

## Once Again 641

### Chapter 641

The appointed place was not the TV station. It was an acting school located on Rodeo Street of Apgujeong-dong, Seoul. Maru checked the address he got through text once again, before pushing the glass doors of the building. He headed towards the 3rd floor through the stairs next to the noodle restaurant on the 1st floor. He opened the door that said 'emergency staircase' and went inside. It seemed that this wasn't used as there was an elevator in the building. On the walls of the 3rd floor that were painted black were three stripes of red, yellow, and blue, curling around like waves. When he followed the complex lines, he saw banners lined up in front of the entrance. Exceptional teachers, custom-fitted entrance exam acting, the acting school of your dreams. Reading the promotions, he walked past the automatic door. Behind the semi-circular desk in front of the entrance was a lady wearing a black suit, who looked like she might as well be a model with her beautiful body figure. On the chairs lined up next to the walls were people of both genders seeming to be muttering something. He instantly realized that they were here for an audition.

"What's the reason for your visit?"

"I came here after hearing that there's an audition."

"Oh, I see. What is your name?"

"I'm Han Maru."

"Han Maru."

The lady repeated the name, emphasizing each character, as she typed on the keyboard. The name 'Han Maru' appeared briefly on the monitor on top of the desk before disappearing.

"You're on the list. Please sit down here and wait for a while. We'll call you when it's your turn."

Maru joined the line of people waiting in line with nervous faces. As there was no spare chair, he just leaned against the wall. For a usual audition, he would be busy preparing a character or some lines that were provided to him beforehand, but there was nothing to prepare for today's audition. A healthy body - that was all the requirements. What kind of character they wanted, what kind of aspects they were looking for in actors - there was no information about those at all. The people who were muttering might actually be chanting incantations. Perhaps something along the lines of 'don't make me do something weird'.

As for the age group, they all seemed to be around the same age. Most of them seemed to be over 20, but there were some that looked younger. There were also about two or three people wearing school uniforms. From this, it looked like they didn't want a middle-aged man as the character. A student, then?

The door to the right at the end of the corridor opened and a woman with long hair walked out. She crossed the corridor while not hiding her dissatisfied face before leaving the acting school. The woman at the desk called out to her, but she didn't even turn around. Just what happened inside that made her so angry? The shockwave left behind by that woman was fully absorbed by the people who were waiting. Maru felt that the mutterings around him became louder. Some people couldn't keep sitting

and stood up before walking around. The lobby of the acting school, which couldn't be said to be small, looked quite crowded. Maru took a seat for himself. As he got older, he felt much closer to the floor. It would be optimal if he could lie down, but he couldn't do that, so he went with the next best option of sitting down.

The anxiety left behind by that long-haired woman continued until the woman at the desk called out the next audition participant. A man who was waiting abruptly stood up before walking to the end of the corridor. For a moment, the mutters ended. Amidst the silence, everyone paid attention to the man opening the door. A girl wearing a school uniform leaned against the wall. It seemed that she wanted to see inside the audition room.

"You can't see inside," said the woman at the desk.

Maru watched the people, who looked like they were caught up in a torrent before closing his eyes. He didn't feel nervous at all. When the woman with long hair rushed out, he only watched with interest and did not think about the meaning of her actions. Not being swept up by the atmosphere was quite helpful at times like these. Since he had the time, he tried talking to the guy inside him. Uhm, hey, hello? Mr. Masked man - his inner mind was filled with the voice that sought him out, but the man did not appear. The dim stage did not appear either. Would it be hard to experience such a happening again like how the masked man said? - that that time was a special case? That guy was a man he didn't like very much, but Maru didn't despise him. If possible, he wanted to have a long conversation with him. Maru wanted to ask what he meant by sharing his memories, why he lived in his body, and ultimately, who he was. There were a lot of things he wanted to ask, but the person to ask the questions to, had hidden himself deep inside the utter silence.

After about ten minutes had passed, the door opened again before the man that went in before came out. He looked angry as well. Just what was happening inside that made all the participants angry? Ganghwan's last words, 'please come back alive', suddenly felt like they had more meaning. Ganghwan seemed to be telling him: You thought I was joking, didn't you?

"Miss Lee Yeji."

Two out of two people left the acting school looking angry. The woman who was supposed to enter the batter's box next heavily swallowed a breath as though she was swallowing a bitter pill before she walked towards the audition room. The door closed and the rest of the applicants were looking at the audition room with uneasy eyes. Maru also looked at the door before looking away. Unless he was capable of seeing through walls, there was no way for him to see what was going on inside. Instead, he decided to look at what he could see. The man next to him had earbuds on while sitting with his legs crossed. From the way he nodded rhythmically with his eyes closed, he looked like he had leisure. The woman opposite him was showing her unease without hiding it. She even glared at the woman at the help desk from time to time. Just what the hell is up with this audition? - she seemed to be saying with her eyes.

Among the dozen or so people, half of them were staring at the door nervously. The ones that kept their calm had formed their own realm and were absorbed in their own things. There was the man next to him, who was absorbed in music, there were some that looked at the brochure that introduced this acting school, and there were some who were reading books. Reminding himself of Ganghwan's words

that observing people was the foundation of acting, he started getting some samples. Just then, a strange movement caught his eyes. The woman at the front desk was moving her hand busily. It wasn't strange that she was typing since she was working here, but the timing she chose to type was quite strange.

Maru pretended to read a brochure as he watched the woman at the desk. He might be wrong, so he had to check one more time. The woman moved. She didn't turn her head around, she just moved her eyes. Her target was the man who was reading a script with a peaceful face. The woman scanned the man for several seconds before looking at the monitor in front of her and typing. She also looked at the man with the earbuds on and typed something.

Observing? Observing what? Her eyes moved again. This time, she looked at the girl wearing a school uniform. It was the same girl who was looking at the audition room nervously. For a brief moment, the woman at the desk clicked her tongue. Maru looked at the corner of her lips rolling upwards, the distance between her eyebrows shrinking, and her head itself shaking from side to side. Negative emotions appeared on her face briefly before disappearing. When they disappeared, she typed on her keyboard. It was clear that she was observing and recording.

Maru turned his eyes to the brochure. Was it a personal hobby of hers? There was that possibility. Just like how people of both genders gave scores to the members of the opposite sex that they come across on the street, she might also be evaluating the applicants because she was bored. I like someone's face, that person looks hopeless, or that person over there is shaking too much - things like that. Thinking about such things, he raised his eyes. Her pupils were directly in line of his sight. Beneath the eyelashes that were rolled upwards, the pupils that moved from side to side stopped in the middle. Maru realized that she was looking at him. When meeting eyes with a stranger, it wouldn't usually last more than 2 seconds. Most of the time, people would look away as though they had done something wrong. There should be about two likely possibilities when people keep looking at someone else without turning away. Either, the pride of the alpha male had been activated, or they found a member of the opposite sex they really liked to the point that they forgot about the shame.

The woman did not belong to either of those. She wasn't looking for a fight, nor was it an expression of like. She looked like she was looking at an animal in a zoo. They were clearly the eyes of an observer. She did not look away. She kept looking at him without a change in her expression. Maru also did not avoid her eyes. He wanted to find out why she was observing them. If it was a hobby, she would have turned her eyes away the moment their eyes met. That was the normal reaction. This woman was clearly not normal, and Maru wanted to know why. What are you doing over there?

The woman's eyes did not even budge. Instead, another part of her moved. Her hands were placed on the keyboard. Tap, tap. The sound of typing could be heard. A moment later, the woman who entered the audition room came back out again. Like the two before her, she also looked angry. The moment she left the acting school without even turning around, the woman at the desk spoke.

"Mr. Han Maru."

That was his signal to go in. Maru could feel other people's gazes. Why - they seemed to be asking. They seemed to want to know the reason why a participant who came later than them was being called first. The people looked for an answer by looking at the woman at the front desk. The woman at the desk just

smiled. She didn't seem to have any intentions of answering. Maru put down the brochure he was holding on the chair before walking towards the audition room. Since an audition was also a form of an interview, it would normally operate on a predetermined schedule. The fact that they did not hand out number tags meant that the order of the audition was based on a first come, first served basis, so why did the order suddenly change? He would probably find out once he met the producer who should be waiting in the audition room.

He took in a short breath before opening the door. In the middle of the room that looked like it was about 30 square meters big was a plastic chair. It was one of those that were commonly found outside convenience stores. In front of that was a table, and on top of that was a 30-inch monitor and a camera pointing towards the chair. It was an ordinary audition room, but the most important thing was missing.

People. There was no one in the audition room for him to show his acting too. Were they on a bathroom break or something? Maru soon realized that it wasn't that. The only door that led into this room was the door he just entered through. This meant that there was no one from the beginning. He first sat down on the chair. As soon as he sat down the monitor turned on.

-You passed the 1st audition. You have to rest there for exactly 8 minutes before leaving. When you leave, please leave without saying anything with the most angry face you can make. The 2nd audition venue will be notified immediately, so please rest in a nearby café. If you talk to any other applicant when you leave, you will fail immediately. Please bear this in mind.

After that line came up, the promotion ad for the acting school started playing. Maru watched the ad in a daze. After seven minutes, the video ended. As instructed, Maru rushed out the door and walked towards the exit with his lips sealed. He did not forget to glare at the woman at the front desk on his way out. The woman winked at him with a smile.

## **Chapter 642**

The franchise café in front of the acting school was filled with people who were studying. The seats by the glass wall were taken by people with laptops, while the tables inside were taken up by study groups.

"One latte please."

While he admired the sliced cakes in the display case, the coffee came out. He picked up the paper cup from which he could feel the heat before sitting on one of the sofa seats in the middle. It seemed that this seat was avoided because many people passed by. He took a sip of the hot coffee under the air conditioner. His mouth was warm, and his body was cool. Was there a luxury better than this? He looked at the girl dozing off on the table next to him and thought back to the audition he had just taken. He passed the first round. He didn't know what the audition was for, but it seemed clear that the woman at the front desk had something to do with it. Was she a person related to the audition? Or was she doing this work because she was asked to by someone? As he was thinking, his phone vibrated. He got a text from an unknown number.

-Please eat lunch and return to the acting school by 2 p.m. The 2nd interview will be held.

Interview - that was a word that smelled like neckties. When he checked the time, he saw that it was 11:40. He lay back against the sofa before drinking his coffee. He had a lot of spare time to the point that it would bore him out.

“Welcome to Real Coffee.”

After hearing the employee’s voice, Maru turned his head around. The one that entered was the woman he saw in the lobby of the acting school. She was the one who read the brochure while calmly leaning against the wall. They met eyes. He nodded slightly. The woman also greeted him with her eyes. From the way she came here, it was likely that she passed the 1st round as well. After all, the instruction to wait in a nearby café should have led most people here. The woman ordered a coffee and sat by the glass wall. As there was no need to go beyond a simple greeting, Maru stayed seated and just sipped on the coffee. Another 10 minutes later, a student wearing a school uniform entered. He was the only one who was reading a book among the applicants who were wearing school uniforms. The rest of them stared at the audition room with curiosity and nervousness.

Just like the woman, he met eyes with the boy. As he sat on the sofa located in the middle of the store and was in the direct line of sight with the entrance, he met eyes with all the people who entered. The boy acted like he knew him. He smiled brightly before becoming awkward and just nodding. Maru also just greeted him with a nod. The boy looked around the coffee shop after getting his coffee before going to the 2nd floor. From the look of things, it seemed that all the applicants that passed would come to this café. Maru took his time drinking the coffee. Meanwhile, three more people he had come across in the lobby came to the café.

It was 12:30. It was about time he got his lunch. Maru threw the empty paper cup in the trash before leaving the café. The common point among the ones who came to this café was that they did not mind the audition room wrapped in mystery and waited calmly. Maru also belonged to that criteria. This meant that the ones that came to this café very likely had passed the first audition. When he left the café in search of a restaurant, the door opened and someone came out behind him. It was another applicant for the audition. Just as they became conscious of each other and smiled awkwardly, Maru nodded before turning around. It was much better to look for a place to eat instead of being here.

He saw a ugeoji gukbap restaurant about two blocks away from the café. There was another ugeoji gukbap restaurant right across it. They weren’t restaurants that belonged to the same brand. Maru thought about common sense as he looked at the restaurants placed right across each other, but it wasn’t something he should be concerned about as a consumer. Regardless of the place, it would be good as long as it was cheap and tasty. He looked inside the restaurant with a clean interior. He saw young men and women in pairs. He tried sniffing. The smell that came out of the ventilation hole was rather clean. It looked like a decent restaurant, but it wasn’t the smell that Maru was looking for. Just as he turned around to go to the other gukbap restaurant, a group of people standing near him entered his eyes. They were the group of applicants for the audition. Awkwardness exuded from them even from afar. It seemed that they grouped up and followed him since it wasn’t like they had a destination in mind. The one at the front was the woman who came to the café first. The woman with sharp eyes sighed softly before taking a step forward.

“Hello? We aren’t kids and it’s not like it’s necessary for us to get close, so let’s not stand here awkwardly like this. It’s a waste of time. Let’s get something to eat for now. I think this place looks okay.”

The woman pointed at the ugeoji gukbap restaurant. It was the place where the young people gathered. The applicants looked inside the restaurant and nodded before going inside. After the small girl at the very end entered as well, the woman who took the lead held the door open.

“Come quickly,” she said.

Maru shook his head.

“I don’t think that place fits my tastes.”

“What?”

“You can eat by yourselves. If there’s something you want to talk about, we can do it after the meal.”

“No, but, we should eat together.”

“I’ll try going to that place first. If I don’t think it’s good, I’ll come back.”

He tried going to the gukbap restaurant across the street. The appearance was just as clean as the other one, but the restaurant was filled with middle-aged men wearing work outfits. The man who had put sunglasses in his chest pocket seemed to be a taxi driver. That was a combination he didn’t even need to hesitate about. He opened the door and poked his head inside. A heavy yet savory smell filled the restaurant.

This was it. Maru turned around and told the woman waiting at the entrance of the other restaurant - I’m eating here. The woman made a sour expression before saying okay.

“Auntie, gimme a bowl of gukbap.”

As soon as he ordered, he was given side dishes before the gukbap came out. He subconsciously smiled when he looked at the steaming hot gukbap. Ugeoji gukbap was one of the pillars that supported his life. When he worked mornings - coming to work at dawn and finishing work at 2 p.m. - Maru started off his day with this gukbap. At 4 a.m., before even the sun rose, the one that greeted him when he pushed open the door after walking through the cold air was none other than ugeoji gukbap. It liberated his wife from waking up during the night to be by the stove to cook for him so early in the morning, and also allowed him to have a fulfilling meal with his thin wallet. From the moment he washed the bus, filled the gas tank, and went through a checkup to the moment he finished his work for the day, the warmth of the gukbap remained deep inside the stomach of the forty-five-year-old bus driver, supporting his day. Of course, it wasn’t that tasty. It was more of a value food.

He took a spoonful of the soup and ate it. Just as he had expected, the taste was quite thick. It had such a good taste that it made him slowly forget about the ugeoji gukbap he ate along with the cold air of dawn. When the taste of his memories became blurred, Maru laughed out lightly. It was a memory when he thought about it now, but back then, it was his method of survival.

After emptying everything in the bowl down to the last bit, Maru stood up. He took a piece of mint candy placed on the counter. For some reason, he felt lacking when he didn’t eat the mint candy. Before he left the restaurant, he checked the time. It was 1 p.m. There was about an hour left, so he wondered where he should go to kill time.

“Excuse me.”

He suddenly heard a voice next to him. He saw the applicants exiting leaving the ugeoji gukbap restaurant across the street. The one who talked to him was just as he had expected, the woman with sharp eyes.

“Isn’t it awkward to eat by yourself? You should’ve eaten with us.”

“Taste is important when it comes to food. This place was good because the soup was thick. Gukbaps are best served thick.”

He cracked open the mint candy with his molars. When he rolled the candy inside his mouth, sweet saliva pooled up below his tongue. The woman twitched as though she was dissatisfied.

“You passed the first audition, right?”

“Yes. Everyone here has passed, right?”

“Yes. I think only the people here have passed the first audition.”

“I think people who weren’t swept up by the atmosphere were the only ones who passed, but I don’t know why they did that.”

“What do you mean by that?”

Not to mention the woman, the other people behind her also expressed their questioning minds and gathered around him. Maru told them what he saw in the lobby. It wasn’t anything worth hiding after all.

“Now that I think about it, I think that was the case.”

“I was reading a book.”

“And I was listening to music.”

“I was doing image training, so I didn’t have any time to think about anything else.”

From listening to everyone’s stories, it seemed that his hypothesis was right to a certain extent. Now that they knew the reason they passed the first audition, everyone fell into contemplation. In an audition, where they were supposed to be evaluated on their acting skills, the first screening was based on the ‘waiting look’ in the lobby instead. Since the situation was rather incomprehensible, Maru understood that they were thinking about it.

“If you want to talk, let’s move inside somewhere. The sun’s hot. The café from before is crowded, so what about that place?”

Maru looked at another café with two floors. Since this street had a lot of cafés, there shouldn’t be a lot of people going to the 2nd floor to enjoy their coffee time. The woman replied ‘okay’ immediately before taking the lead. Everyone entered the café like little ducklings following the mother duck. Just as Maru had expected, there weren’t a lot of people. It was a perfect place to hold a conversation.

“Why do you think they did that?” the woman asked.

Maru just shrugged when everyone looked at him. He had nothing to respond with even if they looked at him. He only found out about the screening process, and not the intention behind it.

“Is there anyone here who has ties to the producer of the one-act play?”

The man who was listening to music in the lobby had asked everyone. Replies all came at once - no. There was no one who knew the producer. Maru found out about this audition through Ganghwan, but he had no information about the producer. Come back alive - that was the only clue he gave him.

“What are they trying to do here? Are they trying to make fun of people?”

“They should have their intentions.”

“In any case, I can clearly see that the producer definitely conforms to the norms. Do you know how confused I was when I saw a single chair when I opened the door? Moreover, how could they notify us through a video? I’m sure the producer doesn’t have the slightest bit of manners,” said a man with curly hair.

He was the guy who had his eyes closed and was unbudging back in the lobby. The curly haired man chatted about the unfairness of the audition to the point that it made Maru wonder how he stayed silent while he was waiting. When he did that for about 3 minutes, everyone seemed to have gotten annoyed and started fidgeting, and only then did the man stop talking. Maru leaned back against his chair and sent Gaeul a message. I passed a weird audition.

“In any case, I hope we can cheer for each other.”

The small girl who was always at the tail, whether it was going inside the restaurant, or coming to the café, spoke. As her voice was small, even Maru had a hard time listening to her even though he was right next to her. The girl looked around her before making an awkward smile and lowering her head.

“Isn’t only one of us going to pass anyway? I think it’d be somewhat funny to cheer for each other,” said the woman who always took the lead.

The girl looked around before chuckling and nodding. Maru looked at the people seated in a circle through the corner of his eyes before picking up his teacup. The woman’s words seemed to have provoked the wariness within them as they all kept touching the teacups with their mouths shut. They seemed to have forgotten since they ate lunch together, but right now, they were in a competitive relationship vying for one spot.

“What do you think the 2nd interview is?” wondered the boy in a school uniform.

They did not talk to each other because they were conscious of one another, but they seemed to feel that this topic was worth discussing as they started talking immediately. The one who started off was naturally the woman who always took the lead.

“This time, they should be looking at acting.”

She had done away with the polite speech now. No one objected to it though. She was in her mid-twenties from a glance, clearly the oldest in the group.



"I heard this when I was recommended for this audition, but apparently, the director for this one-act play has a terrible personality."

"I think I heard that too."

"Me too."

It seemed that the bad rumors about this producer were quite widespread. Ganghwan's words became more and more credible. He also had the thought that the strange interview wouldn't just end with the first round. Just as they had come up with predictions about the 2nd audition, their phones all rang at the same time. All six people here grabbed their phones.

"They want us back now," Maru said.

### **Chapter 643**

"Let's go for now."

Maru picked up his bag and stood up. Even though it wasn't 2 p.m. yet, they got the message to gather as though the schedule was pulled forward. On the way back, Maru observed the group who went ahead of him. The order they walked in seemed to have settled as the woman with sharp eyes took the lead, followed by the earphone man, the one in school uniform, the chatterbox, and then the small girl with a foolish smile on her face. There was no change to the order, and every conversation started from the front and flowed to the back. Not once did it go the other way round. Even a band of marching soldiers would be more free than this. Maru left the group. The woman at the front glared at him slightly. He replied back with a smile.

When they arrived, the only one waiting in the lobby was the woman at the front desk. It seemed that the rest of the applicants had returned. What was different was that the woman was now wearing a baggy t-shirt and jeans instead of a black office suit. There was a large clock drawn in the middle of her t-shirt, and two hands were grabbing the hour hand and the minute hand respectively. It couldn't be said to be a good design, even as a joke.

"Did you have a good meal?"

Hearing the woman ask, they all replied 'yes', 'well', 'it was so so' and other vague answers. Maru did not reply.

"Shall we go inside?"

The woman at the desk led them to the room where they took the audition in the morning. Other than the fact that there were six chairs inside instead of one, nothing had changed.

"Please sit down in order."

If the order was the order they entered the room, the woman with sharp eyes should sit at the very right, but she looked around once before sitting in the middle. It seemed that she had done some calculations. Maru went to the seat on the far right which she should have sat on. After everyone sat down. The desk lady sat down at the table in front of them.

"I should introduce myself first, right? My name is Yoo Jayeon and I work for the drama department at YBS."

Maru nodded. One of the topics they talked about at the café was her identity. As everyone predicted that she had a direct relation to the audition, no one was surprised when she revealed herself to be the producer.

"I was put in charge of a late-night one-act play, and all of you are here in order to participate in it. Some of you might have seen the information about this audition through your acting schools, and perhaps some might have found out through other means. I'll say this beforehand, but please don't ask me to take care of you because you're close to someone. I hate those people."

Jayeon took out her ID card for the TV station and put it around her neck.

"Everyone here should be in a similar place as me. I have to produce a good work in order to prove my skills, and everyone here has to prove their worth by shooting a good piece. Am I right?"

As it wasn't a question that was looking for an answer, Maru stayed quiet. Jayeon then stood up and sat on the table.

"You know why you passed the first audition, right?"

"To a certain extent," replied the woman with sharp eyes.

"Miss Park Minjoo, correct?"

"Yes, that's me."

"You were reading this acting school's brochure, right?"

"I was."

"What did you feel when the man who finished the audition first, left the school looking angry?"

"I thought that he was lacking in both skill and manners."

"Is the fact that you weren't disturbed based on your confidence?"

"Yes. I thought that there was no need for me to mind what someone who failed should do."

"I like that mindset."

Minjoo replied confidently. It wasn't just her eyes, her words were razor-sharp as well. She only said what was necessary. It seemed that she knew how to score points.

"Miss Lee Haejung, you were reading a script, right?"

"Yes."

The small woman, Haejung, replied in a small voice.

"I'll give you the same question. What did you feel when the man left the place looking angry? Also, what was the reason you kept reading the script without being disturbed? Everyone else, please think about an answer as well. I'll be asking the same question."

Haejung, who expressed her nervousness by sucking her lips in, finally spoke.

“Actually, I didn’t know about it. When I raised my head because of the noise, everyone was looking at the entrance nervously. I often get that I’m quite dense.”

“I see. Okay, then. Then what was that script for? Your next audition?”

“Eh? The next audition? N-no, it’s just the script of a film I like.”

“What did you feel when other applicants left the place looking angry just like the ones before them? Did you not notice them too?”

“No, I had found out by then. They left with scary-looking faces, so I was actually really nervous.”

“But you didn’t look nervous to me.”

“Uhm, I kept looking at the script in order to not get nervous. That’s probably why I didn’t look nervous. That’s probably what happened.”

Unlike Minjoo’s clean and confident answer, Haejung’s answer was quite slow and shy in contrast. Jayeon nodded in understanding and then turned her head to the next person. It was the earphone man.

“What about you, Mr. Park Taemin?”

“I usually don’t mind what’s going on around me when I take auditions. I just listen to music and organize in my head what I need to do. When the man left, I just thought ‘okay, cool’. There are people who can’t hold back their emotions wherever you go.”

“Didn’t you feel strange when every single applicant left looking angry?”

“I just thought that there were many weird people. There is no need for me to be assimilated with them and get angry too.”

“Good. I like that attitude. Next is, Mr. Koo Jiyeop?”

It was the man who had his eyes closed. He was also the man who had turned into a chatterbox at the café.

“I was half-asleep so I didn’t quite notice. I did see someone barging out, but I just didn’t mind because it was none of my business. It was the same when other people were staring at the audition room. Rather than being worried about something like that, it’s much better to wait with your eyes closed, don’t you think so?”

He sounded rather cocky, but his conversation style suited his unique expression. Though, he was the type that people would get fed up with after a while.

“You don’t seem to get nervous that often, do you?”

“Nervous? Nervousness gets me nowhere. I need to have leisure when I prepare so that I won’t narrow my vision. Isn’t that for the best?”

“You’re entirely right. That attitude of yours is really good.”

Jayeon put her thumb up. Jiyeop's shoulders jerked up and down as though he was being notified of his passing already.

"How did you feel, Mr. Kang Manjin? I saw that you were reading a book."

The question was directed to the one in the school uniform.

"Actually, I was quite worried because this is my third audition. I usually don't get nervous, but I get really nervous whenever I'm waiting for an audition. When the man barged out, I was nervous to the point that I had a hard time calming down. I was wondering what happened inside that made him so angry. Reading a book is something I do to regain my calm. Though, it sometimes doesn't work."

"If you were so worried, you must have been concerned about the audition room too. I'm surprised you didn't look there."

"I did look, though, it was just once. But everyone kept staring at it and I found that a little bad. Since it had started already, I thought that calming my nervousness was more important than focusing on that room, so that's why I focused on my book."

Jayeon nodded without saying anything.

"How about you, Mr. Han Maru?"

Before he answered, he went through his thoughts. This woman intentionally caused an event and personally appeared at the event to observe. She finished the first interview using the trivial actions the applicants took in a given situation. She was proactive, calculative, and had no hesitation in her judgement. This short question-and-answer session should not end with just finding out what the applicant was like. Perhaps this might very well be the 2nd interview. Even the 1st interview was done in secrecy, was it not? He had to be open to possibilities. Considering that this was the 2nd interview, what did producer Jayeon want? What was this producer trying to find out through these questions that made it seem like she was re-confirming what she saw with her eyes?

She's picking a doll who she can move as she wishes - those words suddenly popped up inside his head. Maru instantly realized the source of those words that appeared regardless of his thought process. It was the man with a weird preference for masks that lived in his body.

"Mr. Han Maru?"

The producer crossed her arms and looked his way. It wasn't that she was urging him to speak, but a late answer would not score highly with her. He tried talking to the guy that existed inside him, but there was no reply. That fellow was quite rude, just saying what he wanted before disappearing. However, the answer he produced was something very much to his liking. The thing she wanted to find out through the 1st interview was probably concentration ability. The ability to not be shaken by any external forces and continue on with their work. That was different. Maru thought that he should quickly note that he was aware of the situation.

"When the man barged out, I was a little worried. I was also a little curious about what was happening."

"But you didn't show it on your face, did you? You looked like you were reading the brochure, before thinking about something very deeply as though you were meditating."

"I just thought about what could be happening; about why he rushed out and why he looked angry. But nothing came to mind, so I decided to do things I can do."

"Doing things you can do is definitely good. But why did you not place any interest in the audition room? If you were concerned, don't you think it's normal to look that way like the other people? Or was it that you didn't want to mind?"

"Allow me to give a similar answer, but there are a lot of things I can't do. Seeing through walls is one of them. I had no way of looking inside a closed door, so I didn't do it. If I had a way to do so, I would've checked. It is true that I wanted to know what was happening."

"I see. Okay, then. Let me ask you one more thing. You noticed that I was observing people, didn't you, Mr. Han Maru?"

"Yes."

He didn't avoid her eyes and looked at her directly, so it wouldn't make sense to say that he didn't notice.

"Then why didn't you ask anything?" the producer asked as she looked down.

She had also turned her body around as well before touching the paper on the table and writing some things with a pen. Her entire body seemed to be screaming that it was a question she asked without meaning. With that, however, Maru became sure that this was the most important question.

"Because I thought you'd take care of everything. Also, I didn't know what to ask either."

He faintly smiled while scratching his eyebrows. Jayeon had her body turned around, but for some reason, Maru felt like she was scanning him from top to bottom.

"I see. Good. Thank you for your answer. Then before we start, let me get some things sorted out."

Jayeon picked up her paper and turned around.

"Mr. Park Taemin, Mr. Koo Jiyeop."

"Yes."

"Yes."

"Thank you for your effort. You may go now," Jayeon said as she pointed at the door with her finger while her eyes were fixed on the paper.

The two men didn't say anything for a while before realizing that they were given the hot potato and raised their voices. The one who spoke first was Taemin.

"Producer, what do you mean by that?"

"I regret to inform you that you don't fit with us. I hope we can meet in better circumstances another time. A time that isn't today."

"What do you mean by that? We didn't do anything, so how do you know that we fit or not?"

“I do.”

Jayeon sounded firm as though there was no need to talk about it. Jiyeop’s lips went on rapidfire like a camera shutter during burst mode.

“The reason is not just. You didn’t even watch my acting yet you want me to leave? Are you sure this isn’t a rigged audition?”

“Do you think I have so much time?”

“Then why are you doing this so suddenly?”

“Because you don’t fit with us. I don’t know how great your acting skills are, Mr. Taemin, Mr. Jiyeop, since I haven’t had a look at them. I’m telling you to leave because I am sure that we won’t get along as business partners.”

“That doesn’t even make sense!”

“Then why don’t you be the producer?”

Maru looked at Jayeon, who was speaking with a smile. The words that Ganghwan said to him circled around his mind. Come back alive, come back alive.... It was clear that she was definitely not an ordinary woman.

#### **Chapter 644**

“Aren’t you being a little too much?” asked Taemin, who had been keeping his calm while Jiyeop’s ears turned beet red.

“I’ll apologize if my words were a little rude. I can apologize, but I hope you can leave now. You know well that both you and I are busy people.”

“In any audition, they decide after looking at the acting. I think that’s common sense.”

“Common sense is good, but I said before, didn’t I? Mr. Jiyeop, Mr. Taemin. No matter how good you two’s acting skills are, it’s no use if you can’t get along with me. Of course, if your acting skills are on the level of Park Taeho, Choi Changhyun, or Yoon Donggil, I’d welcome you with open arms. But it isn’t, is it? Whether it’s the two of you, or me, we’re all little ducklings who haven’t made ourselves known in the industry. And for us little ducklings to survive, we need to have our own philosophies for survival. The two of you regrettably don’t fit my life philosophy nor work philosophy.”

“I think you may change your mind once you see our acting.”

“No. Good acting to a certain level isn’t good enough. I am prepared to suck up to the people who are way beyond my level, but unless it’s like that, I’m planning to match everything to myself. The only reason I didn’t use a casting director nor my connections to various managers that belong to many agencies, is just that. I will see for myself and choose those who can work together with me.”

“I think that’s not being professional.”

“Pros have their pro ways. If you’ve accepted it now, then please leave, I must continue.”

"I didn't accept anything!"

Maru frowned as he looked at Jiyeop. His ears had turned bright red and he ended up expressing his anger in the form of words. To put it in a good way, he did what he wanted, but normally, he would be called a rampant pony who can't look at anything around him.

"Excuse me, producer Yoo Jayeon, but you won't be able to continue saying that to me if you know whose introduction I came here on."

"I should've told you before we started, didn't I? I hate it when people ask me to take care of them because they're close to someone."

"I'm not telling you to take care of me. I'm just telling you to look at me. Just how are you entitled to pick people without even looking at them?"

"So you have the confidence that I will definitely choose you if I see your acting, Mr. Jiyeop?"

"Of course I do. My acting will definitely satisfy a producer doing her first piece."

"Really?"

"Yes."

"But I don't want to see. You're giving me even more of a reason not to work with you, aren't you? I'm picking people who're going to 'work' with me. That means that you have to follow my words to a certain extent. Whether you like it or not, I'm the director. Also, if you're so confident in your skills, don't come here and go to a large-scale project done by major companies. You must be a good actor, so I'm sure you have several scenarios you can choose from. Or, you can use that connection of yours that you told me about to go to another drama. Don't dirty your career with a newbie producer's work."

"You keep getting on my nerves. Even though you're a woman."

He was like a train with broken brakes. Maru picked up the chair slightly and moved sideways. He didn't want to get caught up in an explosion by being next to this guy. He also signalled Kang Manjin with his eyes. Kang Manjin also moved sideways while pulling his school uniform tight. Minjoo, who was sitting in the center, stood up and walked to the back.

In a makeshift square ring, Haejung was blinking her eyes and standing in a daze among the three people who had readied themselves for a fight. Maru signalled and gestured to Haejung to step back. Haejung came to herself and finally stepped down from the ring.

"Even though you're a woman. I've become immune to those words since I heard them a lot, but I didn't know I'd hear those words here. You think a female producer is easy to deal with, don't you? Producers belonging to the drama department quit quite easily after all. Isn't that right?"

Jayeon stood in front of Jiyeop. Maru thought this when she sat down on the table, she was quite tall. Jiyeop's head was level with her eyes. Jiyeop seemed to have noticed that he had committed a mistake, but didn't seem to have any intentions of taking his words back. After all, an apology was much harder than math formulas to a man who was filled with arrogance.

"So you have a complex with regards to being a female producer, eh? You seem triggered."

It seemed that peace was out of reach now. Maru decided to step even further back because he didn't want to get caught up.

"A complex, huh. Yes, that's right. I do have a complex because I'm a woman who's a producer. It feels refreshing to say things without thinking, doesn't it? Now then, can you leave now?"

"You're being wishy-washy to the end, huh. Excuse me, producer, what do you think will happen to you if rumor gets around that you're doing your auditions like this? I think people will swear at you."

"It's me who gets insulted, not you, so get going. If you keep wasting my time like this, I'm not holding back."

"What are you going to do if you aren't going to hold back? This is why there aren't any famous women amongst film or drama directors. They get mad at the slightest things and start grumbling. They have no patience or leeway. But that doesn't mean they have any skill either. After all, they decide to hold such shitty auditions like this one and decide who fits them and who doesn't."

Jiyeop, who thought things were going well for him, didn't even hold back now. Whenever his words hit Jayeon, her eyes twitched. Her fingers were scratching her sleeves, and her heels were tapping on the ground. Maru felt like he was looking at a ticking time bomb.

"You're done, now, right?"

"Why do you ask? Do you finally want to have a look at my acting now?"

"Yes, I must have made a little mistake. Before that, who introduced you to this audition?"

"Why do you ask that?"

"Because I think I should give that person a greeting. That I should take things easy," Jayeon said as she took out her phone.

Jiyeop made the arrogant smile of a victor as he spoke.

"I wonder if you know producer Lee Kangho or not. He's in the drama department of YBS."

"Ah, so you came here on senior Lee's introduction."

"You should know him because you belong to the same department, right? We would've never gone through this in the first place if you had some leeway, right? You don't want your relationship with your seniors to turn bad, right, producer Yoo? I didn't want to say this much, but producer Lee Kangho kinda dotes on me."

While Jiyeop was talking, Jayeon was moving her fingers. She put her phone against her ear and waited for a while before speaking in a cheerful voice.

"Yes, senior. It's me, Jayeon. Yes. Oh, seonbae, there's something I have to say."

Jayeon took a deep breath before speaking in a loud voice.



“Senior Lee, do you want to be at odds with me? Are you picking a fight with me? Do you want me to act nasty again? Calm down? CALM DOWN? Fuck it, do you want me to beat you up? Where are you right now? I’ll be there immediately, so let’s take off our rank stickers and fight. I said let’s fight!”

It didn’t even take 10 seconds for Jiyeop’s expression to stiffen. Jayeon hopped around everywhere like a horse stung by a wasp as she did her call. Maru had to flee to a corner. He felt like he would get a loud slap the moment his shoulder brushed with hers or something.

“Uh-uhm.”

“Shut up before I kick you in the balls.”

The arrogant Jiyeop quietened down. Jayeon’s phone call continued for around one more minute. Jayeon’s rampaging movements then calmed down, and her hair also stopped fluttering like a lion’s mane. She raised her voice to the point that even a marketplace salesman would concede defeat, and now she returned to her calm and polite voice. When Maru saw that, he was sweating. Perhaps he should quit the audition here?

“Yes, yes, senior. Of course. You know I like you, right? Buy me a drink later. I’m a great drinking friend, aren’t I? Also, you know that I was shouting at you because I love you, right? It’s definitely not because I was angry. It’s just me acting cute.”

Jayeon looked at Jiyeop before looking away.

“But this Jiyeop kid, you didn’t send him to me to annoy me, did you? I know that there’s no way you would do that, but I’m asking just in case. You know my nickname, the nasty bitch, so there’s no way you’d try to annoy someone like me. Yes, yes. Then why don’t you give him a call? I’ll help you out a lot as a B-team later.”

Snapping her phone shut, Jayeon looked at Jiyeop. A moment later, Jiyeop’s phone rang. To Maru’s ears, it sounded more gloomy than a requiem.

“Hello?”

Jiyeop’s face turned visibly darker by the second after picking up the call. His upright waist turned curved like a shrimp and he bowed before leaving the audition room just like that. Jayeon’s head turned around to Taemin this time. Taemin did not say anything and just left after picking his stuff up.

“Finally, we got rid of the trash. There’s something I forgot to say when I was introducing myself. I have quite a potty mouth. When I was a newbie, I was called a ‘bitch with a rag in her mouth’, and these days, I’m just called a nasty bitch. I must have spent a splendid company life, right?”

Jayeon stretched her arms out.

“If there’s any of you who’s not willing to work together, then the door is open, so you can take your leave. Doing work with the people you want. It’s a very important thing, you know?”

Jayeon looked around as though she was seeking affirmation. Maru neither expressed his agreement nor disagreement. If it wasn’t for Ganghwan’s introduction; if he didn’t say that she was a capable producer, he would’ve stood up and left. While he understood her work ethics and her methods, working with an oddball meant that he would very likely end up physically and mentally tired. He wasn’t

in a position where he could choose who he could work with, but he wasn't desperate enough to jump into a sea of thorns either. A person who introduced herself as a 'bitch with a rag in her mouth' or a 'nasty bitch' wouldn't have just any ordinary thorns, she would have poisonous ones.

"No one's leaving, right?"

No one stood up when she asked. Maru also maintained his seat. A skilled producer. If that was true, then it was worth rolling around in thorns. So what if he bled a little? He could become famous.

"Good. Then for now, I'll tell you the reason I picked you. I want to know those who know what's going on around them. At the same time, they must also have a concentration that would not budge even if a fire started next to them."

So she wants a superhuman, huh. Maru imagined Jayeon shouting her lungs out at the shooting set. The fact that it suited her scared him a little. Don't exaggerate just because of a 3rd degree burn. Die after you do the last scene - Jayeon looked like she would say such things without holding back.

"Since the two wussies - oh, let me use a more polite word - idiots took up some time, we'll start the audition immediately. Everyone here has had lunch, right?"

"Yes."

"Good. From now on, you have to show me your eating act. Think about what you ate for lunch, copy that and recreate it here."

"Eating act?"

Minjoo raised her hand and asked for confirmation. She looked like she must have heard wrong or something. Jayeon said 'yes' with a refreshing smile to turn her suspicion into confidence.

"I don't know what to show you by eating."

"Don't think too hard about it. For now, think about what happened during lunch and recreate that scene right here. How was the atmosphere of the restaurant? What other customers were there? What caught your eyes? How was the food? It's only been 30 minutes so don't tell me that you forgot. I despise disappointing answers like that."

"Is that all we have to show you?"

"Yes. I may ask you to do some other things midway, but for now, that's all you have to do."

"If it's not too rude, can I ask why it has to be eating?"

"Oh, I guess I didn't explain that. Sorry about that. The two idiots made me forget about the most important thing."

Jayeon sat on the table again before speaking.

"The set we're going to do the one-act play on is a pojang-macha."

"A pojang-macha?"

“A space decorated in orange, and the place where you can experience the most of your life’s joys and sorrows. Why do you think I allocated the time so that you could eat? It’s to see your eating acts. Well, then, if you got it, let’s begin.”

Actually, wait a sec - Jayeon left after adding those words before bringing back a blue plastic table. It was a square one with bits and pieces burnt in black from cigarette ash. It was like the definition of a pojang-macha table.

“Let’s have a look then, shall we? At how tasty you can make the food out to be.”

## **Chapter 645**

“Yes, writer. Then see you this evening. Yes, yes. That place sounds good.”

Park Hoon threw his phone and shouted hooray. His work was now finally on track. Once things went according to plan, it wouldn’t be a dream to start airing by the end of the year. Although the drama times were full for this winter, there were times where things didn’t go well for some of them, so he could use that opportunity. He grabbed his mouse and double clicked on the plan document icon on his desktop. The scripting was going well. To a producer, their work was like their child, and as the creator, he would think that it was very pretty, but the thing he was working on this time was actually pretty enough to participate in the Miss Korea contest. Since the writer gave birth to a pretty piece, the producer had the responsibility to put that child on the stage. If the script symbolized the skill of the writer, the plan was the barometer that measured the producer’s skill. No matter how good the script was, if the plan was like an elementary schooler’s diary, it would never see the light of day. As he was staring at the black text on a white background looking for things to fix, he saw Lee Kangho, who had gone out to smoke, return to his seat while ripping out his hair.

“Did you swallow your cig or something? That was quick.”

“I didn’t get to smoke at all because of a phone call I got.”

“A phone call?”

“This is gonna be an unlucky day today.”

“Didn’t I tell you? I told you not to do bad things. Which police branch is it? Do they want you to come right now? Or is it the bank asking you to pay back your interest?”

“I’d be happy if it was one of those right now.”

“Then who was the phone call from? Your wife?”

“Yoo Jayeon.”

The moment he heard that name, Park Hoon could sympathize with Kangho’s pain. Some of the producers belonging to the drama department at YBS would shiver in fear when they heard the name ‘Yoo Jayeon’ and Kangho was one of them. Even chief producer Cha and president Jung would helplessly tell her to put down her teacup before calming her down. The members of the drama department knew that an angry rhino was supposed to be avoided, not blocked.

“What did she say?”

“You know she’s doing the one-act play, right?”

“Right, it’s her first work, isn’t it? She gets to do her own work just 3 years after entering the company huh. I gotta say, she has some skill.”

“I sometimes forget because of her personality, but her skills are really goddamn good.”

“So what does her debut piece got to do with her shitting on you?”

“I thought I’d try to help her out as a senior, but I ended up getting a scolding instead.”

“Hey, do you like Jayeon? Otherwise, why would you try to help out that crazy girl?”

“Hey, I’m married, don’t go saying weird stuff. Also, I admit that Jayeon has the looks and the body figure, but what good is all that? She’s a different species. Humans and aliens can’t fall in love with each other.”

“Calling her an alien is putting her in a good way. At least aliens are classified as humanoids. In my opinion, she’s closer to a reptile. You know, maybe a tyrannosaurus rex or a triceratops.”

“Can I tell her what you said?”

“Sure, if you want me to barge into your house at night with a knife in hand.”

Kangho rubbed his face.

“I had my plans. I was planning to help her out this one time and was going to take her next bitching off, but looks like I was too complacent. I forgot about that woman’s eyes.”

“What did you do?”

“I sent in an actor I know of. He’s pretty decent, but it looks like he said a word to Jayeon.”

“What did he say?”

“Even though you’re a woman - that.”

“Hey, is the guy that said those words still alive? Are you sure he’s not encased in concrete and thrown into the sea?”

“For now, she just sent him back. Though, I can’t be sure of that ‘just sent’ part.”

Kangho sighed. He collapsed on his desk without saying anything else. Kangho was the grim reaper to the new producers and was a strict senior to the juniors, but in front of Jayeon, he was just a feeble senior.

“You should’ve thought things through. You know how much she screens the people she works with. I got to know the term ‘human allergy’ thanks to her.”

Jayeon was someone who refused to even eat together with the people she didn’t like. She wouldn’t even talk to someone if that person got on her nerves. She never made compromises. Her likes and dislikes were too distinct. Above all, she was a ‘crazy bitch’. The ‘crazy’ of ‘crazy bitch’ included many

concepts that only the people of the drama department would understand. It even included the meaning of respect.

“Is Jayeon coming back to the company today?”

“She said she’s doing the audition herself, so she’ll probably come back once that’s done.”

“Lee Kangho, don’t talk to me today. I’m not going down with you.”

Park Hoon stood up and clapped. The members of the drama department, who were working, all looked at him.

“Today, our beloved Kangho has gotten on Yoo Jayeon’s nerves. Keep that in mind and avoid him at all costs. I won’t take responsibility if you get caught up in the storm just because you talked to him. Oh, chief producer Cha, you just came. Don’t get involved with Kangho today, hyung-nim. Jayeon is getting ready to tear him apart.”

Chief producer Cha, who had just walked in with a magazine in his arms, nodded before going to his seat. The other producers also looked at Kangho with pity before taking their eyes off him.

“Should I take the afternoon off?”

“She’d probably go to your house if you do that. She’ll probably team up with your wife to tear you apart. Can you handle that?”

“No, I definitely can’t. But rather than that, Park Hoon, you were grinning when I came in. It looks like things are going well for you, huh?”

“It’s going so well that I’m wondering if it’s okay to be this smooth. I can’t believe that she’s a first time writer for scripts. The distribution of cuts and time is just that exceptional. The description of the character’s psychology is good too, and the background is good as well. I will have to work my ass off in order to find a suitable shooting location, but it’s been quite a while since text alone got me so excited.”

“That’s because you have a reassuring ally named Lee Hanmi. Do you know how hard I tried to work with her? And yet she won’t even look my way. You won’t know how much I cried when she told me that she was working with you the last time I called her.”

“Thankfully the writer I’m working with is close friends with writer Lee. Thanks to that, I have no problems with the script. It’s all going smoothly.”

“You are lucky, you know that?”

“I do. Now, I just need to get this proposal approved and pray that one of the winter series goes bust.”

“Hey, wishing your colleague does bad doesn’t sound that good.”

“You know that we can’t all have the good stuff. Only if I slip up will you be able to do your work, and only if you slip off will the juniors be able to take your position.”

“I have never created a hit piece yet. Stop cursing me.”

“You’re gonna get stabbed in the back if you say that even though you hit 30% viewership for a program already. No, wait. I guess you’d get stabbed by Jayeon anyway.”

Park Hoon looked at his friend before sending a text: Good luck finding good actors in the audition and I hope you the best in your work. Hm, it was a flawless text. Since she was apparently angry because of Kangho, her bitching would probably avoid him if he sent a message cheering her on right now. A moment later, Jayeon sent a text back. Senior, I don’t bite just anyone.

“What a good instinct.”

Park Hoon shrugged before putting his phone down. She doesn’t bite ‘just’ anyone, meaning that she will bite ‘someone’.

“Lee Kangho, good luck running away.”

That crazy junior of his would definitely keep her word once she said it.

\* \* \*

“Yes, that’s enough. Is there anything else you want to show?”

“What do you mean by anything else?”

“I mean about the act you just did.”

“Should I try the eating act again?”

“No, looks like there’s no need to have a look from what you’re saying. It’s okay,” Jayeon said.

Minjoo, who was acting, made a bitter expression as she stood up. Jayeon fiddled with her phone before looking at the next person. It was Manjin. He took off his uniform top before sitting down. He looked at the blue table before giving a glance at Jayeon.

“You may begin whenever you’re ready.”

“Yes.”

“Also, Miss Minjoo, you can get going now.”

When Minjoo was about to object, Jayeon put her index finger on her lips. Manjin was starting his act.

Maru focused. Minjoo’s acting couldn’t be considered exceptional, but she wasn’t lacking either. It was relatively decent, but Jayeon was fiddling with her phone the entire time Minjoo was acting. There was a time she even took her eyes off Minjoo and smiled while looking at the phone. Minjoo, who failed to get her acting evaluated and was ignored, tried to exaggerate her motions in order to attract Jayeon’s eyes, but even that didn’t end up working. Minjoo’s audition started off silently and ended silently. Jayeon didn’t even tell her ‘thank you for coming’. Just what did she not like about Minjoo’s act? There were a lot of elements Maru could think of, but he couldn’t say which was the right one.

This was why Manjin’s act was important. With two samples, he would have an easier time figuring out Jayeon’s preferences. Once he listened to what Jayeon had to say to Manjin and compared that to Minjoo’s act, he would probably decide on the direction of his act.

Manjin sniffed as though there was a warm gukbap placed in front of him. He fanned with his hand and inhaled deeply before picking up his spoon. He picked up the rice bowl before dunking the rice into the soup. It was enough to know how Manjin acted when he ate during the day. He shook the spoon within the bowl before taking a big scoop. He widened his eyes to express the joy of eating before putting the imaginary spoon in his mouth. He moved his jaws to chew before swallowing exaggeratedly to the point that his Adam's apple was moving. Fuu, after exhaling in satisfaction, he smiled.

“Okay, you can stop. Is there anything else you want to show me?”

It was the same question as the one she gave Minjoo. Manjin couldn't reply immediately and thought about it. He should have also noticed that the situation was repeating. Minjoo was unable to answer this question, and as a result of that, had to leave.

“Can I ask what you want to see from me again, producer?”

Manjin replied with a question. Jayeon then answered that question without showing any dissatisfaction.

“I said everything that I want to see before. Think about it carefully. If you don't remember, you can rest a bit.”

“Then can I have some time to think?”

“Of course, you can. I can give that much consideration to a person who asks the right question. Meanwhile, next. Mr. Han Maru, it's your turn. Miss Lee Haejung, you are the last one, so you know that you have to do better than the rest, right?”

After gazing at Haejung, who clearly seemed nervous, once, Maru sat in front of Jayeon. Jayeon said that she had said everything she wanted to see. Maru thought about Jayeon's words. While she said she wanted to see an eating act, she did not place her emphasis on the act of eating alone. The mood of the restaurant, what caught their eyes. What other customers were there.

Maru looked at the blue table that Jayeon brought. That table was a trap. It was a device that restricted the range of thinking by making the actors think that it was the stage. No one agreed to the scope of the stage, but the two before him started off their acts by sitting in the chair. Their thoughts couldn't escape the frame.

He understood what he had to do. The most important thing was to expand the stage. If he didn't limit himself to the blue table, he could use the entire room as the set. If he turned the table, which acted as the stage until now, into a mere prop, he would have a much broader scope of acting to do.

Maru did not go to the blue table. Instead, he stood quite far away. There was a limited thing he could do when he 'ate'. Why he decided to eat at that place, what the atmosphere was like, what he thought as he ate. He took away the spotlight from the act of eating itself and placed more emphasis on the story. Of course, the eating act was important, but it couldn't be the main dish. At most, it was an appetizer.

Maru decided to start by looking inside the restaurant. The memories and emotions of his past that he was reminded of during lunch, would become splendid ingredients for his acting. Injecting his previous life into his acting was a method he already used before. He had the confidence to do well. However, he

didn't plan to do well. If he stopped at just subliming his past experiences into his acting, he wouldn't have a long acting career. The current Han Maru had to reinterpret the emotions that he brought out from the past. As there was a middle process, acting it out would become that much more complex, but if he could do so, his skill as an actor would rise by a level.

"You may begin when you're ready," Jayeon said.

## Chapter 646

What he found out through some of his experiences with auditions was that the producers, casting directors, and the majority of the staff were actually quite lax. They did not ask pressuring questions like they were interviewing, nor did they urge the participant to start acting. If they delayed the whole thing without reason, the organizers would naturally warn that participant, but most of the time, if the participant asked for some time, they would allow it. That was because the organizers knew that acting wasn't a standardized thing like injection-molded plastic.

"Can I get into the right emotions after thinking a bit?"

"If that's necessary for your acting, then sure. But don't make me wait too much. You know that my expectations will become bigger the longer I wait, right?"

There were thorns in her soft words. Maru accelerated his thought process. Just as Jayeon said, her score of him would become lower the longer she had to wait.

Maru started sketching. Since he didn't start sitting down, he had to decide on a general movement path. Delicate acting was the combination of the expression of emotions that provoked sympathy, as well as the rationale to assign those expressions to their right timings. Too much emotional expression would make the act lose context while being full of rationale would make it look dry. Actors had to construct a building with the ever-changing emotions using the blueprint known as the script. That was why the majority of the good actors were smart.

Maru, who thought of a design and also thought about the middle point of his act, took a deep breath before drawing the finale in his mind. Starting well would win half of the battle, but that also meant that a half-assed finish would mean the result would be half-assed as well. He played the short skit in his mind from beginning to end. He couldn't say that it was perfect, but it was definitely satisfactory.

"I'll begin now."

In his declaration was a trigger for himself. Just like inserting and turning the key to the car would start the car, Maru felt that his own words were revving up the engine of acting within him. That sound was enough to awaken a certain man who slumbered within him. He could feel that the guy had opened his eyes slightly. Maru offered his place on the stage, but he refused. It seemed that he was only going to move after being fired up a little more.

Maru didn't ask anymore either. It wasn't that he was in need of his help. The true worth of the masked man would only appear in an act with violent fluctuations in emotions to the point that reason could be abandoned. Right now, he had to inject his past into this acting and put on a more delicate type of act, so it would be better if Maru himself stepped up. The only reason he offered the guy his place on stage was to see how much he could negotiate with the guy. When he couldn't feel the guy's conscience



before, he just called him the 'red guy' and did as he wished, but ever since Maru realized that he was a completely different entity unto himself, Maru was no longer able to call him out as he wished to. In order to work together with the guy, who only voiced out his opinion from time to time from a corner of his heart, he would need to set up a reward and negotiate with him.

He loosened his jaws. He also relaxed his shoulders. Becoming nervous would make a person tense, and conversely, relaxing would resolve that nervousness as well. It was a trivial but necessary trick to use.

He stood in front of the imaginary door with a lightened body. He started off by looking inside the door. He looked back on what happened during lunch. The two gukbap restaurants were facing each other. That in itself wasn't that interesting, but a highschool student hesitating between the two definitely would. If he sublimed his memories with his father into the process of selecting one of the restaurants, that interest just might turn into focus. The figure of a necktie-wearing father going to work would provoke the tear glands of everyone in the world, but it was rather common, so it might look a little boring. Then what about a father who drove a bus for a living? It might feel like a familiar subject, but it also might become an element of interest to the audience who did not know the reality of that occupation.

Everything was something he experienced himself, but Maru decided to borrow his father's name here. That was reasonable enough, so the only thing left was to show it through his acting.

Maru, who was wandering between the two restaurants, eventually chose one of the restaurants.

"Yes, hello there."

There was no one there, but he strongly believed that someone was there as he made his greeting. He felt like the annoyed restaurant owner's voice could be heard. He pulled his chair out and sat down. He could see Jayeon's eyes fixed on him. He blew those ink-black eyes out of his consciousness and continued on with his acting. After all, Jayeon didn't exist in the gukbap restaurant.

He did exactly the things he did during lunch as though he was going over a prior chess match. His actions before the gukbap came out - he crossed his legs and put his locked hands on his knees. He listened in on the taxi driver's laments next to him. He was saying that he had a fight with a drunk customer during broad daylight. Maru didn't look into the void, he actually pictured the taxi driver and looked right at him. He then turned his head left. Three men wearing paint-colored work outfits were just focusing on eating the gukbap without talking. It was as though they believed that talking while eating was a sin and scraped the bottom of the bowl as though it was their worst enemy. Creak creak - when Maru reminded himself of the screeching sound, his body reacted by itself. To Jayeon, neither the taxi driver nor the three men in work outfits would be visible. However, she should have felt that something or someone was there. He left her to deduce and continued with his acting. The focus was on eating, not the other customers inside the restaurant.

A boiling gukbap was placed in front of him. Maru looked at the gukbap before shaking the rice bowl, which had a lid on it. He grabbed the silver-colored stainless steel bowl and shook it up and down before tilting it and pouring the contents into the soup bowl. He did not exaggerate anything. He just repeated what he did during lunch. He did not stuff his nose into the bowl to smell it, nor did he look down at it with a blissful expression. He just picked up his spoon and fixed his gaze on the TV hanging on the wall. A baseball match between The Eunsung Dragons and The Joogook Eagles was showing. He decluttered the

rice grains with his spoon and put a piece of cubed radish kimchi into the bowl. He then ate it. He opened his eyes and focused his eyes on the TV as his mouth mechanically chewed on the food.

Having meals was important. If this ugeoji gukbap was something he ate after days of starving, he would look at it as though he was blessed, become touched, and might have even prayed to god in appreciation. On the other hand, a normal meal was, while important, frequent as well. Since it happened very frequently, no one would focus on the motion of chewing. The ugeoji gukbap was, while tasty, nothing special, and had no worth beyond being food. He simply chewed and simply swallowed. He did not bestow any meaning to eating beyond just eating. Maru just slowly picked up some side dishes and scooped up the gukbap.

When half of the gukbap was left in his imagination, Maru thought about the past. The memories of his previous life. He remembered the ugeoji gukbap that supported the mornings of a bus driver in his forties. He took out the gukbap, which had a bland taste but had a wonderful spice known as cheap price and put it on the table. It was something he had experienced himself, but he was going to package it differently now, as something that his father had experienced; that it was something he had heard from him.

He did not make a depressed face. He did not bite his spoon and frown either. He just looked at the gukbap for a long time. He rolled over the cubed radish kimchi and reminded himself of the chilly early morning wind, and reminded himself of the taste of the cheap coffee that he drank. Gukbap was a bridge that connected his present life to the previous one. There was a memory in each rice grain inside the oily soup: when he had to apologize to the passengers for the broken air conditioner, when he had a hard time because the schedule was messed up during winter, when he was insulted by a youth that he didn't know the name of, as well as the faces of the people who offered him a cold drink for his efforts.

That happened huh - a smile briefly appeared on his face before disappearing. Maru tilted the bowl and scraped the rice inside. After putting every last grain in his mouth, he had a momentary look at the TV. A home run - he said as he wiped the sweat below his nose.

He stood up from his seat and called out to the owner. He handed over the money before taking out a mint candy from the plastic container next to the cashier's desk. He put it in his mouth before leaving the restaurant. Feeling saliva gathering below his tongue, Maru turned around to look at Jayeon.

"That's it."

"Sit down again."

Jayeon pointed at the chair without giving him any time. Maru sat down on the chair.

"What was in the restaurant that made you choose this one?"

"There was a taxi driver and some construction workers. There was also a savory smell as well. My father always said that if you want a thick-tasting gukbap, you should go to the restaurant where people wearing work outfits go."

"Good, okay then. Overall, the drive behind your acting was pretty decent. It almost became a little boring, but the smile you showed midway changed the atmosphere. What was the meaning behind that smile? I thought you were looking somewhere other than the present."

"I was watching a baseball match while eating gukbap during lunch when my father's words came to mind. He liked ugeoji gukbap a lot. No, rather than saying he liked it, I guess he just ate so much of it, that he came to like it. It was gukbap that he ate while working."

Jayeon nodded her head in understanding. Maru, who was preparing to explain further, could not do so because Jayeon didn't ask any more questions.

"That gaze, I loved that gaze of yours. Do you see that I'm really excited right now? That's precisely the kind of act I wanted. The joys and sorrows of life, and then a pojang macha."

Jayeon smacked her hand on the table and jumped around in joy. She walked around the audition room and clicked her fingers several times before returning to her original position while heaving out a deep breath.

"Mr. Han Maru, was it?"

"Yes."

"You're mine now. Don't think about going anywhere else. You gotta work with me. Oh, right. There was one more person."

Jayeon looked at Lee Haejung, who was waiting on one side.

"Are you ready, Miss Haejung?"

"Eh? Ah, yes."

Haejung calmly walked over. Maru stood up from his seat and moved back. Since it looked like he passed, he just had to wait calmly now.

Haejung took several deep breaths before starting her act. Just like the two before, she ordered an ugeoji gukbap before starting to eat. Her act was something easier on the eyes. She did not cheer out loud or make a big deal about it. It seemed that she also didn't bestow any meaning to eating beyond just eating.

Maru observed her acting in detail. Generally, shy people were sensitive to those around them. Their sharp radars, if used in the right way, would become an ability that would suck in information from around them. To an actor, it was a treasure-like ability. Like him, she also put a lot of detail into her acting. She tried expressing the appearances of the other applicants who were sitting with her and even showed what was placed on the table. Good - Maru inwardly shouted. She had gotten the form down to a certain extent. The only thing left now was to burst it out. An act that was too unified would not look fun. It was about time to spice things up.

Haejung put down the gukbap bowl and finished her act. Jayeon looked at Haejung for about five seconds before speaking.

"Is that all?"

"Yes."

"Your acting was pretty good, but do you know what you lack?"

"I don't."

"Drama."

"What?"

"There's no drama in your act. What does acting exist for? Is it fine if you just imitate doing something? Of course not. If it's just taking form, even a machine can do it. Drama, a human's act needs drama. Of course, I'm not saying that you did bad, Haejung. I just find it a little lacking. You are a hundred, a thousand times better than the failures before you. If you develop your acting brain a little more, you will become a great actress."

It was a compliment. Haejung, who had shrunken up, finally smiled shyly.

"Two people, huh. I guess that's a decent harvest. Oh, Mr. Manjin, you can go now. Also, take Miss Minjoo over there with you. Before you go, if you would allow me to give you a tip, don't overreact. Did you really eat like that when you ate food? You exclaimed at the taste of the food and moaned whenever you picked up a side dish? Think about it carefully. Sometimes, exaggeration is necessary, but that is usually for dramatic expression which doesn't happen normally. I'm saying this because you show promise. I hope you can improve your skill and meet me again at a later date."

Her tongue was really relentless and merciless.

#### **Chapter 647**

"I'll give you a call, so see you then."

Maru turned around to look at the building as he remembered Jayeon's words. For someone who bombarded the applicants with ruthless words, her goodbyes were pretty ordinary.

"Then be careful on your way home."

"Ah, yes. You too."

Lee Haejung left after saying that with a barely audible voice. Jayeon did not say how many people she was going to pick until the very end. Whether both of them passed or only one of them passed, she did not mention. She did tell Maru that she wanted to work with him, but since words weren't as binding as a fully fleshed-out contract, there was definitely a possibility that he didn't make it. Rather than experiencing disappointment after having his hopes up, it would hurt less if he considered that slipping up was one of the possibilities.

It was 4 p.m. Maru called Gaeul. He heard that she had lessons on Sunday. Since he was in Seoul already, he wanted to see her before going home.

After the signal sound went on for a long time, it went over to voicemail. It seemed that she had muted her phone and was practicing hard. He didn't want to disturb her since he thought that she must be trying her hardest. Good luck - he sent a short text. Picturing her practicing while sweating made him subconsciously smile. She was probably practicing under the air conditioner though. Practicing outside in weather like this would probably make her collapse from the heat.

Maru wiped the sweat off his face until he thought that he could no longer do so and entered a nearby convenience store. When hit by the air from the air conditioner, he felt like he was able to breathe a lot more smoothly again. He enjoyed the cold wind as he bought some drinks and stayed inside the store for a long time before leaving. He sipped on his drink under the parasol and watched the people going past. Everyone was frowning due to the heat. The heat was unbearable yet it was only July right now, so Maru wondered what it would be like in August. He threw the drink can in the trash after it became empty very quickly.

“Take a fan.”

This was the first time he was glad to find someone handing out hand fans in the street. The fan had an ad for a telecom company, and in the middle was Suyeon, who was holding a baseball bat. She actually shot a lot of commercials. Maru folded the part where her face was printed and started fanning himself. Hot air blew against him, so it wasn't that cool, but it was better than nothing.

There was a wide street between the various buildings, but no one walked in the middle. Everyone stuck themselves against the walls in order to hide in the shade provided by those buildings. The people walked in a line like ants carrying food until they came to a stop. Maru, who was in the middle of that line, also had to stop.

“Are they shooting a drama here?”

“Don't you think it's for a movie?”

Everyone's gazes had gathered in the middle of the street, where the sun was blazing down. There was a shooting team right next to the fountain, which was spraying water everywhere. Maru saw reflection panels, cameras, and a boom mic held in midair. There were also line-men, who were protecting the electrical lines, as well as other people from the staff that were moving around busily in order to block the people from approaching. A lot of effort was put into doing that last part because this street was usually a crowded one.

“Sorry. We hope you can take a detour down this road. We apologize for your inconvenience.”

The staff guided the passersby to another road with unlit traffic wands.

Maru stopped and tiptoed. He saw actors behind the reflection panels. He could pinpoint an actor without having to look at the face because there were many people around that person fixing his makeup and turning on the fans for him. Maru then looked at a group of people holding sunshade umbrellas about 10 meters away. White, black, light violet. Many different sunshade umbrellas had filled that area like parasols on beaches during the summer season. From the way they waved towards the shooting location, it seemed that they were fans who had come to watch. There were around 30 from a glance, and including the people standing outside the sunshade umbrellas, it seemed that there were around fifty people. The ladies who were looking at the shooting location all turned their heads in unison. A man walked out of the group of people behind the staff lines. He waved towards the fans before standing in front of the cameras. Maru had a close look at the man's face after he left the curtain of men. The man with disheveled hair, wearing a t-shirt that had the collars all stretched out was none other than Ahn Sungjae.

“Ahn Sungjae-oppa! I love you!”

“Sungjae-oppa! Please look over here!”

There was another group a little away from the group of people with sunshade umbrellas, and they were screeching their lungs out. They seemed to be a group of middle school girls. The staff quickly went over and asked them to refrain from doing so, but the teenage girls did not easily quiet down. In the end, Sungjae had to go over himself.

“He’s having a hard time.”

Maru looked around to look for another person. Sungjae being here meant that Geunsoo was probably nearby as well. A little away from Sungjae, who was at the center of attention, was a person who was crouching down with a large black umbrella open above him. It was Geunsoo. There were fans who had come to see Sungjae, but no one showed an interest in him.

Maru approached Geunsoo. As it was a little far away from the shooting location, there was no problem going there.

“It’s hot, isn’t it?” he remarked as he kneeled and poked his head under the umbrella.

Geunsoo, who had been staring at Sungjae in a daze, blinked before yawning.

“It is. I’m sweating buckets.”

“Weather like this would probably make people collapse.”

“It would do more than just make people collapse. Look over there. Youth sure is good. They can stand in the scorching sun like that. What incredible stamina.”

Maru crouched down next to Geunsoo.

“Anyway, why are you here?”

“I was on my way home after an audition when I came across this place. I was wondering what was happening so I made a visit.”

“An audition? What audition?”

“It’s an audition Ganghwan hyung-nim recommended to me. It was rather peculiar.”

“Ganghwan did? If it’s his recommendation, of course it’s peculiar. He’s a peculiar guy himself, and he only befriends peculiar people.”

“So you must be one of them?”

“Probably? You are one too.”

“I’m extremely normal. You can’t find anyone more normal than me.”

“Crazy people don’t think of themselves as crazy people. But man, Sungjae’s popularity is through the roof huh.”

“Of course it is. He’s part of TTO, the top idol group in the country. Even if he’s taking a break from his activities, that popularity wouldn’t just vaporize.”

“That’s true. I was deeply impressed when I saw fans renting an entire coach to come all the way to the shooting location in the countryside. Their passion just goes to show how amazing Sungjae is after all.”

“Are you envious?”

“You think I’m not?”

“Why don’t you show off your friendship with Sungjae-hyung at this opportunity? I heard that TTO’s fan café has a member count in the hundreds of thousands. If you get a photo up there, your popularity will rise in an instant, don’t you think?”

“That’s a good idea, but I don’t need to do that. I’m going to become famous anyway, through acting, that is.”

His words which were uttered with a refreshing smile contained faith and confidence in his own skills. It would be rather off-putting if someone who was all talk and no bark said something like that, but Geunsoo saying it made Maru accept that naturally. Someone who would definitely succeed. He sounded as though he was stating that one plus one equals two.

“How’s the shoot?”

“It’s fun. I’m just hoping that the weather could help us out a little, but looks like that isn’t going to happen. Though, the director did say that it’s good to be able to see everything so clearly.”

“Where’s the director? I think I should say hello at least.”

“He went to talk with some people from the shopping complex, along with the location team manager. There was a prior agreement that we would shoot here, but it looks like some problem occurred. Thanks to that, the shoot is on hold.”

“Nothing’s easy, huh.”

“It’s definitely not easy to shoot a film on someone else’s territory.”

Maru moved sideways. A makeup artist had approached Geunsoo in order to fix his makeup. Maru was watching as she wiped the sweat off Geunsoo’s forehead with a makeup cotton and redid his facial tone, when he saw director Lee Jincheol walking over to the shooting location. He met eyes with the director. Maru greeted the director, who came over while waving his hand.

“You here to watch the shoot?”

“I actually had something else to do in Seoul, and I just came across this place by chance. Also, thank you for the videos you lent me. They’ve been very helpful.”

“Was there anything worth studying?”

“Yes. I’ve learned a lot thanks to them.”

“That’s good. We shot them ages ago, so the contents are blurry to me now. I’m glad that you could learn something from them. How was I in my younger days?”

“You haven’t changed.”

“I’m not sure if that’s an insult or a compliment.”

Maru faintly smiled. Jincheol grabbed the walkie-talkie and said that it was 10 minutes until stand-by. The door to the nearby café opened before people came out. They seemed to be the background actors.

“Are you busy?” Jincheol asked.

“No. I finished what I came here to do, so I have plenty of time.”

“Then wanna take a walk since you’re here?”

“Take a walk?”

Jincheol pointed at the fountain. The background actors had gathered there.

“You just need to walk by. I went over the script and thought about what role you could play, but it was hard to insert anything in the middle.”

“Oh, no, please don’t. You’re just giving me pressure. Just call me to an audition when you do your next piece. But do I just need to walk?”

“Yes. Just keep on walking. I’ll capture you in the middle of the frame once.”

“You don’t have to do that. I don’t have a decent face, so you won’t get a good picture if you do that.”

“Hey, you aren’t half-bad, you know?”

Maru looked at his phone once. He didn’t get a reply from Gaeul yet.

“But you are paying me a wage, right?”

“I’ll treat you to some coffee after this.”

“Thank you.”

Maru walked past the camera towards where the other background actors were waiting. He met eyes with Sungjae midway and just nodded lightly to greet him. Sungjae tried to come over, but the wall created by the fans was thick. Maru gestured to him to not come and joined the rest of the background actors.

“Yes, director. Okay.”

After receiving a message, the staff explained to them how they should move. Just as the director said, he just had to walk right past Sungjae, who was sitting by the fountain. Maru grabbed the coffee cup that the staff gave him and waited.

“Actors, please stand by.”

Sungjae, who was calming down the fans, started walking over to the director before turning his direction midway. Maru looked at Sungjae, who stood in front of him and spoke with a smile.

“Hyung, your popularity is through the roof.”



“That’s because the president put this on the official schedule. I’m rather flustered too because it’s been such a long time since this happened. But why are you here?”

Everyone he came across asked why he was here. Maru explained.

“How did the audition go?”

“I think I did okay. If it goes well, I’ll get to appear in a one-act play.”

“Congratulations. I’m sure you’ll do well.”

“Thanks. But hyung, the director’s waving at you to come.”

Sungjae turned around before hurriedly walking over. The fans all became quiet in an instant. It was good to see that they didn’t want to disturb the shoot. Some students who discovered Sungjae while walking by cheered out loud, but it wasn’t bad enough to pause the shoot. An expensive directional mic should be enough to filter that much noise.

“Let’s go, let’s go.”

The man who was called ‘assistant director’ by the others gave the start signal. Maru picked up his coffee cup and walked forward in leisure. Since he was outside of the camera’s focus, he just walked leisurely since there was no pressure when he heard the director giving the cut sign. The director looked very dissatisfied. When Maru followed his gaze and turned around, he saw a woman wearing a sleeveless shirt blinking her eyes multiple times.

“Assistant director, let’s do that again.”

The walkie talkie held by the assistant director made some sounds.

“We’re doing that again.”

Maru lightly dusted off the water droplets that formed on his coffee before returning to his original position.

“Uhm, what is your name?”

“I’m Choi Minae.”

“Miss Minae. Don’t look at the camera, okay?”

“Ah, yes. I won’t.”

“Alright, please focus on that. Also, wipe your sweat off before we do the next scene.”

Maru looked at the sleeveless shirt girl who soaked up the sweat from her head with some tissue. Although she was warned, it didn’t look like she cared. In fact, she met eyes with everyone who looked at her as though she was enjoying the attention. Maru also greeted her lightly. Was she someone who enjoyed something like that? Well, Maru thought that it was at least better than being nervous to death.

“We’re doing that again. Please stand by,” the assistant director shouted.

## **Chapter 648**

There was a cut signal, and the woman in the sleeveless shirt turned around with a smile. She didn't have an embarrassed expression nor an apologetic expression and just returned to her original position. This was the 2nd NG. She had been pointed out for the same mistake - don't look at the camera.

"Sorry, it keeps catching my eye."

Maru looked at her, who had a bright smile on her face. Her eyebrows were trimmed neatly and her makeup emphasized her facial features. She had the most decent appearance out of all the background actors. She followed the camera with her eyes even when the assistant director was telling her to be careful. Maru, who was right next to her, was able to observe that. She was scanning the camera as though she was admiring her own work with pride.

"I get that you're concerned about the camera, but looking at it straight on like that makes the film look strange."

"I'll do it properly this time."

"Please do that. Everyone's having a hard time because of the weather, so let's finish this in one shot and not drag things out."

The assistant director put the walkie-talkie against his mouth and said that things were ready. The director gave the signal. Geunsoo approached Sungjae, who was sitting by the fountain. Sungjae, who had disheveled hair, played the role of a new detective, and Geunsoo, who was wearing a neat suit and a pair of nice shoes, was the corrupt detective. From the gist of things, this looked like one of the beginning scenes. Geunsoo, who handed some coffee to Sungjae with a friendly smile on his face, looked like a man who worked in the finance business rather than a detective. He had a refreshing laugh and his movements were clean cut. He smelled like a charming villain. The two naturally clicked together. Sungjae was acting with passion in order to not lose to Geunsoo, and Geunsoo was accepting all of that as he did his own acting. This felt like the birth of a splendid duo.

"Go."

Maru took his eyes off them and started walking. Since the main characters showed such a smooth act, it was now the background actors' turn to give a sense of reality to the world they lived in. Maru calmly walked along the movement line that the assistant director told him about. The camera moved on some rails. The background actors walked between the main cast and the camera, and just as the main characters were about to disappear into the crowd, Maru noticed that the steps of the sleeveless shirt woman next to him were slowing. She, who was supposed to be right next to him right now, was now 3 meters behind him. Her steps slowed down just as she was exiting the frame. Having left the camera frame, Maru had a look at the woman who was walking proudly. She was chasing the camera through the corner of her eyes, before looking at the director, who stood up after looking at the monitor.

"Cut!"

The director shouted and also left his monitoring seat before walking over to where the background actors were. The woman in the sleeveless shirt only then looked around in unease. Her actions until now were plenty intentional. Maru couldn't understand what she was thinking when she decided to disrupt the shoot.

“Director, director!”

Before the director could reach the woman in the sleeveless shirt, someone jumped in midway. The director looked at the man before asking - what is it, leader?.

“Looks like she’s very nervous.”

“Is it someone you know, leader?”

“It is. Also, she’s pretty good at acting. She’s quite pretty too, and you won’t find someone as skilled as her so easily these days.”

“Leader.”

“I know, I know. I know what you’re trying to say, director Lee. Just let her go this once. We are close, aren’t we? Minae, Choi Minae. Come and say hello to the director.”

“Hello, director. My name is Choi Minae.”

The woman in the sleeveless shirt quickly went over and said hello. The director stroked down his face and told her to go.

“Don’t be like that, director. Give me a handshake.”

The woman in the sleeveless shirt only returned to her place after grabbing the director’s hand. This woman was rather proud-looking even when she was being warned. Then there was the leader who tried to resolve the situation with a smile, and then the director. Maru understood what was going on instantly. Maru looked at the director, who turned around with an expression that looked as though he had chewed on something bitter.

“Minae, do it properly.”

“Okay. I just wanted to get him to notice me. Thanks, ahjussi.”

The shoot only resumed after the two high-fived each other. The woman in the sleeveless shirt digested the scene in one go without causing an NG this time, unlike before. Actually, causing an NG in a scene like this was even harder.

“We’re moving over to the next location.”

The staff members picked up the equipment and started moving. The background actors were also guided to the commercial district. Maru approached the director.

“Thanks for your work, Maru.”

“I didn’t do anything. Rather than that, the shoot must be hard for you.”

The director made a bitter smile.

“That’s just how working with people goes. You’ll feel it when you grow up. Why does everyone call themselves ‘hyung-nim’ in front of me, I wonder....”

“There’s no one more awkward to deal with than someone who uses connections to join.”

“My words exactly.”

“But looks like she won’t do anything more since you dealt the first blow. I found her rather peculiar when I was watching her from the side. She suddenly changed her walking pace and then looked at the camera as though she was getting her eyes checked.”

“I guess she’s confident that she’ll rise if she shows her face to the camera. When you work in this area, you’ll come across a lot of people who you can’t measure with common means.”

The director gave a few orders through the walkie-talkie. The assistant director’s voice returned through it. The assistant director was asking him if he could come over.

“Maru, are you going to go now?”

“If you would allow me, I’d like to keep watching from the side. May I?”

“Of course you can. We’re going to eat soon, so you can join us there before you go. You did your work, so you should at least get your compensation.”

“Okay, I’ll do that then.”

After replying, Maru looked at his phone. No missed calls, no text messages. It seemed that Gaeul was practicing without any regard for her phone today. Seeing his wife’s face was even harder than seeing a celebrity’s face. Thinking about it like that caused a sad laugh to leave his mouth.

“Go talk to everyone else.”

The director pointed at Geunsoo and Sungjae before walking over to the assistant director. As he was walking over to the two men, who were having their make-up fixed, someone jumped in front. It was the woman in the sleeveless shirt.

“Hey, are you close to the director?”

She didn’t have any etiquette even though this was their first time talking. Maru tilted his head slightly and quietly stared at the woman. Either she was acting bold because she had the leader backing her, or she was born with that kind of personality. Maru wondered which one it was.

“Hey, kid. Can you not hear me?”

“Why do you ask?”

“Because you two looked close. I saw that the director was trying to put you into the film. You must be close to the director, right?”

“Well, who knows? Maybe I am, maybe I’m not.”

“What kind of an answer is that? Tell me properly.”

“So what if I am close?”

The woman pouted.

“Hey, you’re pretty rude.”

"I'm sorry if you heard it that way. But I thought the word 'rude' was supposed to be used to refer to people who cause two unnecessary NGs, am I wrong? Oh, wait, is 'brain dead' the right description to use here? As you can see, I'm kinda stupid."

"What are you saying?"

The woman in the sleeveless shirt glared at him. What was he saying? Did he have to explain in kind that he was mocking her? He didn't mind using personal connections to join something since that happened pretty often. The problem was that she made the entire shoot stop twice because of her deeds. If she wanted to promote herself, she had to use another means, not disturb the rolling of the film.

It's not like you to get angry like that - The moment Maru tried to say a word or two more to the woman in the sleeveless shirt, the guy that resided inside him spoke out. Maru heaved a deep breath as soon as he heard those words. While he was unaware, anger had gotten to the top of his head. 'Not like you' - the guy was entirely right. This kind of method wasn't like Han Maru.

"Sorry about that. I'm having a really bad day today so I must have blurted out something rude without realizing. I must have become strange because of all the heat on top of the anger."

He smiled awkwardly. The woman did not remove her suspicion, but it seemed that she put down the arrow of words that she was about to attack with.

"I'm not that close to the director. I'm only close enough to say hello."

"Also, I saw you talking with Sungjae-oppa too."

"Sungjae-hyung only recognized me because we shot something together before. He's not a star for no reason. He really takes good care of the people around him."

"Really? You aren't close or anything like that?"

Maru just replied with a shrug. The woman in the sleeveless shirt narrowed her eyes at him before sighing.

"And here I thought you were close. I was planning to get you to introduce me to them, but I guess that's not happening. But hey, I didn't see you in the morning."

"The director asked me to fill in the head count."

"Really? You must be living a pathetic life too then. You know, let me give you some advice, don't work in this field unless you have a backer. This noona is telling you this after experiencing more life than you. A rude boy like you will have a hard time even with a backer. No offense, but that's just how the world is."

"I see."

"You're a high school student, aren't you?"

"Yes."

"Just go back home and start studying. Don't poke your head around here just because you want to become a celebrity. Okay? If you work part time jobs like this one from a young age and neglect your

studies you will fail life. Only those with both talent and backing like me can succeed in this field. Consider yourself lucky today. Other people don't tell you stuff like this, do they? I'm a good person, so I'm telling you as a special bonus, okay? Don't have weird dreams and just go back home and study. You don't have good looks either, so you don't fit in this world."

"I'll keep that in mind."

"Now we're talking. Don't be so disappointed. Now that I look at you, you don't look like you're good at studying, but you do look quite athletic. Am I right?"

"Yes. I do have decent motor nerves."

"There you have it, go to that side. Don't poke your head around here and make your parents worried. You're really lucky today, you know? You won't hear philosophical talk like this from anyone else."

"Yes, thank you."

The leader shouted to gather up from afar. The woman in the sleeveless shirt, Choi Minae, turned around and walked away.

"Someone you know?" Geunsoo approached him and asked.

"No."

"It looked like she was preaching to you."

"I did hear some life lessons."

"What'd she say?"

"She said my face isn't good enough to make a living in this field, so I should get back to studying. Oh, wait, she told me to choose an athletic field, because I look like I'm terrible at studying."

Geunsoo tapped on his shoulder and laughed.

"What an absurd woman. Do you know her name?"

"Choi Minae, apparently."

"Looks like I should keep that in mind."

"Why?"

"Because if you want to avoid shit, you have to know shit. But you're pretty amazing yourself. You listened to all that with a smile on your face?"

"Well, you never know when I'll come across her again. They say you shouldn't make enemies if possible."

Then the fact that you still got angry at her is proof that you have come to like acting just as much - the masked man's voice resounded within him again. The guy was kinda distasteful seeing as how he didn't reply when Maru called out to him, but he still said everything he wanted to before disappearing. To borrow Choi Minae's words, he was rude.

“Since you’re here, you should eat before you go. Our almighty Lord Sungjae apparently booked a good restaurant.”

“That was the plan. I don’t have anything to do, and I don’t have anyone to meet either.”

“You’re still young, why do you sound so miserable?”

“You tell me. Oh, Geunsoo hyung-nim, how is it going with Suyeon-noona lately?”

“That was abrupt. That’s not how you hold conversations, boy. You’re making my head hurt.”

“Don’t tell me you’re dating?”

“If the Earth explodes tomorrow, then I guess dating her is not a bad idea.”

“Suyeon-noona would love to hear that.”

“Don’t even start. I’ve never seen someone as sticky as her in my life. She might be an even bigger lunatic than Yang Ganghwan and Yang Miso.”

“That’s taking things too far.”

“Hey, you have a rather positive opinion about her. Are you on her side or something?”

“If I bridge the two of you together, I’ll get a full suit as a gift. A good one at that.”

“I’ll buy you two, so what do you think about separating us?”

“That sounds tempting. I’ll think about it.”

Maru said that he should go before walking over to the background actors. He met eyes with Minae midway, but neither of them said anything.

“It’s a hard job, isn’t it?”

He talked to a man in his 40s, who was sitting next to him. At first, the man looked at him in puzzlement, but they soon got along and talked to each other. Maru talked to other people as well. Perhaps it was because he had done this background actor job for a long time, but he had a strange sense of kinship with the people who did this job. He wanted to do more things for them if possible. The scattered people eventually gathered around him. The woman in the sleeveless shirt did not join them. She kept staring at Sungjae and the director, looking for an opportunity to approach them.

“This fella is good with words.”

“Staying still while waiting is pretty boring after all. We should talk like this and get to know each other. That way, we’ll be able to greet each other the next time we meet in a different place too. Hyung-nims, noonims, don’t ignore me when I say hello later, okay?”

“Of course.”

Time went by in a flash when people talked about their circumstances. The stiff air disappeared and they gathered like people who had come on a picnic together. As a man in his thirties talked about how he had just become a father, the assistant director gave the standby sign.

“Hyung-nims, noonims. Let’s get to work.”

Maru clapped before standing up.

## Chapter 649

“We’ll begin after you change into the clothes you have brought.”

Maru changed into a shirt that the staff provided for him. The other background actors changed into the clothes they brought as well before gathering up.

“It should be fine if we don’t change our clothes. I mean, we just walk by, don’t we?”

“That’s true, but people in the audience with good eyes can catch it. If someone that just walked by walks around the main characters wearing the same clothes, it breaks the immersion. That’s why they change the clothes of the background actors so that they don’t look like the same person as much as possible. They might change their hairstyle too.”

Maru responded with that to the woman wearing glasses, who was standing next to him. She said that this was her first time doing this part time job, and that she didn’t know much. As this job didn’t require any special skills or a long time investment, there were many people who chose to do this job as a part time job. Most of the time, they only do it once, but there were quite a lot of people who did this for a living.

“Oh, I know how that feels. It does bother you.”

The woman with glasses nodded. Another woman, who had freckles, spoke after listening for a while.

“Me too. I usually don’t care about things like that, but once I do catch one, I keep looking for people in the background instead of focusing on the main characters. If I find the same person again, then it’s fun because it feels like I found a flaw in a jade or something.”

“Right, that’s how it feels.”

The two clicked with each other since they were friends. Behind the two was the woman with the sleeveless shirt. Her name was Choi Minae, huh. She was looking at the director like a lovestruck girl. She was clearly obsessed. Maru wondered just how shameless a person could be.

“The shoot is getting delayed.”

It had been thirty minutes since they were told to gather, but the camera wasn’t showing any signs of rolling. The director had been talking to the camera director for 10 minutes now. Maru couldn’t hear their conversation, but from the expression on the director’s face, it didn’t seem like things were going smoothly.

“But hey. Do we always have to wait so long?”

The one who asked was a man wearing a baseball cap. He was in his fifties, and he said that the grocery store he was running went out of business and that he came across this job while looking for a job. He was a man who had to quit the business he had nurtured from scratch and then jump into a totally different field. Maru could only treat this man well since he willingly stood up to fight against



unfamiliarity in order to solve the basic problem that was living. A father, or a husband with a family to take care of would probably feel the same as him.

“You said that the first place you went to was a drama shooting scene, right? In Seoul.”

“Yeah, that’s right. Back then, I sat around in a large hall for around one or two hours, I think? I just drank some canned drinks while feeling the cool air from the air conditioner. After that, they just told me to go home since they were done. It was so easy that it made me wonder if that was really okay.”

“It really depends on your luck. There are some where you get to sit around casually before leaving, and there are some, like this one, where you have to slave away under the sun. If you’re planning to do this in the long term, you should register yourself at a company and get close to the leader. Also, avoid historical films in the summer and winter.”

“Are historical dramas that hard?”

“It can’t be helped. There’s the outfit as well, but the more important thing is that most of the shoot happens away from the capital, so the trip takes a lot of time and energy as well. Doing it during Spring and Autumn is relatively okay, but if you run around wearing armor under weather like this, you might be having an interview with the grim reaper. He’d probably ask why you came so early when it’s not your time.”

“I’ll remember that. Thanks for telling me all this. I was kinda nervous last time because I didn’t know anything. The younger people moved around busily as though they knew something, but I didn’t know anything.”

“I was also dazed when I first worked this job. I just found out some tricks after doing it for a while. If you feel like you can adapt to this job, it’s not a bad idea to keep doing it. I’ve seen many people who’ve started off as background actors before proceeding to become minor actors. It’s easier if you’re older because the industry people would call out to people who are known to be decent.”

“Do you think I can keep doing this job? I’m not sure about standing still like this, but I don’t think I can do anything that requires me to move around busily. Acting is not my thing either.”

“You don’t have to worry that much. It’s just like selling groceries. It might make you feel embarrassed and might make you wonder why you have to smile at strangers in order to sell your stuff, but after you keep doing it, you end up smiling naturally and become a smooth talker, am I wrong? It might seem rather cocky of me to say this since I’m young, but the jobs in this world are generally similar.”

The man with the baseball cap nodded with a faint smile. When he finished talking, Maru realized that people had gathered around him. They were the people who had gotten to know each other during break time while chatting with each other. Another woman started speaking, saying that she had a tip as well. Following that, other people gave their tips and precautions as well. They talked about this background acting job in this small network that had formed.

“If you're not doing this short-term, then it wouldn't be bad to exchange contact info and share things now and then. The place I worked at before did things like that. It works like this: the leader would get access to where people could work, and then they would send out information and get people to

contact each other. People get their work from each other, and it's also easier to have someone else fill in for you if you can't make it to a certain job on short notice."

Maru added that midway.

"So it's like a fishing net huh. I was actually thinking about doing this properly, so I'd love to have people I can contact."

"Me too. I'm trying to do this in the long run."

"I'm not going to do it that often, but I hope I can get to know a lot of people. We can help each other out when we have a hard time."

"Should we exchange numbers? I think that's a good idea."

"Well, they say you can't have too much information."

About fifteen people gathered in a circle before starting to exchange numbers. Maru quietly looked at them. Due to the nature of background acting, there were a lot of cases where the actors were bossed around by the brokers. Since it wasn't a regular job, it was hard for the workers to form a relationship with each other, and as a result of that, they would scatter and work individually. In the market, an individual worker was just a target of exploitation so there were a lot of cases where they would get scammed. He had also seen many cases where the leader just took 'fees' and did not give them any work. This happened because the individual workers did not have access to the bare minimum amount of information. However, these people were probably going to be okay now. Once they shared information among themselves, they would no longer be scammed out of their hard-earned money.

"Hey, what about you?"

That voice was directed at Maru. Many eyes were looking at him.

"It was you who talked about it. Since it's like that, let's exchange numbers and share information if we come across one. Or perhaps you don't plan to do this job long term?"

"Maybe he's only here for today because he's still young?"

"No. He's pretty knowledgeable about this area, isn't he? How would someone who only worked here for a day or two know about that?"

"That's true."

While he kept quiet, everyone exchanged words among themselves. Then they became quiet before the woman with glasses spoke.

"You said you were still in high school right? Are you here for a part time job after all?"

"No, it's not really a part time job. I'm also doing various things because I want to become an actor."

"Really? Then give us your number. It must be fate that brought us together, so it'd be good if we could get to know each other."

Everyone was waiting with their phones open. It was indeed Maru who brought up the topic in the first place, but he didn't mean that he wanted in, he just wanted to let them know they should look after themselves. He was telling them that they should help each other in order to not get exploited by others. Maru was young so he thought that they'd only do it among themselves, but he got an unexpected offer. He was still in high school and wouldn't be able to share much, yet everyone was eagerly waiting for his number. Maru smiled back at them.

"That'd be great for me. Hyung-nims, noonims, I hope I can get close to you. Also, treat me to food from time to time. I'm the youngest here, so I'd love to get treated."

"Hey, we are having a hard time too. But I guess I can pay for food if we meet up every now and then."

"I'll pay for the drinks then."

"Hey, he's still in high school."

"These days, high school boys start drinking quite early. You drink too, don't you?"

Maru looked around to look at all the people who had circled around him. He felt like he understood why elder Moonjoong would often join the background actors and laugh with them whenever he had time during shoots. Whether emotionally or for work, these were the kind of people who were closest to him at the shoots. There were people who aspired to be actors, and there were people who simply tried to make some money out of background acting without having any huge dreams. Their dreams and natures were all unique, but they shared a common point in that they all earned money by appearing in films like this and that they did acting for a living. All animals found relief when they were in a group, so the animals known as actors were probably finding comfort when they hung around those who had similar natures as them. The noble and proud breed might not approach this kind of group because of the messy nature it's based on, but Maru liked this kind of group, which was a cluster of different and complex background circumstances.

"My number is...."

After he said his number, he got a lot of text messages at once. They had another conversation to learn each other's names. Although this group happened rather suddenly. There was no awkwardness. They even made an appointment to drink together after the shoot. The middle-aged man with the baseball cap said that he'd treat everyone. He shouted heartily as though he had forgotten that his grocery store went out of business. That was a fast track to get a smashing from his wife. Maru laughed when he thought about it.

"Wait. I think I saw you somewhere before, Maru."

The woman with glasses tilted her head before taking her glasses off. She told Maru to stay still before putting the glasses on Maru.

"That's right! That drama. Was it New Semester?"

"What the heck is that?"

"Ah, you're right!"

Half of them didn't know about it, but the other half did. The ones that did started explaining to others what it was about and soon they all knew about it. The kid that appeared in a drama - that was his new title now.

"Looks like we didn't recognize a fully fledged actor."

"Oh no, it's fine to not recognize me since I don't really have any recognition."

"You should've told us. You're a celebrity after all."

"There's nothing more pitiful than trying to paint yourself in gold. It is only cool when other people recognize you."

Maru returned the glasses to the original owner.

"Then I guess we know an actor's number, huh? Or maybe you don't use this number that often?"

"I use it all the time. I'm a nameless actor, so I won't get called anywhere either."

"You are on TV. You aren't exactly nameless."

"Apparently, being on TV doesn't make you amazing. There's the money too. Don't ask about it because it's a sensitive topic."

Maru sighed softly in relief after he said those words. Their eyes towards him didn't change. If someone looked at him with eyes filled with expectations, he might have felt bitter. He wanted to leave this good meeting as a good meeting until the end.

"What was that? What is up with this kid?"

Seemingly having overheard, an unwanted face joined them. Maru did not reply and looked at the woman with the sleeveless shirt, Choi Minae. Go away - he barely swallowed those words to stop them from coming out of his mouth. He didn't want to deal with this woman since she had the stereotypical 'I'm evil' eyes.

"What the heck was that? You're leaving me out?"

Just as the woman with the sleeveless shirt joined the group while trying to act cute, the assistant director gave the signal. Everyone stand by - Maru walked past the woman immediately.

"This is the last time apparently, so let's do our best," he said as he ignored the stare from the woman with the sleeveless shirt.

## **Chapter 650**

"Get a decent-looking actor ready. Also, find out when the child actor is coming."

That came out from the assistant director's walkie-talkie. The walls of the buildings had turned yellowish now. The shoot moved on to the next scene. Geunsoo and the actress that played his wife were sitting on a café terrace. From the way their shoulders touched each other's without making them look awkward before the shoot, they seemed to be on pretty close terms.

"Actors have it good. They get good treatment."

“That’s true.”

The woman with glasses and the woman with freckles spoke as they looked at the café terrace. The other background actors also commented.

“Maru, do you also get that kind of treatment when you go to a shoot?”

“Someone as lowly as me would never get that treatment.”

“How about your manager? Doesn’t your manager look after you?”

“I do have a manager, but he’s in charge of all the child actors and usually moves around with Sooil a lot. The other child actors usually work without a manager.”

“Sooil?”

“Oh, there’s someone named Yoo Sooil.”

“Ah, Yoo Sooil! I know him. I saw him in a drama before. Didn’t he shoot a commercial as well?”

“He’s famous after all.”

For some time, everyone asked him about Yoo Sooil. He didn’t know anything much, so he couldn’t give them a specific answer. The people asking questions also changed topics after hearing obvious answers. They asked what being an actor was like, what they had to do, and what was hard about it. Maru replied with what he could and what he knew. He neither exaggerated nor undermined it. He only said the facts so that it could be a guideline for those looking to walk down this path. They would have to choose whether they proceeded forward or turned back.

“She’s here.”

That came from one of the staff. A car entered the parking lot and a woman walked out after the car stopped. The woman, wearing sunglasses, immediately opened the passenger seat. Maru looked at the girl getting out of the car. She was Kim Bitna, who walked boldly with a child’s face. She walked over to the terrace and sat in between Geunsoo and the actress. Geunsoo grabbed Bitna’s hand and waved it around.

“Looks like she’s that woman’s daughter.”

“She’s pretty. My daughter was cute like that when she was that age.”

Maru smiled as he listened to the grocery store man’s words. The shooting set became busy along with the arrival of Bitna. Makeup stylists all flocked to Bitna, while the director approached the three people sitting on the terrace and explained to them what they had to do.

“Looks like it’ll start soon.”

Maru stood up and did some stretches. The sun was going down. The assistant director, who had been looking at the sky for a while now, grabbed the walkie-talkie and called the director. It seemed that the sky was finally in the color they wanted. The director also looked up at the sky from the café terrace. From the way he nodded, he seemed satisfied with that as well.

Maru finished off his exercise by trilling his lips to relax his facial muscles. It wasn't that he was going to do an emotional act in front of the camera, it was just something he did out of habit before every shoot. He also took a deep breath. The air at a shooting location would be thick and would make him pant if he didn't breathe plentifully right now. He had gotten used to that environment after shooting dramas, but it was still pretty difficult to deal with. He would probably never feel at home during a shoot until he retired.

"You'll start from this bench."

The assistant director walked forward. The background actors followed him and learned about their movement path. They walked past the terrace the main actors were sitting on and entered the café.

"You and you. Sit down here. We'll bring you coffee so talk to each other naturally. Anything is fine. The camera won't be able to catch your mouth in detail. If you don't have anything to say, you can recite the national anthem."

The glasses woman and the freckles woman sat at the table next to the main actors. It seemed that they were chosen because they were decent-looking college students. There were a total of three tables on the terrace, and the sleeveless took the last table. She was putting on a pose while holding a cup with a straw in it.

"We're starting the shoot. You just have to start from the starting point and walk over once we give you the signal."

They left the café. Along with the action sign from the director, the main actors started acting. Geunsoo, the actress, and Bitna produced a bright mood and showed what a harmonious family was like. Just as the café part timer actor came out with the drinks for the main characters, the assistant gave the signal. It was the signal to move. Maru looked at the background actors behind him before moving first. There were people who were uneasy about their movement, so he decided their path for them beforehand. Ahjussi, go past the bench, hyung, walk towards the street lamp, and noona, to the center - like that.

A dozen or so people walked past the café. Maru went inside the café and looked at the last background actor that was leaving the camera angle. Everyone moved according to their predetermined paths without making a mistake. If an extra made a mistake, they would get an earful 100% of the time. A leader with a bad personality would swear at them as well. Mistakes were only tolerable for the main actors.

"Cut! Again."

The director's loud voice could be heard. He was shaking his head as though he didn't like this. Maru listened to the director's voice that was coming out of the assistant director's walkie-talkie - Assistant director, the two women at the front are too frozen up.

The assistant director approached the glasses and the freckles and said something. It seemed that he was consoling the two, telling them not to be so nervous. It seemed to be going well until the freckles stood up.

"I don't think I can do it. I'm too nervous."

The staff sighed and put down the equipment, which made the freckles turn pale. Unlike the glasses, who had an interest in acting, freckles just came here following a friend. It was hard to receive gazes from over fifty people including the staff and the onlookers. To someone without immunity, attention was nothing more than a net that strangled them.

The assistant director tried to calm her down to no avail. The leader, who was watching from the side, also stepped up. The leader sent away freckles and walked over to the director. Maru observed the situation before approaching freckles.

“Are you okay?”

“Yeah, I think I’m okay now. But before, I thought I was dying.”

Freckles sighed in relief. Glasses also approached and patted her on the back.

“Uhm, who is Han Maru?”

That was the assistant director with the walkie-talkie. Maru raised his hand.

“The director’s looking for you.”

When he left the café, he saw the director standing right in front of him.

“Maru, can you replace that woman from before? We don’t have any decent faces around right now.”

“Okay, I can do that. I don’t have to do anything specific, right?”

“No. You just need to sit down and have a chat. If possible, try to get the woman sitting in front of you to relax.”

Just as he was about to return to the café after nodding, the leader spoke out in a loud voice.

“Director Lee, I said we can just pull her forward. She won’t make a mistake now, you know?”

“Leader, she has a very strong face. It’ll be captured by the camera all the time, and it doesn’t look good.”

“But the young ones are all pretty and fashionable these days, you know? And it will look more realistic as well.”

“Leader.”

“Director Lee, don’t say that and just try her out once. I’m not saying this because she’s the daughter of a friend of mine, but because she really has the skill. She had the power to attract attention.”

“Yes, I get that the lady over there has a character. But just like you said, she attracts attention. An extra should look like an extra. Look at that.”

The director pointed at sleeveless who was sitting at a table on the terrace. As soon as she realized that the director was looking at her, she crossed her legs and leaned back before making a drowsy face. Maru couldn’t tell whether she was trying to boast her feminine beauty or was acting, but it was clear that she wanted attention.

“She might look like that right now, but she’ll change dramatically once the shoot begins.”

“I don’t believe in actors who say ‘they’ll switch modes once they start the shoot’. Do you think actors that get into the emotion before the shoot do that because they have nothing better to do?”

The director had raised his voice a little. It seemed that the frustration and anger he had suppressed with a cap known as ‘relationship’ had reached the limits of the cap. The leader immediately stopped telling him about using sleeveless as a better character and accepted. He probably noticed that probing the director out further would result in losses. The leader scanned Maru from top to bottom before walking away from the monitor.

“He’s rather consistent.”

“He doesn’t have a bad personality, but he covers for the people he considers his own a little too much. I really want to flip everything over when he acts like that from time to time, but he never crosses the line. His ability to not cross the line just by a hair’s breadth is so precise.”

Maru was reminded of the leader’s eyes. He had a look at the café. The leader was talking to sleeveless. When sleeveless tilted her head in dissatisfaction, the leader quickly combed his rather spare hair sideways. It seemed that he was embarrassed that he wasn’t able to show his friend’s daughter his own abilities.

“Should I go up just like this?”

“Should we comb your hair backwards? To make you look older, I mean.”

When he went to the café terrace and sat down, a woman holding makeup tools approached him and touched up his face and hair. While undergoing makeup, Maru felt a prickly gaze, and it was from the leader and sleeveless.

“Are you the one?”

“Yes. The director told me that he doesn’t care even if it’s a couple.”

“Really?”

Glasses, who was sitting in front of him, smiled faintly before sighing. It wasn’t that she was at leisure, she just liked the fact that she could be in front of the camera. She was talking naturally while holding the coffee cup before, but right now, she sat upright and looked clearly stiff. It seemed that the absence of her friend had brought out her nervousness.

“Why am I so nervous all of a sudden...?”

Glasses kept blinking endlessly. Her eyes were looking towards her friend, freckles, in a nervous manner. Unease exuded from her eyes. Maru tapped on the table to get her attention.

“Do you know how many dwarves lived with Snow White?”

“Why do you ask so suddenly?”

“No particular reason. How many were there?”



"Isn't it seven?"

"Correct. Then what was the material of the magical carriage that took Cinderella to the ball?"

"A pumpkin of course. Why are you asking such a thing?"

Just as glasses was becoming curious, Maru saw the background actors start to move. Following that, they got a sign from the assistant director.

"Ready."

And roll - Following that, the slate could be heard as well. The only remaining one was the director's action call. Glasses' lips trembled. 1, 2, 3, action - as soon as that came out, Maru grabbed the cup with his hand.

"Noona, do what I do."

"Huh?"

"For now, try grabbing the cup like this."

"C-can we talk like this? The camera's rolling now, isn't it? It will be an NG if our voice gets captured, and that...."

"It's fine. Go on."

Behind glasses were the main cast, who were acting. As soon as she heard a voice from behind, glasses tried to look back with a stiff expression.

"Noona, look at me."

Maru estimated the location of the camera and turned around slightly so that his expression wouldn't be captured. Then he stretched out the part below his nose and widened his eyes.

"I look like a monkey, don't I?"

Glasses looked at him with absurdity before laughing with her mouth covered as though she was coughing. What are you doing - while she was saying that, her eyes were drawing a curve.

"The camera might see you."

"It can't. According to the layout right now, it's shooting my shoulder, so your face won't appear in it either, you know?"

"Really? Did it just go past us?"

"Of course. Did you think that the camera would be shooting you all the time? Aren't you a little too full of yourself?"

"We're pretty close to the main actors, so I thought I was in it for sure."

"Honestly speaking, your face doesn't look that good, so they can't afford to shoot you for a long time."

"Hey, what's wrong with my face? I'm not too shabby."

“And where’s that confidence coming from?”

“I look pretty decent, don’t I?” glasses said as she raised her chin a little.

Maru smiled. At the same time, an ‘okay’ could be heard from afar.

“What the heck? Is it done, just like that?”

“Yes, it’s over. Well done. Your expression was really good.”

Maru heaved out a heavy breath before stretching his arms out. If she stayed frozen in front of the camera, the director would have shouted cut instead. It was rather fortunate that they finished without a hitch, but Maru thought that she just barely made it. Freckles walked over and complimented the two, saying that the two looked great. Just as Maru was looking at glasses, who looked confused, Maru saw Bitna, who was walking over to him.

“Hello, oppa.”

“Hi, Bitna. How have you been?”

“Good.”

“You were good at acting back there. I should learn a thing or two from you.”

“Thank you.”

Bitna bowed as though she learned that she should thank people if she was complimented. Maybe this was why people said that daughters were great. When he looked at Bitna, who looked at him with round eyes, Maru was reminded of her sister. He wondered if she was doing well and whether she got rid of the problem she had. Just as he was about to ask, everyone was told that they should eat. It was time for dinner.