elephant. It was clearly a home that had children in it.

“The kids just fell asleep. There would be big trouble if they wake up, so be careful,” Jincheol said.

He walked across the living room with cat-like steps. Jinjoo and the three children could be seen inside the room that seemed to be the baby’s room. Jinjoo was gently stroking the stomachs of the children who were sleeping. Meeting eyes with her, Maru silently greeted her. Jinjoo smiled and nodded.

Jincheol opened the door to a room and went inside. This room seemed to be used for storage as there were a lot of boxes and items piled on top of one another.

“It should be inside this box. There’s quite a lot, so you need to check the label.”

Jincheol dragged out five blue plastic boxes and placed them in the middle of the room. Maru cleaned off the dust with some wet wipes and slowly opened the cover. Inside were a bunch of videotapes.

“It looks like there’s around three hundred in total.”

Geunsoo said as he sat down.

“It’s over a decade’s worth after all. These days, they don’t take up much space because you can put them all on CDs, but those didn’t exist back then.”

Listening to Jincheol’s words, Maru took out the videotape at the very top. A tape that was slightly longer than his handspan. It had been a really long time since he had seen one. CDs had replaced all storage media when he entered middle school, and ever since then, videotapes became a relic. There probably wasn’t a household these days that still used videotapes to watch movies.

“There’s a treasure here,” Geunsoo said as he took out one of the tapes.

'Secret sister-in-law.' - that was the label on the tape.

"It's one of the relics from cheonggyecheon. Do you want it?"

"Nah. This seems to be filled with wedding videos and celebratory occasions. Maru, how is it on your side?"

"I'll have a look at what's below."

Maru took out some of the tapes at the top and looked below. Unlike the top, which just had tapes, the lower tapes were stored in casings. Jincheol exclaimed when he saw them.

"It's those. I remember now that I see it."

Jincheol took out the blue casings. The yellowed-out paper labels on them said 'Yecheon'.

"Let's take them all out for now."

The three of them took out all of the tapes in the big box.

"Man, we took a lot of videos."

There was a total of 57 videotapes encased in blue casings. All of them had a label that said 'Yecheon'.

"One VHS is around 220g each, so they should be about 13kg if you count the casings. If I could, I'd love to have you watch them at my house, but we have children, and more importantly, don't have a VCR."

"Of course. I'll take them and watch them by myself. I'm thankful that you're lending me these at all. I would hate to disturb you even more."

Maru placed the tapes in a cardboard box that Jincheol gave him. After wrapping the box with tape, he tried lifting it. It was quite awkward to lift it up since the volume was big, but it wasn't like he couldn't move.

"I want to watch them too since he told me that the president fell in love with her as well."

"You aren't taking a step out from this place today, you know that, right?"

Geunsoo licked his lips in pity as he looked at the box.

"I'll give them to you once I finish. I'll take notes on them too."

"I'll be thankful if you do. Uhm, hyung-nim. I'll take Maru home."

"It's okay. I can take the taxi home. It looks like you have work to do. You don't need to mind me."

Maru picked up the box. He quietly left the room, trying to not make any sound. He met Jinjoo in front of the door and she told him to visit again. Maru nodded before going towards the door.

"I hope the next time we see each other, we do it because of work. I feel like working with you will be fun."

"I'll gladly take you up on any offer."

Maru shook hands with Jincheol.

“Are you sure you don’t need a ride home? You look pretty uncomfortable.”

“I can load it on the taxi.”

“I feel sorry about it.”

“Why would you be? Thanks to you, I got to meet the director and got precious things too,” Maru said as he thought about the videotapes and the coffee. Geunsoo took a step back, saying okay.

“I’m off then.”

“You’ll probably have to go to the high street to get a taxi. You don’t see them around here that much.”

“Okay.”

He picked up the box and left the house. His steps were light thanks to the unexpected gifts. He looked forward to watching them already. What kind of acting did she do? He was excited like a child.

Just as he started walking, he remembered something important.

“Did we have a VCR at home again?”

Maru frowned.

### **Chapter 573**

“Why don’t you try expressing a little more? They say restraint is good, but it might make you look like a shy actor. It’s fine if you did that intentionally, but if you didn’t, then you should try making your actions look a little bigger.”

“Like this?”

The junior shook off her hands and stepped back.

“I think that looks better.”

“Ah, okay.”

“What do you think?”

“I’m not sure. It feels a little exaggerated.”

“Then let’s research it together. If you can’t accept your own acting, no one will.”

I’ll think about it some more - her junior stood in front of the mirror with a contemplating expression. *She* looked at the back of her junior before sighing. The first year students that joined this year had strong colors. On top of that, their natural senses in bringing those colors into their own acting were good as well. The reason why the audition, which would usually end in a week, took two weeks this time was because there were a lot of competent first year students. The first year students that were picked were filled with the passion to learn, and thanks to that, the 2nd and 3rd year students had become a lot busier than before. *Her* friends were already saying that Myunghwa High had won the nationals.

"The first year students are scary," said Kim Seol as she wiped her sweat with the towel around her neck.

She was someone who had joined the acting club in her first year, and was now currently the club president. She originally had long hair that reached beneath her shoulders, but she showed up two months ago in February, after having cut her hair short. That day was the graduation day of the senior who was the club president until last year. The former club president laughed big time when she saw Seol's short hair. It was probably her way of showing her resolve as she succeeded the title of the president, but the graduating seniors and her friends chuckled until the end.

"In a few years, I feel like kids who have been studying acting since elementary school might enter. It's good to see Myunghwa High's fame rising, but it does put a lot of pressure on me as a senior," Kim Seol said as she looked at the juniors.

"I have so many worries since I'm graduating this year," *she* replied.

"Should I repeat a year? I like this acting club too much."

"I feel like you're someone who would really do that so don't say that."

*She* blocked Kim Seol's mouth. Just then, *she* was startled by the sticky sensation that she felt from her palm and immediately lifted her hand. Kim Seol was reaching out her tongue.

"Bunbun, your palm is too salty."

"Who told you to lick it?"

*She* pouted and wiped her hand on Kim Seol's towel. This girl was really unpredictable.

"Who do you think is going to win the individual prize this year?" Kim Seol asked as she looked at the practicing first year students.

The first year students took most of the important roles for the summer competition. Although the 2nd year students applied for the audition as well, they were unfortunately pushed back to being supporting characters since the new members were so good.

"I don't know. Everyone's so good."

"Don't say that. There are two that have already caught your eyes, no?"

"You don't say that in front of everyone, right?" *she* asked as she narrowed her eyes.

"Of course not. I'm only saying it because it's just between us."

Kim Seol pointed at two of the first year students.

"Park Hoyoung, Kim Yuna. I guarantee that one of those two will win the individual prize. Bunbun, you think so too, right?"

*She* nodded unwillingly. The two that Kim Seol just talked about had top skills even among the new members.

"They both learned acting after all," *she* said as she did some stretches.

Unlike the other first year members, who had started learning acting after joining the club, those two have already been studying acting and were seriously considering taking that path in the future. Those two possessed acting skills that got the unanimous approval to join when they applied for the club.

If someone did get a prize, it would be one of those two, just as Seol had said. *She* looked at the two juniors who were reading their scripts as she thought about it.

“So look after them, will ya?”

Hearing her words, *she*, who was stretching her legs, raised *her* head.

“Me?”

“Yes. Honestly, ever since the seniors graduated, there’s no one in the club who’s as good as you when it comes to acting. Above all, you have experience appearing on TV. On the days when the instructor is here, we’ll follow the instructor, but otherwise, I hope you can be the one to take care of those two. That will help them out as well.”

“I don’t think there’s a need to go that far though.”

Kim Seol shook her head.

“They are people who can bring out more of their skills if there’s someone to guide them. I hope you can be the one to do that.”

*She* quietly looked at Kim Seol. She was an unpredictable girl, but she wasn’t someone who would speak out of line. The reason she succeeded the title of club president was because she had sufficient talent and leadership skills.

“Do you really think so?”

“Yes. I think they want that as well.”

“But is there anything I can even help with? They probably know everything from acting schools.”

“Acting schools don’t teach you everything. Plus you have first-hand experience in shooting the real thing, meaning, you got to act with real actors. I hope you can use your experiences and guide them. They aren’t treating acting as a mere hobby, so I want to help them out as much as I can.”

*She* sighed and stood up. *She* approached the smiling Kim Seol and pinched her waist.

“Don’t blame me if something goes wrong.”

“If someone says something to you, bring that person to me. I’ll punish that person for daring to tease our Bunbun.”

How could *she* win against that? She smiled and approached the two juniors. Because they were so absorbed, they didn’t realize that *she* was standing behind them. Their concentration was really something.

*She* tapped on the two people’s shoulders.

“Oh, seonbae-nim.”

Hoyoung closed the script and looked at *her*. Yuna, who stood next to him, seemed a little startled as she dazed out for a while before standing up straight.

“How is it? Did you learn your lines?”

“Yes. I can probably recite them in my sleep.”

“You sound confident. How about you, Yuna?”

“Me too,” Yuna replied in a small voice.

*She* really found Yuna cute. Her soft skin and her facial features that were so delicate that they made her look like a doll. From what *she* heard, there were at least five boys among the first year students who had an interest in her. She was really polite as well, so she was doted on a lot by the older students. Furthermore, unlike her cheerful-looking appearance, she was actually really calm, making *her* think that she was a shy girl at first, but now *she* knew that the girl was filled with passion. There were times when she looked quite dull, but that was because her actions were streamlined without any wasted movements. Yuna showed really clean movement when one observed her.

“Do you want to go through the lines? I’ll fill the other roles.”

“Really?”

Yuna became visibly happier. *She* smiled awkwardly because of the pressuring gaze.

“I would love to have you check on us.”

Hoyoung urged Yuna, saying that they should begin quickly. Yuna also quickly got ready.

“We aren’t just going over the lines. Put your emotions into the lines as well. We’re going to exchange what we felt from each other’s lines and think about how we can change them after.”

*She* no longer spoke and just looked at the other two. Since these two were really good, *she* might actually distract them if she wasn’t serious. *She* would have to watch them while maintaining the tension she was in during shoots.

“Begin once you’re ready,” *she* said as she opened the script.

\* \* \*

“...That is my opinion. These are purely my opinions so if you don’t think one is right, then just ignore it. I know that both of you are learning in acting schools.”

“I think I like your teachings better. In acting schools, it’s not personal guidance. It’s more like checking homework when we prepare some acting. We rarely get the chance to have someone comment on our every action,” Hoyoung said.

“What you taught me is the same as what I learned in acting schools. No, I found it a lot easier to understand so it was very helpful.”

Yuna nodded after saying those words. It was as though she was trying to cheer *her* up. *She* inwardly felt relieved. *She* was worried since she had never taught junior like this one-on-one, but it seemed that they were satisfied.

“I’ll do this in the future as well. If you want to practice with me, talk to me any time. I’m an extra in the play this time, so I have a lot of time. Don’t feel too bad and just talk to me whenever you’d like.”

“Right, seonbae-nim. I find that strange. Why did you not take up any roles this time?” Hoyoung expressed his dissatisfaction.

“Because I’m in my 3rd year. Myunghwa High has always been like this. In our 3rd years, we either take insignificant roles or don’t participate at all and help out as staff instead. Only then do the juniors get a chance. Of course, if the juniors are not worth looking at, all of us 3rd years would have to participate....”

*She* looked at the other first year students who were practicing on the other side of the clubroom.

“But as you see, we have a splendid new batch of members this year. We need to be the ones to support you since we have stage experience, because who else will?”

“Wouldn’t we get the grand prize if the seniors go on stage though?”

“You can’t say that for sure. Even if we do, we won’t feel that happy about it. After all, there will be a gap once we graduate. If the alumni happened to hear about that, they’ll immediately barge in and scold us, you know?”

“Well, the seniors were a little scary back then.”

“They’re all working in society after all. You’ll realize what I mean once you become 2nd and then 3rd years. Going on stage might be fun, but it’s even more fun helping out the juniors. I think that’s the driving force behind Myunghwa High getting the grand prize every year.”

*She* smiled and closed the script.

“Well done, both of you. It’s time to go home.”

Hearing *her* words, the two juniors looked at the clock simultaneously.

“Oh, it’s gotten so late already.”

“I didn’t realize.”

“Sorry for holding you up so late on a Sunday. Get your things. Let’s leave together.”

Hoyoung replied ‘yes’ in a big voice before running over to the other first year students. *She* turned around after putting her script between her arm and her body. *She* had to get changed and then get ready to go home.

“Uhm, seonbae-nim.”

“Yeah?”

*She* turned around. *She* saw Yuna hesitant to do something.

“What is it?”

“Uhm... can I ask you about one thing?”

“Do you have something to ask already? What is it?”

“Uhm... there’s this thing I coincidentally overheard.”

“Yeah, go on.”

“I heard that you know Han Maru-seonbae who appears in ‘New Semester’.”

“Han Maru? Uh, yeah. What about him?”

“Do you really know him?”

“Yeah.”

Hearing that, Yuna became even more hesitant to say something. *She* tilted her head and took a step closer.

“What’s this about? Don’t be too stiff. I won’t eat you.”

“...Uhm, seonbae-nim. Can I meet Han Maru-seonbae?”

“Meet Maru?”

“Yes! I mean, it’s not me who wants to meet him. My sister says she wants to meet him.”

“Your sister?”

“Yes. She’s called Kim Bitna. She just entered elementary school this year.”

“Really? She must be cute if she’s anything like you.”

“Yes, she’s really cute.”

“But she wants to see Maru?”

“...Yes.”

Yuna turned her head away slightly. *She* tilted her head in confusion but still replied.

“I’ll ask him for you. It sounds like your sister really likes New Semester.”

“No, she doesn’t watch New Semester that much.”

“But she knows Maru?”

“I heard that she got to act together in the same drama before.”

“Drama?”

“Yes. My sister is a child actress.”

“Wow, that’s incredible.”



“Heheh, my sister’s good at acting.”

Seeing Yuna smiling happily made *her* realize just how much Yuna cherished her sister. *She* took out her phone on the spot.

“I’ll try calling him.”

“Thank you.”

*She* checked the time. 9 p.m. He probably had a shoot today since it was Sunday, but he also said that it might end early, so he should probably be home by now.

*She* long-pressed the shortcut number: 2.

#### **Chapter 574**

The taxi drove off. Maru took a deep breath before lifting up the box with the videotapes. It wasn’t that heavy, but it was hard to walk because of the sheer volume. Just as he barely managed to carry the box, that got caught on his thighs every time he walked, to his house, his phone rang.

“Yeah, what?”

-Were you exercising? You’re out of breath.

“I was moving some stuff.”

-Stuff?

“I received some presents. Anyway, what’s up at this hour? Didn’t you say you were going to practice late into the night?”

Maru pushed the box in front of his house and sat down on the stairs. 9:10 p.m was the time when he checked his watch.

-I just finished.

“You have it hard.”

-Nah.

Her small laugh could be heard over the phone.

“If you just finished should I go pick you up? I think I have time to see you for around an hour.”

-You must be tired because of the shoot, so get some rest. Oh, I called you because a junior of mine wanted to see you.

“Junior? Junior who?”

-Junior at our school’s acting club. To be exact, it’s her sister who wants to see you. Do you know someone called Kim Bitna?

“Kim Bitna?”

He contemplated when he heard the rather familiar-sounding name. He remembered the small pretty girl who played the role of a beggar with him during the shoot for Apgu last summer. That girl's name was Bitna. At the same time, he was reminded of Bitna's mother, who wore sunglasses and drove with one hand. Even though he had only seen her once during the audition, she left a deep impression on him.

"I know her. I met her when I shot Apgu last year. She was a really polite kid, so the adults doted on her a lot."

-Then that must be her. A junior of mine is her sister, and I heard from her that Bitna wants to meet you.

"Bitna wants to meet me?"

-Yeah. Looks like you two were close?

Maru thought about what happened last year. He couldn't say that they were on really good terms. Unlike the other boys who he had gotten close to by living together with them for a while, Bitna always disappeared with her mother after the shoot.

"It wasn't bad, I guess."

-Really?

"I did treat her to some snacks from time to time, so maybe that's how I scored in her heart?"

Maru reminded himself of the young Bitna who did the shoot without any complaints. Even adults found the weather hot, yet Bitna continued acting without crying even once. Her clear eyes left a deep impression on him.

Just then, he could hear her start talking to someone over the phone. He had waited for a while when the door to his house opened.

"Oppa, what are you doing here?"

It was Bada. Maru pointed at the phone.

"Oh, it's unni. What's this? It's in the way here, so I'll take it inside for now."

Bada struggled to put the box inside. Maru thanked her in a small voice.

-What's this thank you?

"I said thank you for being born."

-What the hell was that so suddenly?

"This wasn't the first time I've said that. Anyway, I thought you were talking to someone."

-It's the junior I was talking about. She's next to me. How's your schedule? Bitna apparently really looks forward to meeting you.

"No way. I'm fine with Tuesday. I wonder if Bitna is okay with that?"

-Wait a sec.

Her voice became smaller again. She seemed to be talking with her junior.

-She's okay with Tuesday.

"Really? I'm fine with meeting her, but I don't know what she wants to do. If it's just saying hello, I can go over to your school. Bitna can do that too."

-That sounds good. Then you should come on Tuesday, and I will send you the time by text.

"Okay."

-I'm going to hang up then.

"You are?"

-What else?

"How disappointing. It's the perfect time for a call, yet you want to just hang up after doing business?"

-If you don't have anything to do, just sleep!

"How heartless."

She hung up after wishing him good night. Maru smiled and closed his phone.

"Rather than that, Bitna, huh."

That was unexpected. Just as they talked about, they weren't on bad terms, but they weren't close enough that they would meet up like this in person. At most, they would greet each other if they met each other on the streets. If it was one of the boys that rolled around the floor with him to act like a beggar, he might gladly meet them, but for Bitna, he felt more confused than happy.

What were they supposed to do when they meet? - he thought about it as he opened the door. He couldn't think of anything to say to her when they met. There weren't many things he could do with an elementary school kid. Maybe he should buy some food for her at a restaurant?

"Oppa, what's all this?" Bada asked after opening up the box.

She opened one of the casings for the videotape.

"Are these movies?"

"No, some recordings of acting practices."

"All of this? No, wait, 1988? These are super old!"

"They were taken a long time ago after all."

"How many are there?"

"About sixty."

"You're going to watch all of this? How long is each one?"

"Probably at least an hour?"

“Then that means at least sixty hours, huh.”

“Do you want to watch it with me?”

“Forget about it. I need to study. But why’s there so many? Who’s in it?”

“An amazing actress.”

“An amazing actress?”

Bada tilted her head. When she asked who they were, he just replied to her that they were a nameless actress.

“An amazing, yet nameless actress? I don’t get it. But how are you going to watch it?”

“Don’t we have a videotape player at home?”

“We threw it out a while ago. No one was using it, and it was taking up space in the living room, so mom gave it away to a junk dealer if I remember correctly.”

“So it’s like that after all. Do we have to buy one then?”

Maru put the videotapes back in the box and took them to his room. It seemed that he had to look for a VCR first. Maybe he should visit Yongsan?

“Ah, right, promise.”

Tuesday was his only day off but he had already made an appointment. The only other day he could take off was Thursday when he had acting club practice. However, he hadn’t been to practice a lot lately thanks to shooting the film and the drama. Although practice was lower on his priority list, he had talked to Daemyung about it, and considering what he had to do as a senior, he probably shouldn’t miss out on any more practice sessions.

Should he try to borrow one at school? Maru thought about Taesik. The school probably had a VCR, and it was probably in some storage room somewhere because it wasn’t in use. He might be able to get this resolved quite easily if he asked.

‘Let’s leave that at that.’

Let's wash up for now - he was drenched in sweat after moving some heavy stuff. He decided that he should think about other methods after having a shower.

Maru looked at the box with the videotapes pleasantly before opening the door.

\* \* \*

“Thank you.”

“Don’t mention it. I can do this much. Here, drink this.”

Yuna accepted the strawberry milk while bowing. Her seonbae also went with strawberry milk. They were in the convenience store in front of the school. They naturally came here as they talked to each other.

“The seonbae who graduated used to take me to this place a lot,” her seonbae spoke.

She had a bright smile on her face.

“You’re talking about the one who came for the welcome ceremony for the club right? The one with the short hair.”

“Yes. That’s her. You didn’t know that Seol cut her hair short following her, did you?”

“Oh, did she?”

“Yeah. Seol really liked the former president. Well, you can say the same thing about me. She always asked if we were okay when we were having a hard time. She was really scary when it came to practice, but she was kinder than anyone once practice was over. This is the place I used to talk to her a lot. I think everyone in the acting club drank with her here at least once.”

“She must be a good person.”

Yuna said as she grabbed the strawberry milk with both of her hands. Just from her seonbae’s words, she could tell just what a warm person the former president was. Likewise, the seonbae that brought her here like the former president had to be a good person.

Yuna bit her lower lip and looked at her seonbae. Actually, she had told her a lie. It wasn’t her sister who wanted to see Han Maru-seonbae. Well, she did say it from time to time, but she never desperately wanted to. At most, it was just ‘there was this interesting oppa’. It was her who fanned the flames. When she heard that her seonbae knew Han Maru-seonbae, Yuna thought about it for a long while before talking to her about it.

“Yuna, you said that you wanted to become an actress, right?”

“Yes.”

“Is your sister the same?”

“My sister’s popular. She showed up quite a lot in dramas, as a child actress.”

“Really? It wasn’t just Apgu?”

“She was actually a child model, but she started acting because mom said she should try. She’s really good at acting. I started practicing acting ever since I entered middle school, but my sister debut when she was five. She’s a senior in that regard.”

“Yuna, you’ll become a splendid actress too one day. I managed to, you know? You’re much better than me, so there will come a day when you will be able to display your skills.”

Yuna couldn’t lift her head due to embarrassment after hearing that. She felt extremely happy that the number one seonbae she liked in the club was complimenting her. She felt like the fatigue she got from practice was melting away.

“Ah, do you like strawberry milk? I forgot to ask and ended up buying what I like.”

“I really like strawberry milk.”

Yuna gulped down the strawberry milk.

“Take it slow. You’ll choke.”

As soon as she said those words, Yuna choked on her drink. She coughed and wiped her mouth with her sleeve. She felt embarrassed.

“See, I told you to be careful.”

“Sorry.”

“There’s no need to be sorry. Do you want some tissues?”

“Oh, I have some with me.”

Yuna took out some tissues from her bag and wiped her mouth. She then carefully looked at her seonbae. She was leaning against the chair and looking at the sky as she drank.

‘Wow.’

Yuna subconsciously gasped because her seonbae looked nothing like the character she played on television. She was good at acting, kind, gentle, and.... Yuna thought that it was the best choice she ever made to come to Myunghwa High, purely because of the acting club alone.

In Suwon, Myunghwa High was well-known for two things.

One, a school where celebrities attended, and two, a school with a great acting club. Most people who had an interest in this field knew that the alumni of the acting club at Myunghwa High were powerful in the entertainment industry. Yuna also chose Myunghwa High because she wanted to become an actress.

“If you’re having a hard time, then tell me or Seol about it. Or you can go to the other seonbaes about it. They’ll all help you like it’s their own matter. The acting club is no different from family after all.”

“Yes, seonbae-nim.”

“Then shall we get up? Oh! You can meet Maru at 6 on Tuesday. We don’t have practice that day, so that’s a good thing, isn’t it?”

“Thank you.”

“What are you going to do for your sister? Can she come to the school by herself?”

“I’ll go pick her up. We live nearby, so it’s fine.”

“Then I guess there are no problems. I’ll tell him to treat Bitna well. He’s not someone who would play pranks on children, but he’s quite weird.”

“Weird?”

Yuna blinked her eyes and asked. However, her seonbae didn’t seem to have heard as she kept tapping away on her phone. Yuna smiled and no longer spoke. She couldn’t care less about the trivial stuff. What was important was that she got to meet Han Maru-seonbae in person.

“Let’s go, Yuna.”

“Yes!”

Yuna walked right next to her seonbae.

## **Chapter 575**

“I’m home.”

“You’re late. How about dinner?”

“I ate already with a seonbae of mine.”

“What did you eat?”

“Strawberry milk.”

You should eat properly - seeing her mother worried about her, Yuna smiled and said that she was okay.

“I’m fine since I ate a lot for lunch. Where’s Bitna?”

“She should be sleeping right now. She said she was tired after we came back from the studio.”

Her mother pointed at the bedroom. Yuna quietly opened the door to the room. She could hear regular breathing. She tiptoed so she wouldn’t make any noise with her feet and approached Bitna who was sleeping on the bed.

“Bitna, your unni’s here.”

She whispered and waved her hand, and just then, Bitna opened her eyes. As Yuna didn’t have any intentions of waking her up, she quickly apologized.

“Unni, you’re here.”

“Sorry. Looks like I woke you up. Go back to sleep.”

Bitna, who sat up while rubbing her eyes, yawned before standing up.

“I’m going to watch TV.”

“Do you want me to carry you?”

After thinking for a while, Bitna nodded. Yuna quickly piggybacked Bitna and went to the living room. Some metal sounds could be heard from the kitchen. It seemed that her mother was putting some fruits in a bowl.

“Bitna, did you wake up?”

“I think I woke her up.”

After replying, she put Bitna down on the sofa. Bitna, who was still sleepy, looked at the powered off TV in a daze before looking for the remote.

“Bitna, what do you want to watch?”

“A drama.”

Yuna turned to a Sunday drama channel. Bitna got herself together and started watching TV.

“Have some fruits.”

Her mother put down a large bowl on the living room table. Yuna forked a chopped banana before giving it to Bitna. She subconsciously smiled when she looked at Bitna, who ate the banana with her small hands.

“You’re going to cry even more than I will when Bitna gets married in the future, aren’t you?”

“Of course. Bitna, even if you get married, you must come and see your sister, okay?”

Bitna’s small head nodded.

“You should eat as well, mom.”

“You should eat first. Also, are you going to keep coming home around this time in the future?”

“We’re in our busiest period right now. The characters have been decided, and we’re also making the props. It won’t always end this late though. I find myself lacking no matter how much I practice, so I want to do about an hour more, but the seonbaes told me that it’s important to rest as well.”

“They’re right. Staying in your top condition is also important.”

Yuna looked at Bitna who was watching TV before turning around to look at her mother.

“What did Bitna shoot today?”

“An acquaintance of mine opened a studio. It was really well-decorated too. She said she needed a photo to display at the counter, so I had Bitna do that.”

“Are the photos good?”

“Of course they are. Who do you think the model is?”

“Did you take photos of them with your phone?”

“I thought you’d ask that, so I did.”

Her mother went to the room and came back out with her phone.

“Here. Don’t they look good?”

Bitna was standing in a beige-colored background. She was wearing a light blue one-piece dress and was sitting on a chair that was larger than herself. It was way too cute.

“She’s even prettier if you see the actual photos.”

“Bitna, these look so good,” Yuna said as she showed Bitna the photos.

Bitna smiled faintly before looking at the TV again.

“If this place does well, it’ll be all thanks to Bitna.”

Yuna looked at the photos in satisfaction before giving the phone back to her mother.



“What happened to the audition she took last time?”

“We didn’t hear anything back, so I don’t think she made it.”

“Where can you find a girl prettier than Bitna, huh? They just don’t know their stuff.”

“There are many girls who are just as pretty as Bitna.”

Her mother waved her hand and stood up. Yuna followed her to the kitchen.

“Did you decide on what to do about the acting school?”

Her mother sat down in the kitchen and crossed her arms. When she made a posture like that, the manager side of hers would surface. Yuna organized her thoughts before speaking,

“I want to focus on the acting club for the first year.”

“Is that because the acting club is fun for you? Or because it’s helpful to you.”

“It is both fun and helpful.”

“Yuna.”

“Yes, mom.”

“As you know, we live in an era where only those that have been preparing steadily since youth can grab the opportunity. Mom thinks that both you and Bitna are very pretty and talented, to the point that I can’t believe you two are my daughters. That’s also why I think you’re at a very important moment right now. Think about it carefully. There is a right time for learning. Hanging out with your friends at your age is very important, yes. It’s not like mom doesn’t understand that. Also Yuna, you must remember that the successful actors and actresses all gave up some things to reach their level. It’s not just actors. You can apply that logic to every other job. Achieving something is the same as giving up just as much. Yuna is smart, so you know what mom is saying, right?”

“Yes, I do.”

“And you still want to reduce the number of acting school lessons that you took during middle school and focus on the acting club?”

“Yes, I do.”

Her mother closed her eyes. Yuna waited patiently. Her mother was making her decision right now. If she said no, Yuna was planning to act stubborn, which she hadn’t done in a long time.

“Are you doing the acting club in order to play around?” she asked.

Yuna immediately shook her head.

“No. If the acting club really just played around, I wouldn’t have joined in the first place. Mom, I want to become an actress. I’m not lying about that. And, just as you said, I know that there are things I have to give up in order to become one. That’s why I want to take a break from acting school for a while. Actually, the acting I do at the club is much harder than what I do at the academy. At the academy, I do

exactly what the instructor tells me to do, but in the acting club, I have to be more proactive. I liked that feeling. It's unlike anything I have done until now."

"Do you really think so?"

"Yes. Honestly speaking, acting with my friends is fun. I have friends at the acting school, but we don't strive to put on a play with all of us. Mom, you said that actors need to have a variety of experiences, right? The acting club is a really new place for me. Oh, there's also a special instructor who comes every week, so it's not like the education level loses out to acting schools."

Yuna then thought about one person.

"Also, I have a seonbae I admire at the acting club, and I could learn a lot of things while looking at her acting."

"A seonbae you admire?"

"The one I talked about last time."

"Oh, the one that appeared in the sitcom?"

"Yes. The one who bought me strawberry milk today was also her."

"You admire her?"

"Yes!"

Hearing that answer, her mother's lips softened. There was a smile on her face, and the tightly locked arms loosened up as well.

"If there's a seonbae like her, I guess there's no need to go to an acting school."

"Are you really giving me permission?"

"Have I ever not give you permission after I talked to you seriously about it? Yuna, if you are really sure that what you feel is right, I am going to try to understand you and allow you to do what you want. You're my daughter after all."

"Thank you, mom."

"Here. Give mommy a hug."

Her mother opened her arms wide. Yuna smiled and gave her a hug. Just then, Bitna, who was watching TV in the living room, came up to them and got in between the two. Yuna gave her sister a big hug.

"Mom, I want to sleep."

"Bitna must be tired. You must brush your teeth first, right?"

Her mother patted Bitna's buttocks. After brushing her teeth, Bitna went to the bedroom.

"If you ever change your mind later, tell me. I'll try to contact someone who can get you into Film."

"Isn't that place expensive?"

"It is, but when I think about your future, it's absolutely worth it. Mom will do everything I can for your sake. So, if you ever want something, then tell mom about it."

"Okay, mom."

Her mother picked up the vase placed on the dining table. As Yuna was watching the water level rise in her mug, she heard her mother's voice.

"Also Yuna, who is Maru-oppa?"

"Wh-what?"

"Bitna said in the studio today. That you seem to want to meet Maru-oppa."

"Bitna said that?"

Her mother did not reply and just stared at her. Yuna did not know where to look, so she stared at the mug.

"If it's something you need to keep secret from mom, then you don't have to tell me. But if it's about dating someone, you must be very careful. Liking and loving someone is a natural thing, but sometimes, that natural thing can put people in pain. You must understand that. Of course, mom believes that my daughter knows about such things already."

Yuna hesitated before speaking,

"Mom, you know the drama called The Witness, right?"

"I do. I liked it to the point that I kept up to date with all the episodes."

"Then do you remember one of the extras who was a murderer? The one that appeared in the interrogation room."

"Do you mean the scene where Ahn Joohyun was shouting?"

"Yes."

"I remember that scene. I was really nervous when I watched that scene. It was quite scary after all. Why do you ask?"

"The one that played the role of the murderer in that scene is Han Maru-oppa. Right now, he's in New Semester."

"Oh really? He's an actor?"

Her mother smiled as though she was interested and leaned forward. Yuna slightly leaned backwards after seeing her mother so close to her.

"Do you know him?"

"No, I've never met him. But Bitna seems quite close to him. They both used to be beggars in Apgu."

"Apgu? Oh! I remember. There was this mature boy who was always taking care of Bitna when I went there to pick her up and... right. His name was Han Maru. Your mom's memory is still good."

Her mother clapped and rejoiced. Yuna smiled awkwardly.

“Actually, I was really surprised when I saw him acting in *The Witness*. How can he do such a thing... Then, I found out that Bitna knew Maru-oppa so I asked her. Because I wanted to meet him once....”

She said that last part in a really small voice.

She had a lot of actors she admired. However, most of those actors were much older than her.

The only one that managed to show impressive acting and was around her age was Maru, so Yuna became curious about him. Just like her friends who liked idols, she investigated the actor named Han Maru, but she couldn't find anything worth noting. Then, she found a short interview with Maru on a magazine website known as Sharon. While reading that interview, Yuna nodded several times. There were many things she could sympathize with.

Through that interview, Yuna found out that Maru appeared in a movie called *Twilight Struggles* and managed to find a short clip of when Maru appeared on a video website. In that clip, Maru left a short, but deep impression. He gave her a sense of chill that was different from the violent struggle he showed in *The Witness*. Yuna replayed that clip several times. The moment she realized he enraptured her with just one line, Yuna wanted to know more about that actor.

“Wait a sec.”

Her mom picked up her phone and stood up while talking. It seemed to be a work-related call. Yuna saw her mother go to the veranda before sighing.

“So Bitna knew about it.”

She was so embarrassed because she wanted to meet a man who she never met before, so she very indirectly asked Bitna if she wanted to meet Maru, but it seemed that her quick-witted sister had seen through everything.

The reason she wasn't able to tell her seonbae that it was her who wanted to meet Maru was also because she felt very embarrassed about meeting him one on one. It was also because she felt that Maru-seonbae might be weirded out since someone he didn't know wanted to meet him. That was why she tried so hard to come up with that lie, and yet....

‘If Bitna knows about it, seonbae must have noticed as well. She must have pretended not to know about it because she was being considerate, right?’

She really thanked her seonbae now. Yuna slapped her cheeks lightly. She decided that she shouldn't have lied no matter how embarrassed she was. She resolved that she should definitely apologize to her seonbae later.

“But at least I get to meet him now.”

Yuna calmed down her breathing as she thought about Maru's face. She looked forward to meeting him as an actor. Just what kind of thoughts did he have? What kind of practice did he do that allowed him to act like that? She had a mountain of questions. She decided that she would ask everything when they meet the day after tomorrow.

'I can do it, right?'

She could picture herself not being able to ask anything in embarrassment, but it should be fine since Bitna would be next to her. Yuna nodded her head.

'It's fine, I can do it!'

\* \* \*

"Did something good happen to Yuna? She seemed really happy about something."

She, who was taking a shower, thought back to the smile her junior had before focusing on washing her hair.

'Well, something good probably happened to her.'

"Ah, the warm water is so good."

A pleasant sense of relaxation filled her body

## **Chapter 576**

"I don't think I am allowed to let you take it home. I did look for one, but all the VCRs registered as school items are integrated into the TV, so I can't really let you take it home."

"I see. Sorry for asking you something absurd."

"No, no. Sorry for not being able to help. But why are you looking for a VCR? Most people use CDs these days."

"I have some videotapes I got from someone."

"Don't tell me they are red tapes?" Taesik teased.

"We're past the era of watching such things on videotapes. It's just a video recording of a real play and a real stage. They are precious resources, so I wanted to watch them quickly, but things just aren't going well."

"If it's like that, you can bring it to school and watch it here."

"There's about sixty of them...."

"Oh, I guess you need to look for a VCR and watch it at home then."

"I was counting on the school to have one, but I guess it didn't go that well. I'll try visiting Yongsan next week."

"If I had one at home, I'd love to lend it to you, but we threw it out a few years ago as well."

"Most households don't have one these days. I guess they'll soon be treated like record players, while videotapes become vinyl records."

"Probably."

Just as he was about to say goodbye and leave, Taesik's laptop made a noise. When Maru had a look at the screen, he saw a messenger window pop up. Taesik sighed after checking the message.

"You seem busy, so I'll take my leave now. Thank you for looking into it."

"Oh, okay. But this isn't work. This is something worse."

"Worse? Is it...."

Taesik pointed at the laptop screen as though it was fine for Maru to read. Maru narrowed his eyes. He could see the text on the screen. The first thing he looked for was the name of the one who sent the message. He realized then what was worse than work.

"So you still haven't finished preparing for the wedding yet."

"The important things have been dealt with."

"Then I guess it must be about the honeymoon huh."

"I heard Miso vented her stress on you, and it seems that she told you about that after all."

"I heard it a while back. But did you really invite your parents and mother-in-law to the honeymoon?"

"Things happened that way."

"You were too generous. She's going to use this to nag you for a lifetime."

"I know, right? I've never dated anyone until now, and I'm suddenly getting married, so people around me are like... you know. There's the age gap between me and Miso too. We met each other's parents amidst the confusion, and thanks to that, we found out about each other's family history. I know just how hard a single parent's life is since I'm a teacher. I thought that it was good to take mother-in-law since she must have had a hard time until now, but when I got myself together, I felt like I made a mistake."

"It would've been perfect if it wasn't the honeymoon. Such a pity."

"You're entirely right. Plus, it's not like I can suddenly go up to mother-in-law and tell her the disappointing news. If I go through like this though, I'm afraid of the consequences."

"...Congratulations on your marriage. I guess that's the only thing I can tell you."

"Don't you have a way out?"

"My mother said this once: A wife is above the national leader before marriage. Anyway, Miso-noonim does really love you, so perhaps you'll be able to gloss over it if you act cute?"

"Act cute at this age?"

"Teach, acting cute works if someone who never does it does it. Rather than regretting it later, even the young me thinks that you should look for peace right now by getting her to forgive you."

Good luck - Maru cheered in a small voice. Taesik made an awkward smile and put his hands on the keyboard. When Maru glanced back, he was creating an emoticon on the keyboard. Bless the latecomer

husband. Of course, it was likely that she would nag him about it their whole lives, but what could he do about it? He should have been prepared for what's coming since he got a young wife.

"Hey, Han Maru! Where do you think you're going without cleaning!"

A broom was thrown at his face as soon as he returned to the classroom.

"How heartless. Can't you fill in for a friend?"

"Stop yapping and do it quickly. You're in charge of the corridor!"

Maru smiled bitterly when he felt the kindness of a friend who would not accept other people's happiness. He was sweeping the floor with the broom in the corner of the corridor when he heard a pair of deep voices from the floor beneath him. Maru grabbed onto the banister and looked down. A skinny tall guy and a small but well built guy were talking to each other.

"Did you guys eat steam engines or something? Quieten down a little," Maru said as he looked at Bangjoo and Chihwan, who were climbing the stairs.

These days, they always walked around together like a duo from a comedy movie. Of course, it was rather rude of him to compare those two to renowned actors, but he couldn't help but be reminded of such a pair when looking at the two.

"Hello, seonbae-nim!"

"Maru-seonbae!"

Bangjoo greeted him politely while Chihwan waved his hand. Bangjoo scolded Chihwan saying that he was rude. Maru sighed.

"Both of you are just as bad so stop. Also, lower your voices. Leaving aside Chihwan, Bangjoo, isn't it about time you got that fixed?"

"I am trying to, but I always end up raising my voice when I'm next to this guy. He's too loud so I can't hear anything whenever I say something."

As soon as Bangjoo's words ended, Chihwan countered.

"Bangjoo-seonbae. You can't just say that. I'm raising my voice because your voice is loud."

"That's not true."

"That's what I want to say."

Maru quietly approached them from the back and pulled both of them by one ear.

"Go up to the hall already. No one will say anything about your voice there."

The two juniors grabbed their ears and walked up the stairs. Usually, the meeting of two people gave rise to a synergistic effect, but with these two, that effect took place in a weird direction.

"Good to see that they're lively. I had them do the same things since I thought they would become close to each other, and it seems I was right."

When he turned around, he saw Daemyung. Maru slapped Daemyung's chest without saying a word.

"So you are the cause."

"Wh-what?"

"That's not called lively. That's called being loud."

"At least it's nice to look at them. They're filled with vitality."

"As expected of the club president who loves the juniors. Are you going up right now?"

"No, I'm going to buy some drinks from the cafeteria. You're coming to practice today, right?"

"I will. I've been missing practice for quite a while now."

"If you're too busy, don't push yourself."

"Hey, the word is that you work until late into the night. Do you think I can rest like that? I'm going to go and do some practice and check on the props as well so don't worry about it. Also, sorry. I feel like I'm pushing everything onto you."

"Oh, don't mention it."

"Dowook isn't coming either these days, right?"

"Yeah. He went home early today as well."

"Looks like they're having a hard time looking for a part timer."

"They did find one, but apparently, that person didn't show up without notice after a few days. Is a petrol station job that hard?"

"It's a bit hard because of washing the larger vehicles. Although the machine does the brunt of it, it still requires a person to help."

"Maybe that's why Dowook said he wanted to have you do the work. His father is also apparently looking for you all the time."

"The auntie there made some really nice food, so it was really good working there. Though, I can't do it now because I'm busy."

"Everyone's busy."

"You are doing the club on top of your studies too, aren't you? If it's really that hard, tell the 2nd years about it. It'd be better if I or Dowook could show up from time to time, but that's hard for both of us."

"I'm starting to realize why the 3rd year seniors never came to practice last year. You really get that pressure that you have to study huh."

"Tell me once something happens. I'll try whatever I can to help."

Daemyung smiled and climbed down the stairs. It was really satisfying to see the increasing number of club members at the beginning of March, but problems started occurring when they started practicing



for real. There were over thirty juniors to guide, yet two out of the three third year members were absent all the time, so there had to be problems. Daemyung was trying his best, but he probably had it hard, both psychologically and physically.

'I don't think it's a bad idea to pick a club president from the 2nd year members quickly.'

Once Daemyung retired from being president, he should get more time to focus on his schoolwork. The acting club was an important place, yes, but compared to Daemyung's future, not as important. Rather than achieving something as an acting club, Daemyung's stable entry into college was much more important from Maru's perspective.

"Seonbae, are you cleaning?"

"Hello, seonbae-nim."

Aram and Jiyeon appeared in front of him. They seemed to be going up. Maru stroked his chin as he looked at Aram. Among the 2nd year students, Aram was probably the best-suited to be the club president. Bangjoo wasn't bad, but he wasn't capable of being harsh. If they were given some work, he would cheerfully solve everything by himself. Compared to him, Aram was someone who could distribute the work suitably. She would also be moderately strict as well. The club president had to be able to become strict and snap out. In that sense, Aram was a decent candidate. Of course, Jiyeon was a really decent person as well, but....

"Seonbae-nim. Do you need help?" Jiyeon offered.

Jiyeon did not suit the position after all. She was a docile sheep, so she would get swung around by the wolves if she was given armor to wear. It was better to give the position to someone who knew how to bare their fangs.

"You shouldn't do that. Seonbae, we'll be off first."

"Alright. Daemyung said he's going to buy drinks before going up, so go up and have everyone start practice. Bangjoo is up there as well, but he's probably fooling around with the others."

"Okay."

Aram led Jiyeon up. Hm, she was really reliable. He decided that he should talk to Daemyung about stepping down from the role of president.

After sweeping the floor, he went to the classroom and got his bag. Although he usually only carried around a script and a novel, there was a videotape inside today. He couldn't hold back his curiosity and ended up bringing one. There was a VCR in the classroom opposite of the hall, so he could watch it there.

"7th of August, 1987."

Maru looked at the videotape he took out from his bag. This was the oldest record among the videotapes that director Lee Jincheol gave him. The sixty videos were recorded a few days apart at the shortest and months apart at the longest. The last video was taken in January of 1989, a month before Jung Haejoo passed away. According to the timeline, the Jung Haejoo of 1987 had not met president Lee Junmin yet. He would find out what kind of acting she did through this video.

After putting the videotape back in his bag, he started walking up the stairs. When he arrived at the hall and opened the door, he saw the juniors who were stretching under the guidance of Aram.

“Hello.”

“Hello, seonbae.”

He nodded at the juniors before going to a corner. He planned to watch the video leisurely after doing everything he needed to do.

“For now, let’s start with sewing.”

Maru put some clothing on his lap as well as some cloth to patch it up.

### **Chapter 577**

“Let’s take a 10 minute break! Those of you who want to go to the bathroom should go now, and those of you who want to drink something, there are drinks right there so drink as much as you want. Let’s start again after we take a break.”

As soon as Daemyun’s words ended, Chihwan sat down on the ground. The others also sat down on the floor as though they were falling.

“I don’t think I’ll ever get used to this even after a year.”

Chihwan wiped his sweat. Even though they had finished only their stretches, his whole body was aching. ‘Stretching’ was supposed to be something done lightly before an actual sport or other activities, but it had a completely different meaning within the acting club. Extreme exercise, that was another name for stretching in the acting club.

“That seonbae is sewing again today.”

“You’re right.”

Chihwan’s colleagues were whispering to each other. Maru had shown up to practice after a long time, but what he did was always the same: making props. Most of the props that were piling up inside the container had been created by Maru’s hands.

“I wonder why he’s not doing acting.”

“He must be busy.”

“Really? He doesn’t even show up on TV that much though.”

“Now that you mention it, that’s true. In last week’s episode, we only got a brief glimpse of him from the side.”

“Did he get edited out because his acting was bad?”

“No way.”

“I saw on TV last time that there are people who only show up for a minute after shooting for five hours. Dramas must be the same, right? If they aren’t good, they just won’t show up.”

"I guess that's plausible. I only watch New Semester for Giwoo-oppa."

"Isn't Kang Giwoo so handsome?"

"You can say that again. A friend of mine sneaked out of her house and went to Daejeon to see him last weekend."

"I also chased after TTO oppas a lot once. Though, I stopped doing any fan activities since they haven't been active recently."

"Have you seen TTO in real life?"

"I did. Man, they're no joke. Do you know what a halo is? Those oppas had halos so bright that I couldn't see them properly."

"Giwoo-oppa must be even cooler from up close then, right?"

"Of course. I've been chasing after media people for 2 years. Even the best idols can't hold a candle to handsome actors. You know Lee Hyuk, right?"

"I do!"

Chihwan looked at the two girls when they raised their voices. The girls lowered their voices after looking at him. However, they still looked excited. Was the guy named Lee Hyuk that good?

"I saw Lee Hyuk-oppa from up close, and I almost fainted. His eyes, nose, and mouth are like they have been sculpted. I thought he was a foreigner at first."

"I also saw the movie. I was really surprised when I watched it, you know? Lee Hyuk-oppa looked so handsome."

"I almost dazed out as well. His looks are just, whew. Also, you know that there were bad rumors about him, right? There were talks about how he is an actor with a pretty face but terrible acting because all the pieces he shot produced bad results, but those allegations faded away with this movie. He's too good at acting. I even watched it twice."

"Really? That's awesome."

"At first, I watched it without thinking, but when I watched it again, I saw things I didn't the first time. Especially Kwon Dayoon's acting. Honestly, I haven't looked at her in a good light ever since Blue split up, but Kwon Dayoon was different."

"I know right? I didn't realize it was her at first."

"She was an idol, but her acting was so good. I saw from a fan café that the reason Blue split up was to let Kwon Dayoon debut as an actress. Being dubbed an idol actress does sound a little cheap after all."

"Didn't they split up because they had a bad relationship? I heard that someone got pregnant."

"Maybe that happened, but Kwon Dayoon's acting is so good that it wouldn't be strange for her agency to give her their full support, right? Seeing as how Kwon Dayoon didn't leave the company even though the group split up, I think they terminated Blue because they wanted to turn her into an actress. Was it

Lee Chaerim? She switched to acting as well, didn't she? I'm sure that acting makes more money than being an idol."

"Right. I heard that actors earn a huge amount of money through commercials. If I was the president, I would let someone as good as Kwon Dayoon be an actress and not an idol."

"My words exactly."

"I guess the reason she doesn't show up recently is because she's practicing acting. I almost fell in love with her when she snapped out in the movie. I originally didn't like her that much, but I feel like becoming a fan is okay after looking at her acting."

"Me too. I shivered when I saw her."

The girls started talking about the movie 'Those Guys'. Rather than talking about Lee Hyuk being cool, they were talking about how Kwon Dayoon's acting was good.

"It's not that her acting was good, it's that the direction was good. You don't know your stuff," Chihwan said after listening for a while.

"What direction?"

The girls looked at him. Chihwan made the biggest smile he could. Maru and Bangjoo, with who he watched the movie, definitely said that the movie was good because of the direction.

"The direction of the director. It's not the actors who were good at acting, it's the editing that made them look awesome."

"No it isn't. Their acting was good. Did you even watch the movie?"

"I did."

"And you can still say that? What direction. Dayoon-unni just had awesome acting."

"You really don't know your stuff. Listen up. Maru-seonbae said that it's a victory for directing after seeing the movie."

"So what?"

"Do you want me to explain in detail? Who is Maru-seonbae? He's an actor who has acted in dramas and movies, right? Who do you think knows more about movies? Him, an actor? Or us, an audience? Of course it's h...."

"That's not right! I get that Maru-seonbae is on TV, but whether he is good at acting is another story," the girl said after giving a glance in Maru's direction.

Chihwan raised his eyebrows. She dared to say something that was disrespectful.

"Maru-seonbae's acting is awesome!"

"It's not in New Semester."

"Can you still say that after seeing Maru-seonbae in Those Guys?"

The girls widened their eyes.

“Maru-seonbae was in Those Guys? I watched it twice and I don’t remember seeing him.”

“Me neither. He wasn’t in it.”

“When did he appear?”

The girls glared at him and asked. Chihwan did not step down before their fierce gazes.

“You know, the fighting scene at the beginning.”

“The fighting scene? Oh! The scene where there was no sound? Maru-seonbae appeared there?”

“Yes! He shot together with the Kwon Dayoon that you’ve been praising.”

He thought that they would look at Maru differently now, but the girls’ reactions were lukewarm at best.

“What the heck? He’s just an extra then. He barely showed up as well. I actually expected something because you said he was in it, but it turns out it was nothing much.”

“See? That seonbae isn’t anything much.”

“If he was really popular, why would he come to the acting club? He should be busy shooting. He just got lucky to show his face here and there.”

Chihwan felt like he was going to become angry. The girls were respectful to the other seniors, but it was easy to see that they were disrespectful to Maru.

‘Fine, I get it. I get that seonbae doesn’t show up that much and is always by himself, so it’s not surprising that they don’t know about him. But this isn’t right.’

Chihwan was deeply impressed by Maru during the audition the film production club held. Although they had the same role, Maru showed him a completely different side to acting and made him realize what acting was about. If the girls watched him properly that day, they wouldn’t say such things.

Chihwan stood up and walked over to Maru. The girls were frightened and grabbed him, but he shook them off and stood in front of Maru.

“Seonbae-nim!”

“What?”

“Show us your acting. Those girls are looking down on you.”

Chihwan pointed at the girls. The five people who were sitting in a circle stiffened up like concrete. They didn’t dare say what they said directly to his face. Chihwan boldly looked at the girls like they deserved it.

“Chihwan.”

“Yes, seonbae-nim!”

"If you have energy left over, go run a lap."

"What?"

Chihwan looked at Maru with a dazed expression. He had told him that the juniors were being disrespectful to their senior, yet this was his reaction.

"Seonbae, I said they are looking down on you."

"Three laps."

"No, but, seonbae!"

"Four laps."

"Fine, I won't say anything."

Maru hinted at him to walk away. Chihwan sighed and turned around. The girls seemed to have realized what had happened and started to laugh about it.

"See? Maru-seonbae doesn't have anything to say about it either."

"Also, did you actually just tell him? Are you really a man?"

"Stop overreacting to jokes. Maru-seonbae must feel that it was absurd as well."

The girls chuckled. Chihwan glared at them and sat in front of them. The girls who met eyes with him fiercely looked at him for a while before turning away.

"Are you trying to pick a fight or what?"

"He's so ridiculous."

"What a cocky guy."

Cocky? Chihwan tried to go up to the girls to nitpick them, but he couldn't do anything thanks to the other boys coming up to him and holding him back.

"Why don't you calm down a little, dammit."

"I'm going to kill you if our relationship with the girls goes bad."

"Did you forget that we were going to hang out together? Why are you fighting?"

His friends smiled like idiots while looking at the girls. Chihwan was boiling inside. At first, he was angry at the boys, but it soon turned into disappointment towards Maru. Wasn't he supposed to protect his pride as a senior? Maru treated Chihwan like that, yet he didn't say anything to the girls. He simply couldn't understand. It would've been great if he showed them his acting and had them shut up about his skills.

Chihwan walked to Maru again.

"Seonbae."

"Yeah, what."

Maru was focusing on sewing and didn't raise his head. Chihwan pouted.

"Isn't hierarchical order important in group activities?"

"That's right, it is. In that sense, what am I supposed to do with you when you keep interrupting me while I'm making props?"

"No, seonbae. I'm on your side. I'm Ahn Chihwan, the man who knows honor. I am taking your side with the resolve to fight against the girls."

"Good for you."

"That's it?"

"Why are you being so naggy when you're so big?"

"I'm not being naggy. I like you. That's why I can't stand you being disrespected."

"Why can't you do that?"

"Because a senior shouldn't be ignored."

"Is this the military or something?"

"Are you fine with being ignored?"

"I am, so please be quiet while I sew this. Or you can help out. Daemyung, that guy, he gave me a mountain load of work with a smiling face, so I don't have any time to rest."

"What? Here I was prepared to fight the others because of you."

"No, no, not because of me, but because of you."

"Because of me? Of course not! I said because of you."

Maru raised his head. He yawned before starting to speak.

"I'm fine with it though."

"Even if you are, I'm not."

"See? It's because of you. You aren't my manager. Why do you care about my reputation? If you have time to think about that, then go read the script one more time. You have a role, don't you? Is your acting perfect? Can you say that your acting is perfect?"

"It is perfect!"

"Really?"

"Yes!"

"Then do it."

"What?"

"I said do it. Think of this place as the stage and do it."

"...Fine. But you have to do it too. It'd be weird for only me to do it."

"You really know how to annoy a person, huh. Fine, instead, you have to do this as well," Maru said as he pointed at the pile of clothes next to him.

"Okay! But it would be no fun to just do it, so let's make a bet. If you win, then I'll help you out until you finish."

"You really won't stop until you have everything done your way, huh. Fine, a bet or whatever. Do what you want."

"Since it's a bet, I should get something if I win as well."

"How meticulous. What do you want?"

"Teach me acting."

"The others are teaching you already. Instructor Miso comes here too."

"I want to learn from you. Your acting is really good."

Chihwan looked at Maru. Maru palmed his face.

"Just where did a guy like this come from...."

"You should be prepared to accept me as your disciple. I'm not sure about anything else, but I really did memorize everything about this play perfectly."

Chihwan turned around and shouted at everyone else.

"Everyone! Listen up!"

## **Chapter 578**

"You want me to be the club president?"

Aram looked at Daemyung with a startled expression.

After stretching, Daemyung called for the 2nd year students. She followed him to the cafeteria while slightly confused since they had never been called out separately like this before, but it was happening now. Aram looked at Jiyeon and Bangjoo, who were standing next to her.

"Seonbae, what do you mean by that so suddenly?" Jiyeon spoke first.

Following that, Bangjoo also asked for an explanation. It seemed that it was the first time they heard about this as well.

"You were talking to Maru-seonbae just a while ago. Was it about this?" Aram asked.

"I have actually been thinking about it for a few weeks now, but after talking to Maru, I felt that it'd be better for both you three and the first year students if I decided quickly."



“Why are you doing this so suddenly? Did someone say something to you? Are the first year students looking down on you? Who is it? I will trample on them.”

“A-Aram, calm down. It’s not like that.”

Aram panted and looked at Daemyung. If it wasn’t like that, then why was he suddenly quitting? Daemyung had led the club very well until now. Thanks to his gentle guidance, the first year students managed to adapt to the club quickly. On days where Miso treated them harshly, Daemyung encouraged everyone after practice and eased the atmosphere so that they didn’t hold any grudges.

Whenever she watched him, Aram felt that Daemyung was a really good senior. When she first met him during her first year, she didn’t like him. She was thinking that he was just an oversized guy who had a shy personality, but after finding out about his actual personality, she felt like he was a reliable senior. That was why she congratulated Jiyeon and Daemyung when they started going out. He would never hurt Jiyeon after all.

Yet right now, such a reliable senior was saying that he wanted to step down from his position, so she was very confused. Why was he stepping down when he had no trouble guiding her and her crazy antics even when he was in his 2nd year? No matter how she thought about it, the only thing that changed was the addition of the 1st year students, so she wondered if some of the juniors were looking down on him.

She quietly looked at Daemyung. Bangjoo and Jiyeon seemed worried as well.

“It’s not a problem with the first year students. It’s my own problem.”

“Your own problem?”

“Hm, honestly speaking, I’m a bit tired recently. As you know, Dowook and Maru haven’t been able to come to the club recently, right? It’s probably going to stay that way in the future. I tried to do my best by myself, but it seems like I was just too greedy.”

Daemyung smiled awkwardly.

“Thanks to your help, I managed to get through the two busiest months, March and April, but once May starts and the national competition comes around, I don’t think I’ll be able to handle it.”

“Seonbae, you are preparing for college entrance exams, right?” Jiyeon asked.

After hearing that, Daemyung indeed looked considerably exhausted. When Aram thought about it, the other 3rd year students in the club were all busy with their own work and rarely showed up to club activities, yet Daemyung consistently came to the club and looked after the others.

‘It was always him who stayed behind until the end to clean up and turn the lights off too.’

Now that she looked back, all the trivial things were done by Daemyung. It was him who had everyone practice after talking with Miso, and it was him who came up with ideas for props. Maru helped out from time to time, but since he rarely showed up to practice in the first place, he didn’t contribute that much. Moreover, the first year students went to Daemyung with their questions since he treated them nicely and rarely went to Maru, whom they still felt distant to.

'Leaving aside Dowook-seonbae and his violent tendencies, Daemyung-seonbae really did do everything.'

Now that she looked back in retrospect at the things that she took for granted, she could see just how much effort Daemyung had put in to lead the club. Bangjoo and Jiyeon seemed to have realized something as well as they were both making bitter expressions.

"I don't plan to just push my burdens on to you. I'm still going to do what I have to do in the future, but I want you to succeed the role of the club president, Aram. We need a person who can handle the others even without me, and I think you, Aram, is the best fit for it. Maru has the same opinion as me in this regard. Dowook said he doesn't care who does it, but mentioned your name in a text. The 3rd year students are all thinking that you are the right person for the job."

"You aren't going to just not show up like the other seonbaes, right?" Aram said jokingly.

"If I did, I'm sure you guys would come and grab me."

Daemyung smiled faintly.

"Of course, I'm not forcing this on you. It's a request in the end."

"I'm good with things like that. Pestering everyone. The elementary school kids always freeze up when they see me at the dojo."

"Maru said that that's what's good about you."

"Then what is it that you see in me?"

"Your sense of responsibility."

"I don't have any of that, you know?"

"I think you do. You can do this. I feel like the others are relying on you a lot as well. I'm not saying that Bangjoo and Jiyeon are bad. If we had small numbers like before, I would instead have picked Bangjoo or Jiyeon. Bangjoo maintains a close relationship with the juniors, and Jiyeon is someone who looks after others a lot from behind, so they're well-suited to lead the club when there are not many people. However, there are more than 30 people now. If we assume that a similar number of people apply next year and that some of the current recruits quit next year, we will still have over thirty people. With more people, there's bound to be more conflict, and I felt like the new president needs to be able to maintain order at times like that."

"If it's like that, it's not like I can't accept...."

"Is it too hard after all?"

"Being hard doesn't really matter. If it's something I like, I'd do it even if it's hard. But, you know, it's just a bit of a pity. You were doing great until now."

"It's thanks to everyone being good kids and following my words."

"I tried handling some children in place of the master at the dojo, but they don't just follow someone because they're gentle. It's because you were doing well that they would rely on you and follow you."

Aram turned his head sideways.

“What about you two? Are you two fine with me doing it?”

Bangjoo and Jiyoong both nodded their heads.

“If you stop showing up to the club like the others just because you stepped down from being president, I’m going to find you and drag you here.”

“O-okay.”

“Fine. I’ll do it. Also since I’m doing it, you should understand that I’m going to do things my way.”

“Of course. But what are you going to do?”

“You probably don’t know, but groups have formed among the 1st years recently. Well, you can’t really stop groups from forming since there’s a lot of them, but there are some that slightly look down on others. I have my sight set on a few that got roles this time. I haven’t said anything until now, but I am going to interfere starting now.”

Hearing that, Daemyung just quietly nodded. He seemed to know something.

“Seonbae, don’t you have something to say?”

“For now, I’ll just listen to what you have to say first.”

“Hm, okay. Firstly, I can say with confidence that you are perceived very highly even among the 1st year students. You get along with them without getting angry, right? That’s why everyone likes you. The problem is Maru-seonbae.”

Aram thought about Maru’s face before continuing to speak.

“You know, some people have the tendency to either talk bad or suck up to people who seem to be doing better than them, right? It was fine when Maru-seonbae showed up to practice frequently, but recently, there are people that are starting to look down on Maru-seonbae. They only judge what’s shown on the surface since they don’t get to spend a lot of time with him. You know the things unique to girls right? Where they express their disdain for others without actually doing it directly. If I was in the same class as them, I would have grabbed them by the hair and just...!”

“Aram, calm down,” Jiyoong said as she grabbed her sleeves.

Aram sighed.

“I tried to talk to them nicely about it, but they said they didn’t do it. Even though it was as clear as day. Those devious bitches....”

“Aram, watch your mouth!”

Jiyoong looked at her with a sour expression. Aram smiled awkwardly. She promised one thing with Jiyoong and it was that she wouldn’t use bad words in front of her. Jiyoong said something about how girls shouldn’t use such words or something.

Aram started talking again.

“They acted ignorant and I didn’t have concrete evidence, so I just told Maru-seonbae about it, but Maru-seonbae just told me to let them be. When I asked why he just said that I shouldn’t be the one to be in that position. That’s why I let them be. Recently, though, I think they became more obedient since Maru-seonbae hasn’t been showing up at all.”

Aram sometimes couldn’t understand Maru’s actions. He could just give them a sharp scolding, but he didn’t do so and didn’t let her do it either.

“That problem does exist,” Daemyung said.

Aram twitched her eyebrows.

“You knew that?”

“I was with you every day, how could I not?”

“Then why didn’t you say anything?”

“Because I felt like it would be better not to do anything for the time being. In one way, that’s one of the reasons I’m giving the title of the president to you.”

Daemyung made a soft smile.

“I think it was at the end of March? When I started seeing signs of that. Especially after Maru started taking time off because of the film production club, bad opinions of him started popping up. Unlike the drama, the film production club is just another club that’s like us, right? They probably got the notion that he’s placing more importance on the film production club than the acting club. Of course, I know that most of them don’t think like that. A lot more people treated Maru like a senior even though he didn’t show up that much. That’s when I talked to Maru about that, and asked what he thought.”

“What did he say?”

“He said that the method is important.”

“What does that mean?”

“The fundamental problem is that Maru was negligent about the acting club. This is the undeniable truth. The first year students are different from you three. You know what kind of person Maru is since you got to spend a year with him. The first year students, on the other hand, only saw Maru for a month, no, even less if you actually calculate the time. What do you think when Maru misses practice?”

Aram replied without hesitation.

“Nothing. Maru-seonbae isn’t taking the day off to rest.”

“I think so too.”

“I always think that he has his reasons.”

Aram looked at Jiyeon and Bangjoo. Both of them were thinking the same thing as her.

“Exactly. You know Maru’s circumstances, so you understand him. That’s not the case with the first year students. They know nothing about him. At most, it’s that he shows up on TV. That’s why Maru, during

the beginning of the semester, mentioned that he doesn't plan to get the senior treatment in the club. You know how clear Maru is when it comes to drawing the line."

"He's not just clear, he's kinda merciless about it."

"Maru is thinking that it's natural for him to be hearing things like that since he is unable to do the things he has to do as a senior. However, he simultaneously knows that it would negatively impact the whole club if it continues."

"That's why he should have scolded them at that time. Even if he doesn't want to get the senior treatment, there's a minimum amount of courtesy towards other people in the club, isn't there? Take this as something coming from a former athlete, but I hate hierarchy becoming messy. I'm not going as far as to say that we should maintain order, but I think we should keep everyone in line."

"Yes, what we have to set straight, we have to set straight. It's just like how school rules exist for a reason - the club has its own rules. Since the acting club isn't something we made but received from our seniors, we should take care that it doesn't become a mess. That's why I'm going to give you the role of the president. This was what I was talking about with Maru in the hall earlier. Maru was talking about the method, and I was talking about the order."

"So me becoming the president comes first in this order?"

Daemyung nodded.

"Maru compared it to this: If a fresh employee insulted the president and the manager scolded him about that, that company would definitely not see a good end. Of course, I think that's taking it a little too far. Maru's serious when it comes to things like that, but he wasn't entirely wrong, so I thought about it. We will graduate and leave the school after this year anyway. The ones remaining behind will be you guys and the first year students. In such a situation, is it a good thing for a crack to appear between the first and second years? Maru and I don't think that's the case."

Aram's lips twitched.

"But once I become the president, I'm not going to let the backtalkers be, you know?"

"It doesn't matter if it's after you become the president."

"Why?"

"Because it's the club president who makes the mood of a club. When you interfere with the first year students while I'm still the president, they might start thinking 'who are you to say something when even the president isn't saying anything' or something like that. Though, it's a different story if you're the president."

"Some of them will start hating me, are you okay with that?"

"That's why you're the president. The ones scolded by you will probably go to Jiyeon and complain to her about it. I guess you're the dad and she's the mom in that sense."

Bangjoo, who had been staying still until now, asked what he was.

“The unemployed uncle who freeloads in their house. I feel like playing with the kids suits you the best.”

“No way, unemployed is a little....”

Bangjoo chuckled.

“Does Dowook-seonbae know about this as well?”

“Dowook is barely conscious at school because of his family matters. He’s not going to college as he is going to succeed the family business. Even when I try to talk to him about the club, he just says ‘I don’t care!’ in a loud voice.”

“That’s just like him.”

Aram sighed.

“Sheesh, Maru-seonbae makes things way too complicated. We should’ve just scolded them at once. Sometimes, I feel like he’s some stuck-up geezer.”

“Well, his style is to do everything meticulously.”

“There’s you too. You never said a word to us.”

“Sorry, I didn’t want to make you guys worry.”

“That’s the problem. You are tired because you are trying to do everything by yourself. Fine! I’ll take that president role. Unlike you though, I’m going to be strict from the beginning. You can’t say anything about that, okay?”

“I will absolutely not say anything about it.”

Aram nodded.

“Then that’s that, right? Let’s go up. We’ve been talking for more than 10 minutes. They must be waiting,” she said as she looked at the time.

## **Chapter 579**

“So when are we telling the others about it?”

“I’d like it to be before the competition.”

“Since we’re at it, let’s just do it today. Bring it up after practice, seonbae. I don’t like delaying things.”

“Okay, let’s do that.”

Daemyung thought that it was just like Aram to think that way. She did not hesitate with her actions once she decided on something. Once Aram became the president, the acting club would probably become more cheerful. He looked forward to seeing how the acting club would change after this.

“Seonbae, did you have a hard time?”

Daemyung smiled awkwardly when he heard the soft voice from beside him. Jiyeon was looking at him with a worried face.

“It’s not like there’s a big problem. I’m just a bit tired so there’s no need to worry about me.”

“...In the future, tell me about it, even if it’s just once in a while. There’s nothing I can do, but I can listen to you. Like you were to me, I want to be of help to you.”

“O-okay, I’ll consult you from time to time.”

He looked at Jiyoong, who smiled back at him.

“Maybe I should get a boyfriend too.”

“Seonbae, aren’t you being too cruel in front of the singles here?”

Aram and Bangjoo commented as they walked up the stairs. Daemyung immediately turned his face forward. Although he was going out with Jiyoong, he didn’t know how to react whenever he heard something like that. He looked away in awkwardness before looking at Jiyoong. She was making a pouty face for some reason.

After looking at the grinning juniors, he closed his mouth and reached out behind him to grab Jiyoong’s hand. Jiyoong flinched and curled her shoulders upwards a little before making a smile. He grabbed her hand tightly before loosening his hand. Jiyoong’s expression was calm unlike before.

‘I feel like I just overcame a big hurdle.’

He grabbed her hand out of instinct, and it seemed to be the right answer. Had he pretended not to know anything, he would probably have received a gaze filled with disappointment. He had grown so he felt proud about it.

When they went up to the 5th floor, Daemyung saw the door to the hall closing. They usually left it open during breaks for ventilation, but it seemed that the juniors closed it.

“Maybe they’re starting to practice?”

Aram twitched her eyebrows and pulled the door open.

“What are you doing?” Aram asked after looking inside.

Daemyung also walked inside and looked inside the hall. The first year students were all looking in one direction. Daemyung then moved his gaze to the right end of the hall. Maru and Chihwan were standing on top of a wooden platform raised 10cm above the marble floor. The barbells and dumbbells were moved to one side.

“Seonbae-nim is here.”

“Do we continue?”

The juniors murmured amongst themselves. Daemyung walked up to Maru for now.

“What’s happening?” he asked as he glanced at Maru and Chihwan.

The script in Maru’s hand was a little odd. Did Chihwan ask him to look at his acting or something?

“You’re just in time. Daemyung, before we resume practice, can we do a short act?”

“Act? You mean from the play?”

“Yeah.”

Maru flapped the script in his hand.

“If you’re trying to teach the others, it’s more than welcome. What made you want to do this though? I thought you weren’t going to act as much as possible.”

“Why don’t you ask that proud-looking junior over there? He’s a pain in the butt.”

Maru sighed.

“Chihwan, what’s happening?”

“An acting battle.”

“Wh-what? What battle?”

“Acting battle!”

That term reverberated in Daemyung’s ears. It felt like his brain had shut down. After looking at him in a daze for a while, he turned around to look at Maru.

“What does he mean by that?”

“It’s a little complicated to explain so just give us scores after you watch. We’re going to act the same scene, so you guys should help out as well,” Maru said as he looked at the 2nd year students.

Daemyung brought a chair and sat in front of the platform, despite still being confused. Meanwhile, Aram had the first year students sit near the platform as well.

“Daemyung-seonbae, I can start now, right?”

Chihwan looked excited. Daemyung permitted him for now. He still couldn’t get a grasp on the situation, but from how Maru was staying still, it seemed that he had his plans.

‘But an acting battle all of a sudden?’

Daemyung calmed down his heart and grabbed the script. He didn’t know the circumstances, but it was pretty clear that the two were going to act the same character.

‘Now that I think about it, Maru has never shown off his proper skills, huh.’

Maru had drawn the line and said that he would just be a staff member this year. Even after they finalized the characters and started practicing, Maru had never shown off his script acting. He did demonstrate some of the technical elements like pronunciation and voicing, but he never showed anything that combined everything.

Perhaps this was a good thing. Seeing Maru’s stage acting would probably be a fresh shock for the juniors. Watching an actor on a TV screen was qualitatively different from seeing the acting firsthand. Even a CD recorded with the greatest recording equipment couldn’t be compared to listening to a live



orchestra. Acting was the same. Unlike watching a tiny bit that was edited to go on TV, an actor's real performance could only be seen in whole from up close.

Daemyung told the juniors to come as close as possible.

"If there's not enough space, you can sit on the platform as well. Maru, is that okay?"

"It's fine even if they come on stage."

Daemyung told the first year students who had important roles in the play to go up on the stage and watch Maru from up close.

"...Isn't that too close?" Chihwan asked as he looked at the others who were less than 10cm away from him.

They were within an arm's reach.

"It doesn't matter who's there."

"That's true, but.... A-alright. You and I are under the same conditions. But seonbae, you know what the saying 'a man's word is heavier than gold' right?"

"Heavier than gold or whatever, do as you wish."

"Fine."

It seemed that there was some sort of agreement between those two.

'It doesn't matter what kind of agreement those two came to. It's fine as long as he can show others good acting.'

Daemyung took out his pen. He would probably find out more about Chihwan through this stage. It would help him with his growth if he wrote down his bad habits and told him later.

'There's probably nothing to write about Maru anyway.'

Maru would definitely show good acting. Maru was always serious when it came to the stage. He wasn't someone who would accept showing a 'practice' that he didn't prepare for fully instead of a 'performance'. While he never participated in acting practice, Maru probably had a better understanding of the characters than anyone here.

'Maru's script. There's a lot of signs that it's been written on.'

Daemyung looked closely at the script in Maru's right hand. The cover was tattered and from what he could glimpse of the inside, it was filled with pen writings. Although he did not take up a role, he probably analyzed and researched the script. That was because it would allow him to study which would help him improve his acting. Perhaps he might have delved into it thinking that he might be able to give a solution to the juniors when they were stuck on something.

Maru volunteered to be an outsider during his first year, but didn't he care about the harmony of the acting club above everyone else?

Maru couldn't be more disinterested in the things that weren't related to him, but when it concerned the people around him, he looked after them to the point that it could be described as 'meticulous'.

'Though, he's so clear cut when it comes to setting his priorities straight.'

Daemyung sometimes wondered to himself when Maru was with his girlfriend. Other than his family, was there anything or anyone that had as much value to Maru as her? Despite the fact that it was just a romance between students, Daemyung had the feeling that Maru was willing to give up anything for her. Even if it was something very important.

It sometimes gave him the chills.

It made him feel that perhaps real love was not as beautiful as people made it out to be. As ironic as that might be, looking at Maru made him think that. He couldn't explain exactly why he had such an impression, but it sometimes made him uneasy when looking at the couple.

'I must be mistaken, right?'

Daemyung shook off his thoughts and looked at the makeshift stage.

Chihwan seemed to have finished his preparations as he was calming down his breathing.

"It won't be easy, you know?" he said in a small voice as he spun around his pen.

This would be completely different from practice. The colleagues who were practicing with him had now become the audience.

Audience, was there a word that made an actor experience such excitement and worry as that word? Chihwan had nearly non-existent stage experience. He might be able to gain confidence while practicing, but acting in front of an audience was something completely different.

"Phew, I'm nervous."

His shoulders were stiff and the distance between his legs was awkward. His gaze was at a loss as well. He was pretending to be okay, but his nervousness was clear for Daemyung to see. As for Maru....

'If he too is excited, Chihwan is a bit pitiful....'

It was clear that he was excited. Not the agitated kind that came from unease, but a sense of heightening that came from a situation where he had full control. He was reminded of Maru's acting which he saw from behind the side curtains when he was in first year. Maru, who went up to the stage and talked to the audience, ended up devouring everything on stage like a predator who found fresh meat.

Daemyung remembered that moment. The curious feeling where he could feel Maru's emotions and a sense of tension that was qualitatively different circulating inside his body. When he stood on the same stage as Maru, he felt that every one of his cells was reacting to Maru's actions. Even when he didn't have any confidence in his acting usually, he was filled with confidence when he was next to Maru.

A power that led other people forward.

Daemyung believed that the Maru on stage had such power.

"If Maru-seonbae was feeling bored, he should have done it with us. Ah, that looks fun," Aram said next to him.

Bangjoo and Jiyeon were all looking excited as they looked at the stage that Maru was on.

"Before we start, I hope you can be fair in your judgment. The first years shouldn't give me a good score just because we're friends, and you shouldn't take Maru-seonbae's side, seonbae-nims. It's a competition of pure acting after all."

"Don't worry about that. We'll clearly see who's better once we get a look," Daemyung said.

Acting was the act of giving a form to something abstract. That was why there couldn't be a real 'scoreboard'. However, for some curious reason, it was possible to clearly distinguish acting that people liked and disliked. That was why acting was fun. It was as if there was an answer that existed since they were born. Good acting was good acting to anyone's eyes. Conversely, awkward acting made even the audience feel embarrassed.

"Fine. I'll go first. I'm a bit nervous, but I can do it. I practiced more than Maru-seonbae when it comes to this role at least."

"Do everything you can."

"I like Maru-seonbae, but I will win this time. It's a fair battle between two men."

"I wish you luck."

Maru sat on the ground. He rested his chin on his hands and looked at Chihwan. Chihwan licked his lips before slapping his own cheeks.

"You can begin as soon as you're ready," Daemyung said to the two people.

Although they were consuming practice time, an event like this was perfectly fine. Daemyung hoped the first year students would show more interest in acting through this opportunity.

'Oh, it's different from my acting'. Once the juniors started thinking that, they would definitely start thinking about what better acting is, and that question, which there was no answer to, will make them grow.

Was Chihwan able to receive the gazes of the audience around him without letting them affect him? If he was not, he wouldn't be able to start. A stage was where an actor was evaluated. Chihwan would be able to show a decent act if he didn't get nervous and just showed what he practiced, but as long as this wasn't a practice but a place for evaluation, his attitude when acting would be different, and that difference would show up in his acting.

Whether that difference would produce a good result or a bad one, he was about to find out.

"I'll start after drinking some water."

Chihwan stepped down from the stage for a moment.

Daemyung felt like he could see the results already.

## Chapter 580

Shit, shit, shit - that word kept reverberating in his head. Why was this happening? His heart was racing without his consent. It was good that it was pumping out blood, but it was clearly overdoing it. He could feel his blood wildly circulating around his body. Thunderous noises echoed inside his body. He could hear loud thumping noises as though his heart was beating right next to his eardrums.

He emptied a whole 500ml bottle of water to suppress his nervousness, but his mouth became dryer instead. Did he even drink any at all? Chihwan looked at the empty water bottle in his hands in vexation. Was there only half of it left?

“Hey, when are you going to start?”

“Let’s get started already.”

His colleagues jokingly commented. Although they were just acting like usual, their words made him even more chaotic today. Their words were stretched out like an audio clip from a stretched videotape. After that, the noise slowly died down. The voices of his friends became smaller and conversely, the noise of his heart became louder to the point that he thought it was about to jump out of his mouth.

Chihwan bit on the flesh inside his cheeks and went back to the platform. The hall he thought he had gotten used to felt so unfamiliar as though this was the first time he came here. The reason was probably those ‘eyes’. Dozens of pupils looked right at him; the biological organs mixed with black and brown felt like they were sticking all over his body. He was suddenly reminded of when he saw a cockroach at home while he was alone. He was well aware that the small insect wasn’t a big threat to him, but when the glossy back shell twitched, it made him startled nonetheless. He felt sorry towards his seniors and colleagues, but he felt like he was standing amongst dozens of cockroaches right now while being barefoot.

‘It wasn’t like this before.’

When he took the club entry audition as well as the film production club’s audition, he was shaking as well, but he didn’t feel ‘afraid’. He knew that everyone was human and like him, just students, so he felt ‘embarrassed’ at best, but he never felt like he was afraid or wanted to run away. If he disliked standing in front of people, he would’ve never opted to enter the acting club in the first place.

‘Then why?’

Fear? That wasn’t the right word. Disgust. The emotion he felt at the center of dozens of gazes was something unfamiliar and horrific. Nothing had changed from the times he was practicing, so what was making this so hard? He looked at the faces of his friends. They weren’t monsters with disgusting faces, nor did they provoke any kind of negative emotions in him. They were just colleagues he liked. However, why was it that when he looked at his colleagues, who had taken a step back and became the audience, his stomach started to ache and his vision became dark?

Let’s try standing for now - Chihwan stood at the center of the stage while trying his best not to be conscious of those gazes. Maru stepped back.

Various gym equipment, such as dumbbells, barbells, and benches were taking up one corner, so the platform should have seemed small, yet it looked endlessly wide today. It was as though space itself had

some sort of life energy and expanded itself causing Maru to look so distant. However, regardless of the wideness of the stage, the distance between him and the audience looked strangely close no matter where he was. Was there a need to watch from up close like this? - he had this question.

Chihwan looked down at his palms. They were wet with sweat. He wiped his hands on his pants and took a deep breath. He tried fooling himself to think that this nervousness was only temporary, and that he would soon adapt to it once he started speaking. He closed his eyes and opened them again.

The gazes had become even closer to him. Their pupils were even clearer to his eyes. They were chatting amongst themselves, and it ticked him off so much. Shut up - he wanted to say.

It was all messy. The noise was bad enough that he couldn't concentrate. His heart was messing up his focus from the inside, while the chatter from the others was disturbing his heart even more. At that moment, Chihwan realized that he had forgotten his line. The lines that filled his mind until just 10 seconds ago had disappeared in the blink of an eye. He felt as though his mind was refusing to think and was just meaninglessly processing the information gotten from his eyes. I must remember - he tried to get himself together, but his blank mind did not give him his lines.

"Aren't you going to start?"

Aram's voice could be heard.

"I am. I am going to do it."

"It's been a minute already. If we need to wait, we can always see Maru-seonbae's acting first."

"No! I can do it."

He quickly opened the script he was holding in his left hand and checked the lines. The moment he flipped over the page and found the first line, nay, the colon after the name of the character that he was playing, he suddenly remembered all the lines afterwards. He didn't know why he forgot such a simple line. He sighed in relief and looked forward again.

'No way.'

Was there a problem with his brain or something? The moment he became conscious of the gazes again, the lines he remembered literally 0.5 seconds ago with confidence disappeared from his mind again. He hurriedly opened the script again. He chased the lines with his eyes and memorized them. He remembered all the lines again. He could probably sing them as well.

"Are you going to do it while looking at the script?"

One of his colleagues spoke out. Chihwan said 'no way' and closed the script with confidence. A black curtain enveloped his mind again. He felt ashamed. He even felt relieved that this wasn't an actual stage.

'I can't do it.'

He realized just how pathetic he was. He thought that he had done plenty of practice over the past two weeks after his role was decided. Even with tests, he would score above 80 points if he studied the night

before, but he had practiced the lines for two weeks, so he felt that it would be stupid to not be able to do them.

Yet, he was the stupid one.

He realized that gazes were heavy. He felt firsthand the dangers of going on stage. In his current state, even if he read the lines out loud while looking at the script, his voice would probably be shaky.

He was about to apologize and stop, when,

“Mr. Hwang? There’s no man with that name here. I don’t dare lie to you, officer. Dangerous people, no miscreants like independence, I stop them from coming to this area in the first place.”

Maru read the line without any fluctuations in his voice.

“If you can’t remember your lines, say them out loud. If you really have practiced properly, your body will take over once you start. That is, ‘if’ you have practiced to the point that your body remembers it.”

“Maru-seonbae, I’ll just....”

“Do it. Try reading them out loud.”

“I’m sorry. I can’t do it.”

“So you did it so many times that you know whether you can or not before you even try? I still don’t know until I try, you know?”

Chihwan looked into Maru’s eyes. He wasn’t speaking in a scolding voice. He was talking as though he was stating the obvious.

Chihwan clenched his teeth until his teeth started aching before saying his lines out loud. He just said his first line, but his lips and tongue had followed up by themselves. His mind was still dark, but his tongue and vocal cords were saying the right words as though they knew what they were supposed to do.

When he finished one line, Chihwan felt that something had changed. It was the gazes. The gazes that looked at him no longer disgusted him anymore. Even though all he did was finish just one line, his heart became calm. The nervousness he felt until now seemed like a lie and his body relaxed. He felt light as though he had lost some weight, and the endlessly wide stage became narrow again.

I can do it - an endless stream of confidence filled the parts where nervousness left. His mind started working. He could remember all the lines clearly as though he had scanned them into his brain. He could practically read the lines off the script in his head.

“Seonbae-nim.”

“What?”

“C-can I do it now?”

“We never stopped you. Take a deep breath like you usually do.”

He breathed in deeply just like Maru said.

“Breathe out lightly.”

He breathed out with the thought that he was leaving half of his breath inside his lungs.

“Your lines?”

“They’re perfect.”

“Then I guess there’s no problem.”

“Watch me. I’m going to do really well.”

“Just start already.”

Chihwan stomped one foot and stood at the center of the stage.

\* \* \*

“He’s the type to do great in front of other people,” Daemyung said after watching Chihwan’s performance.

He seemed nervous at first, but the atmosphere around him changed after Maru’s short advice. Chihwan did well to express ‘Mr. Baek’ who secretly helped out the independence fighters. During practice, his character felt lacking since his unique cheerfulness kept showing in his performance, but he showed a heavy act that made the audience feel just how dire the situation the character was in.

“He has power,” Bangjoo said.

That was a really suitable expression. Chihwan had a power that ruled over the stage. Thanks to his loud voice, his lines were refreshing and clear. On stage, pronunciation and voicing were the two most important things. As acting was a way of transferring information to others, a solid foundation gave a sense of depth to acting.

“Yeah! Wasn’t I great just now?”

“Ahn Chihwan, not half-bad, eh?”

“You were much better than during practice.”

“You were good!”

His colleagues applauded him. Even they, who had seen Chihwan’s acting before this, acknowledged his performance. Chihwan definitely shone on stage.

Daemyung put down his pen. He originally picked the pen up thinking that he should write down some things that he should point out, but he really didn’t have much to write. Chihwan’s acting just now was ideal and it felt like Chihwan had shown everything he could. The word ‘perfect’ could be carefully attached to him here.

“It’s your turn now, seonbae-nim,” Chihwan said.

Maru nodded and stood at the center of the stage.

Daemyung lifted his head and looked at the faces of his juniors. They seemed to be deeply impressed by Chihwan, who had unexpectedly put on a good performance. Moreover, they were personally much closer to Chihwan than Maru, so it was likely that they might give him a higher score. Some of them might even think that they should give Chihwan a higher score purely to one-up the seniors.

Daemyung sighed.

'It's always like that.'

Without Maru's advice, Chihwan wouldn't have been able to do anything. If Maru acted after that, he would have finished things while propping up his pride as a senior and put an end to things there.

Yet he did not. Maru probably wouldn't care even if he was ridiculed by the others here. In fact, he might want that instead. After all, that would result in the first year students gaining more confidence and Chihwan improving further.

Maru was probably thinking that being ridiculed was just temporary.

"I'm starting."

Daemyung nodded and crouched down to pick up his water bottle.

Chihwan had put on a good performance and Maru was next. Since he had achieved what he wanted to do, he would probably come down after putting on a decent show. Although it was only for two weeks, Chihwan had practiced properly. On top of that, he was in his best condition when he acted. Even if it was Maru, it would be difficult for him to show a better stage than Chihwan since he had never actually practiced.

He thought as such and sat back up again when he saw the faces of his juniors, who looked very serious. They seemed like they were faced with a serious problem. Daemyung hurriedly looked at the stage.

'Ah.'

He subconsciously clenched the water bottle tightly. The plastic bottle made a loud noise as it crumpled. However, no one reacted to that.

All eyes were on Maru.

"Mr. Hwang? There's no man with that name here. I don't dare lie to you, officer. Dangerous people, no, miscreants like independence, I stop them from coming to this area in the first place."

A man with an insinuating voice was rubbing his hands as he spoke. His voice was thin, and his waist was bent. He looked like he was willing to give the patrolling officer everything. The man who bowed his head towards an invisible Japanese police officer looked really pathetic.

"My good sir, I will report to you as soon as I find them. No, no, I will capture them with this body and soul of mine that I dedicated to His Imperial Highness and drag them to you. Why, yes, of course."

The man who was looking ahead of him with a fishy smile slowly looked around him. His clasped hands twitched. His chin shook slightly and his healthy chin could be glimpsed at. Like a rat living with a cat, he walked around the stage while looking around everywhere.



It was tense. Daemyung wetted his dry lips with water again. The others also picked up their water bottles and drank.

“My word, my word, my word. I must be going crazy for sure.”

The man who was scurrying around the stage looked forward. His fear-stricken eyes could be seen by the audience. No one made any noise. Even Daemyung just watched the stage in a daze.

The moment his gaze intertwined with the actor's, Daemyung felt the distance between him and the stage shrinking rapidly. It felt like Maru was standing right next to him. The nervousness that was contained in his every breath and action dissolved into his own body without filtering. Daemyung looked for his water bottle again, but sadly, it was empty.

“I find this horrific! I despise these days where I can be killed any day.”

He looked desperate. The man who rolled his back like a hunchback and opened his eyes in an afraid manner, didn't have any strength at all.

Chihwan's acting of this part could be called reverent. He was grandiose and heroic. The man acted out by Chihwan was someone who could calmly accept death for the sake of independence. He felt like he would accept his fate while saying his lines in a calm manner. He had power, and the stage had vitality.

On the other hand, Maru was, well, unsightly. The man on the stage was pathetic, ugly, and sometimes even disgusting. Heroic traits were all but missing. Despite that, the man still fought. Bowing to the Japanese authority was his battle, and selling his smile to the Japanese was his way of fighting. He always desperately survived, and helped out the independence fighters despite extreme fear. Even while helping, he despised the independence fighters. He cursed himself for not being able to live with the status quo. He resented himself for not being able to become a Japanese citizen.

“I may die without seeing independence, but I have faith; I have faith that there will be rest after this.”

When Chihwan said those words, Daemyung was reminded of the independence. He thought that it was the bright death of a hero who had brilliantly fooled the Japanese authorities.

And now, Daemyung was met with another scene where the man met his death that he so looked forward to. To him, independence might have been a cloud in the sky. It was just the death of a small, weak civilian man who could smile due to the fact that he no longer had to be afraid of the Japanese authorities.

The act ended.

Maru dusted off his pants as though nothing had happened and stepped down from the stage.

There was only one thing that Daemyung could do.

The simplest reason why mankind was given two hands: that is, to applaud.