

## Once Again 791

### Chapter 791. Sequence 6

“I want to say that I’m doing this to gain experience, but I’m actually just trying various things out because I feel uneasy if I don’t do anything. Whether it’s actors or writers, it’s not like ‘experience’ will get you better treatment, so I’m even more uneasy. Of course, there might be people who might give me good treatment if I say I worked in this field for a long time, but if you ask me who I’ll choose if I had to choose between a young writer who had written a popular piece and a middle-aged writer who wrote so-so pieces, even I would lean towards the young writer. So how would the investors think about it? I would graduate in no time, and once I graduate, I would have to start looking for a way to live my life. I’m afraid because I chose writing as my career; the path to a livable wage with writing is quite narrow. It’s because I’m afraid that I’m struggling. I’m hoping that this short film will become a line in my experiences section on my resume.”

Bangjoo looked at Daemyung’s back and recalled what he said. Dreams always looked distant, but actually, they were often closer to reality than not. Everyone dreams of consolidating their foundations and proceeding on the path they seek, but they would often realize that their dreams were buried underneath the foundation they built up when they actually try reaching out to it.

“Living and doing what you want at the same time must be hard, right?”

Aram, who was eating pork belly at his side, rolled her eyes up and down. What the heck are you on about all of a sudden? – she seemed to say with her eyes.

“It’s Daemyung-hyung’s words. He seems worried. He keeps handing in applications to competitions, but he’s not even getting a critique back, so he must be uneasy.”

“I’m sure he must be worried. Living through writing isn’t easy, is it? Though, I’m sure it’s a different story for popular writers.”

“I even felt sorry for him when I heard his story. I honestly never worried about money. I mean, my sister paid for the living expenses and my education after all.”

“That’s right, you’re blessed. You have a top star as a member of your family. Oh, give me the ssamjang.”

Bangjoo picked up the ssamjang and put it in front of Aram.

“I probably would have also chosen to do something else if I wasn’t in a good financial situation. Maybe I would’ve become an ordinary salaryman or learned some skills since I like to use my body.”

“That’s what most people go through. But most of the time, if it’s truly something you want to do, you end up doing it. I also graduated from a two-year college and entered a small company as an accountant. I didn’t even enroll in a four-year program like my mom’s friend’s daughter, so I couldn’t even try out large companies. The only thing left on the list were small companies. I worked hard for the past two years. It was pretty okay. It wasn’t something I wanted to do, but after I had become close to them, I kinda felt like it was destined for me. I was getting a monthly salary, and they were even going to raise my pay next year, so I didn’t have a reason to quit either. I’ve liked sports since I was in middle school, so I always thought that I’d be teaching kids when I grow up, but earning a stable income is more

important, isn't it? That's how it was until Christmas Eve last year. Just as I was going home after work, the general manager called out to me. I went back to the office and checked the announcement through the company intranet, and I had this thought – ah, I'm going to work as a sports teacher. That's when I quit and started working with the dojo master I'm working with now," Aram said as though it was nothing much.

"If I was you, I wouldn't have been able to do all that."

"I'm pretty sure that's not true. This is a personal opinion of mine, but people are bound to do what they like. I do hear that people often end up just doing what they're doing because of money, but don't you think that they'll quit if they find that it really doesn't suit them? It's because it suits them, before they can say that they're compromising, that they continue doing it. If it was completely outside of what they wanted to do, they wouldn't even think about staying. In the end, it's about the degree of suitability. Either do something that suits you 100% like what I'm doing or do something that suits you about 80 to 90%. If it's closer to 0%, I don't think you can do it just because you have no choice. Most of the time, people shoot themselves out if they find that the place they are in is a pit of fire."

Bangjoo nodded. He never realized that the girl who always looked like a brute was thinking of something like this.

"You really can't judge a book by its cover, huh?"

"Somehow, that sounds like an insult to me."

Aram raised a spoon. Bangjoo also raised his and got into a defensive position.

"Until when are you going to continue being archenemies, huh? You should get along already," Maru said from the far table.

Bangjoo wanted to defend himself by saying that she started it, but he didn't say anything because it might make him look petty.

Thanks to the smooth shooting progress, they were able to eat the pork belly, which they were going to eat tomorrow once all the shoots ended, earlier than they expected. Grilling meat while sitting on a bench where they could hear the mountain stream flowing down under the moonlight was a pretty emotional thing. Bangjoo, who grilled some meat on the cauldron lid provided by the cabin owner, handed the pieces out to various people before returning to his seat.

"Maru-seonbae definitely looks better now, right?" Aram said as she flipped over the pork belly being grilled.

"For sure. It must be like what Jiyeon said, and he resolved the romantic problem he was having."

"It's quite unexpected. Like you said, you can't judge a book by its cover. Who knew that he would have received such a shock? I thought he would be far from the romanticist who would be hung up over their first love."

Bangjoo ate a piece of meat and looked at Maru who was sitting on the other bench. From high school until now, they had continued their senior-junior relationship while meeting each other around a couple times a week to around once a month. Most of his classmates, who he thought he was close to,

contacted him less and less, and he had lost news of most of his college friends ever since they went to the military, but this seonbae who was a year older than him still remained a close friend to him till this day. As they had known each other for a long time, Bangjoo thought that he knew what Maru was thinking to a certain extent. He at least believed that he would be able to notice what was on his mind even if he didn't say anything. It was when Maru notified him that he was going to the military that he realized that his belief was merely a misconception. Maru's eyes that day belonged to someone completely different.

"I'm sure a lot has happened to him. Perhaps he might be acting okay now too."

"That person never brings up his own problems from his own mouth, so you might be right."

Aram poured some soda and gave it to him. As they had the evening shoot left, alcoholic drinks were prohibited. Bangjoo raised the cup and toasted.

"Since we're at it, let's ask him directly."

Aram, who emptied the drink as she would a glass of soju, abruptly stood up and walked over to where Maru was. She tapped Maru, who was eating, on the shoulder before pointing her head elsewhere. The way she acted totally looked like she was some street thug picking a fight. Bangjoo only replied with a blank smile when Maru looked at him with a questioning look.

"You want me to cook meat for you?" Maru asked as he crouched down in front of the cauldron lid.

"Do you think we would call you over for something like that? You're supposed to be the main actor."

Aram snatched away the tongs that Maru was about to pick up.

"Then I wonder why you called me here. The fact that you called me out here separately means that you are either planning to threaten me or do something shady."

"I guess you can call it a threat. Maru-seonbae, let me say something blunt. When I had a look at your face last month, you looked like a rotten tangerine, to be honest. You know, that mushy feeling, right? You were smiling but not so smiling. I could see such an atmosphere from you."

Bangjoo raised his head to look at the sky. He did feel uneasy when Aram said she'd ask and walked over to Maru. She wasn't someone who would choose her words depending on the person, so he thought that she'd ask something blunt right off the bat. However, he had never realized that her choice of words would be that blunt. He feigned ignorance as though to signify that he was completely unrelated to this conversation, but Aram kindly pointed at his face and notified Maru that he was on her side.

"But when we looked at you today, you looked pretty okay. We were thinking that you got everything resolved just like what Jiyeon told us, but when we thought about it, you're known for your outer appearance being entirely different from what you're thinking."

"That's what I'm famous for?"

"Of course. So let me ask something. I heard that wounds gotten from people must be healed through people, right?"

"Yes."

“Seonbae, so did you find someone to be in a relationship with? If that’s the case, I can understand how the gloominess about you disappeared.”

“Unfortunately, there’s no one I’m meeting right now.”

“Then what is it? Honestly, the reason you turned into a zombie is that you broke up with that unni, isn’t it?”

Bangjoo poked Aram with his elbow. There were questions that she should and shouldn’t ask, but she didn’t seem to know the boundary between the two at all. Aram glared back at him, seemingly asking what was so wrong. Bangjoo became speechless. For a moment, he wondered how she managed to work at a company for a whole two years. Maybe the people at the company were all ascetics?

Maru, who stayed still in a daze as though he had been hit on the chest, suddenly smiled.

“There have been times when people asked me in a roundabout way but never this direct. I guess it does hurt to get hit directly on the face, huh.”

“I’m of the mind that being half-assed is useless. So? What happened? I can’t say that I know you well, but I at least know that you aren’t someone who can smile after forgetting about a problem you haven’t resolved. You are a serious romanticist, and you were hurt because of your breakup with your first love, right? It doesn’t make sense for someone to have transcended all emotions in just one month when you’ve been suffering for years. That leaves just two options. Either you met someone good that you forgot about your first love, or....”

Aram’s eyes widened as she spoke. Bangjoo also had a hunch as he listened to her, so he looked at Maru’s expression. He squinted his eyes like he would do when reading some tiny words in the corner of the newspaper. He wanted to check if what he saw wasn’t wrong. Maru was expressing that he was ‘taken aback’ with his entire face. That was something pretty hard to see. He suspected that he was not looking properly, so he squinted his eyes and checked again. The mouth of the smooth-talker who wouldn’t lose to anyone was sealed into a line. The man who never averted his gaze was glimpsing downwards. Bangjoo felt like he could hear Maru’s eyes rolling. After scratching his eyebrows to the point that it made the onlookers itchy, Maru spoke after a long while,

“I’m taken aback.”

“I know even without you having to say it. In fact, I was surprised instead to see you act like that. What is it? Are you two back together again? For real?”

“No, it’s not like that.”

“Come on, it’s not ‘not like that’. What was that expression just now? You looked like a boy in puberty. I almost felt my heart flutter. Seonbae, seonbae!”

Maru stood up, saying that he’d talk about it if he became able to. He was clearly fleeing. Aram wasn’t someone who would miss that. If Aram didn’t do it, Bangjoo would have. Aram, who had ten years of Judo experience, grabbed Maru by the sleeve. Maru shook his arm up and down, but if that was enough to shake her loose, Aram wouldn’t have grabbed him in the first place.

“Seonbae, you should sometimes let your worries out to your juniors.”

“Why do you look so bright when you want to listen to my worries? I’ll tell you about it later. I don’t really have anything to tell you right now.”

“Then let me ask you just one thing. If you lie, I’m never going to let you go.”

“Alright. I won’t lie.”

“Are you meeting that unni again?”

“No.”

“But you still like her, don’t you? Something happened between you two even though you aren’t back together yet, right?”

While listening to her question, Maru looked behind Aram with a serious expression like he had just witnessed a traffic accident. Bangjoo subconsciously followed his gaze. Aram did the same. At that moment, Aram exclaimed. Maru managed to shake her off.

“You were going to ask one thing, weren’t you?”

“Is this how you’re going to be? Also, don’t start acting all of a sudden. I thought that something really happened.”

“Nothing happened. And that’s the same with me as well. You should just continue eating. We’re going to go out once the sun sets.”

Bangjoo looked at Maru walking back to his bench. Although it was for a brief moment, his shaking eyes and his crooked lips expressed his inner heart that he had hidden until now.

“Maru-seonbae might actually be pretty sentimental,” Aram said from the side.

Maybe - Bangjoo agreed.

## **Chapter 792. Sequence 6**

“We’ll shoot the part where you walk all the way here and sit down.”

The shoot began with Ando holding the camera and coming towards them.

Hyungseok thought that the choice of location was incredibly good. It was 9 p.m. They managed to arrive at this apartment complex about two hours earlier than they originally planned. There was a six-lane road next to the apartment complex lined up along the Gapyeong river, but there wasn’t a single car on it. There were only families who came out to camp out to stave off the heat, as well as a group of people riding bicycles or using inline skates. According to Sora, cars were forbidden from passing through until the apartment complex on the other side of the river was completed; meaning, this was the perfect place to shoot.

“I ate so much pork belly, but I think I’ve digested it all. Maybe it’s because I was moving around busily.”

“Right. I also thought I ate quite a lot, but when I got out of the car, I couldn’t even remember what I had for dinner.”

“Don’t you have any snacks with you?”

“I don’t. I’m going to buy some after I finish this scene. I saw a convenience store on that road.”

While they chatted, they walked past the two actors who were walking in front of them. Hyungseok looked at Sora’s face as he left the sight of the camera. This thorough director did not allow for a single mistake and expressed it immediately whenever she found something that wasn’t to her liking. From how she wasn’t saying a single word with her eyes fixed on the laptop that was connected to the camera, this cut seemed to be to her liking. Aram, who was walking with him, held up her palm. After giving her a high five, he waited for the cut to end.

“Okay. We’ll continue the conversation scene after you sit on the bench here. Bangjoo-oppa, please turn on the generator. We need to set up the fill light.”

The shadow cast on the actors’ faces was controlled by the lighting. The two actors stood dead still like wax dolls as they accepted the light that was pouring on them from above and in front.

“I think that should do. Ando-oppa, put them in the frame. Let me have a look.”

Hyungseok checked the laptop screen from the back as well. It was much easier to make out the features on the actors’ faces than when the streetlight was the only source of light. When the camera settings were changed a little, the faces of the actors on screen became a little paler.

“I think the color temperature is okay like this. We’ll shoot like this once and shoot it again with a warmer tone.”

Hyungseok asked Sora if there was anything he had to do.

“Not now. We only need the two of them for now.”

“Then I’ll go to the convenience store over there for a bit. I think everyone’s getting hungry.”

“Oh, then I should give you my credit card.”

“Nah. I can buy snacks.”

“I can’t have you do that when you came here to help. I’m already sorry that I can’t pay you any wages.”

“I earned plenty. So don’t worry.”

“Then I’ll take you up on your offer. Actually, I was a little thirsty too.”

“I’ll take a special order for you then, director. Would you like coffee?”

“Yes. And a coffee for our camera director too. He likes the one with caramel in it,” Sora said as she looked at Ando who was sitting in front of the bench.

Hyungseok nodded. From his observations today, these two weren’t dating, but they were clearly not in a normal relationship either. Though, the problem seemed to be that they weren’t making any progress since the girl was on the active side while the man was passive.

“We’ll take a ten-minute break,” Sora said.

Hyungseok picked up his wallet and went to the convenience store. On the way, he suddenly heard someone running and turned around to see who it was, only to see Aram running towards him at a fast speed. Her running posture looked like a professional sprinter.

“Wait for me!”

They entered the convenience store and selected an assortment of bread and drinks. They also got some triangular rice balls and put them on the counter.

“You said you were preparing to become an actor too, didn’t you?” Aram asked as they left the convenience store.

“Yeah. I’m only in my first year though.”

“Are you close to Maru-seonbae?”

“Well, I at least think so, but I don’t know what Maru thinks about me. But we’ve been living together for two years, so I guess you can call us close?”

“Two years?”

“Military.”

“You were colleagues in the military?”

“Maru was one month senior.”

“Having him as a senior must have been tough. Maru-seonbae looks out for people a lot, but he also places a lot of importance on rules and order. Though, he does ignore them wholeheartedly when it is necessary.”

“In the beginning, it was tough for sure. He did everything perfectly like he had been to the military already, so he was practically an enemy to me and my colleagues. We always got chewed out for not doing as well as him, when he only came ahead of us by a month.”

“I can already picture that. Maru-seonbae doesn’t really show a weak side for sure.”

“It’s quite a mystery if I think about it. He never got scolded by the seniors for the entirety of two years. Forget weak, he looked like he was holding the answer sheet already. Every single one of his actions was the correct answer, so the seniors didn’t touch him. In fact, he got good treatment before he spent enough time.”

“Enough time, huh. It might be because I heard a lot about the military from my friends, but perhaps I should have gone to the military as well, as a female soldier. I think I’d do pretty well.”

“It’s kinda funny for me to say this when it’s our first time meeting today, but I think you’d do well too. You said you’re a teacher at a dojo, right?”

“I’m a teacher in name only. I’m more of a chauffeur. No wait, I guess I’m closer to a caretaker at a nursery?”

Aram took out a popsicle from the plastic bag and ripped the plastic packaging. The tip of the popsicle was covered in chocolate.

“Oppa.”

“Yeah?”

“I’m currently doing some background investigation right now. Get that?”

“Background investigation?”

Aram pointed at a bench in the distance with her finger. She was pointing at Maru and Sooil who were sitting down.

“Which one of those two?”

“Maru-seonbae, of course. What good would I get from investigating Sooil-oppa?”

“Investigating Maru?”

“I just became a little curious about something. Asking the person in question didn’t give me an answer, so I can only try going at it from the side. Of course, if it’s something you can’t answer, you don’t have to tell me. If you feel like you shouldn’t answer my question, then don’t talk about it. It’s simply a curiosity of mine after all.”

“Don’t you think there’s no need to dig into it if he doesn’t answer it himself?”

“No, Maru-seonbae is someone who draws clear lines. He’s someone who’ll clearly tell me to stop if he doesn’t want me to do it. The lukewarm reaction he’s showing me right now indicates that it’s not something that he’s that displeased about. Anyway, did Maru-seonbae mention anything about having a girlfriend when he was in the military?”

“Girlfriend?”

“Or maybe about someone he was getting along with? You know you talk about stuff like that in the military, don’t you?”

“Maru didn’t have a girlfriend. And as far as I know, there wasn’t a girl he was getting along with either. He didn’t have any interest in relationships. Once, I matched my vacation with him, and I told him that we should go play with some girls I got acquainted with while doing business, but he didn’t even pretend to listen to me. He’s a decent guy, so when he became a sergeant, both his seniors and juniors probed him to see if he wanted to be introduced to a girl, but he declined them all. That was why he even ended up joking that he might be gay....”

While saying those words, Hyungseok recalled Maru rejoicing after receiving Han Gaeul’s autograph. Though, his description of it, ‘the best and the worst’, was kinda confusing.

“What is it?”

“I just remembered that Maru has a celebrity he likes. If that’s the kind of girl he likes, I guess he has high standards. Maybe that’s why he declined all of our offers.”



“Celebrity? Who?”

“Han Gaeul. I saw her from up close when I went to work a part-time job, and she was definitely pretty alright. Looks like not anyone can become a celebrity. She’s down to Earth too. Maybe that’s the kind of girl Maru wants to meet.”

“Maru-seonbae said something like that? That he likes Han Gaeul?”

“He never actually said out loud but looking at the expression he made back then, I’m pretty confident that he likes her. I got an autograph from her for him. When Maru received that, he....”

“He?”

Saying that Maru introduced him to producer Yoo Jayeon wouldn’t result in anything good. Hyungseok smiled it off and continued speaking,

“He really liked it.”

“Really?”

“When I got the autograph from her, I told her that Maru is an actor in a theater. When I did, Han Gaeul even kindly wrote a comment on the autograph: Mr. Han Maru, I hope I see you on the same stage in the near future. She definitely knows how to make people pleased.”

“Aha, the same stage? That’s what Gaeul-unni said, huh?”

“She didn’t say it. She wrote it down. But hey, did you say Gaeul-unni? That makes it seem like you know her.”

“Something like that. Maru-seonbae, I knew it was like this. No wonder.”

“What is it?”

“I’m sorry, but it’s a secret for now.”

“You made me spit out everything.”

“I’ll tell you about it when I interrogate Maru-seonbae later and have him admit to his crimes. Maru-seonbae, he’s a total romanticist.”

Aram thanked him and slapped him on the back before walking away. Hyungseok cringed and straightened out his shoulders to move his back muscles. Her slap was way too spicy.

“Total romanticist?”

Hyungseok looked at Maru sitting on the bench underneath the street lamp. Maru? A romanticist? Where did she get that idea?

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Maru sighed softly. Aram was just grinning in satisfaction right next to him without even telling him the reason.

“Just what the heck is it?”

“Nothing. I just like your acting so much. How can you look so good in a school uniform? I almost mistook you for an actual high school student. You’re good at acting, and you look pretty young too. You have a pretty blessed life.”

“This is the first time that someone told me I look young.”

“I heard that being in love makes people younger.”

Aram hopped away, saying that she had to clean up the props. Maru stroked his chin. What was that suspicious smile about?

“It’s only 1 a.m. We finished much earlier than I originally expected. We even got to shoot some of tomorrow’s portion as well. We should return to the cabin, rest till morning, and finish up once we wake up.”

“Can I get changed now?”

“Yes. Thanks for your work.”

Maru took off the school uniform. As the film started with a murder scene and ended with the two friends sharing a friendship in the past when they were students, a school uniform was a must. He liked the plot of starting from rock bottom and ending with reminiscing about the past. The message that the film had was nothing that amazing. It just expressed that murder could happen just as spontaneously as two people becoming friends, both violently and indifferently. Although he’d have to see the final product to be sure, Sora said that she wanted the whole film to last about 15 minutes. Since it wasn’t that long, the nuance of the whole film would change according to how she decided to do the edits.

“Thanks for your work.”

Maru handed Sooil a drink. It was one that Hyungseok bought from the convenience store.

“Nah. It was fun to act without holding back after a long time.”

“Aren’t you tired? I think that was a pretty hard schedule.”

“I once started at 3 a.m. and finished up at 3 a.m. the next day. Of course, back then, I wasn’t dragged around without a single moment to rest like I was today.”

“I’m sorry that we can’t give you good treatment when you’re an expensive actor.”

“If I wanted good treatment, I wouldn’t have come in the first place. It’s good: the people here, the atmosphere of the shoot, and even other things. It’s relaxing.”

“Those guys are now going to call you up from time to time and ask you to meet them, so don’t pick up their call if you find them a bother.”

“People as good as them are always welcome. Heck, I should tell them my address and have them come over. I like them a lot.”

“Oh?”

Maru emptied the drink in one go and stood up from the bench.

“Let’s clean up if you’re done drinking.”

“I thought you felt sorry that you couldn’t give me good treatment?”

“It’s just a figure of expression. Let’s carry the lights for now.”

Sooil laughed and stood up.

### **Chapter 793. Sequence 6**

“Just like how you think you’re done with everything hard in this world after you finish your CSATs, it’s the same for the national exams as well. But you know well, don’t you? In front of you is the internship, residency, then fellowship. I know that you intern doctors have it hard. But, do you think any of that will alleviate once you become a specialist doctor? No, you’re going to have an even harder time then. How about fellowship? I’m sure you know well that those guys are just called around everywhere because there aren’t any spots open to become college professors.”

Senior Yoon made a sly smile and raised his glass. Despite knowing that it was only an act, he felt so spiteful that she didn’t want to look at him in the face.

“So please cooperate with me, interns. Especially those of you who are almost done with it. Don’t think about leaving. If you don’t make it to residency in the department you want, you’ll have to come back and then we’ll have an awkward time facing each other.”

“Yes!”

“Also, I’m saying this because it’s just because you interns here, but you know professor Choi Min, right? You don’t have to follow him just because he’s skilled. You know what I mean, right? I mean, that person is pretty, you know.... Of course, I trust that I’m not the only one who thinks like that.”

Senior Yoon snapped his finger. Kang Giwoo, who sat next to her, raised his glass first, and the remaining actors followed suit like a wave. Gaeul looked around before raising the glass about halfway before putting it down again.

“Drink moderately. After that, those of you who’re going to go back to the hospital can return, and the ones going home can go home. I’ll be paying today.”

Saying those words, senior Yoon stood up.

“Cut! We’ll turn it around and do that again. And also, Sunghoon-hyungim. You don’t have soju in there, right? You look drunk already.”

“If you want to say that, give me the real deal. Since I’m acting drunk, I might as well do it drunk.”

“Don’t you remember that you broke your nose because you fell over after drinking last time? It still freaks me out to this day, you know?”

“How can you mention that in front of all these juniors? Are you trying to chew me out here?”

The director and senior Yoon gathered in front of the camera while laughing. Gaeul also stood up from her chair and had Mijoo take care of her face. She was the stylist that had been with her for the past two years and was someone that she cherished.

“Unni, your makeup looks so good today.”

“Maybe it’s because I had a good sleep?”

“Sleep is definitely good for the skin, huh. But poor unni. You’re going to shoot like mad once it goes on air, right?”

“Probably.”

“It’d be much more comfortable if they save up some episodes.”

“It’s not like they don’t want to do that. The schedule of the staff, the writer, and the actors. If you think about PPL on top of that, it can’t really be helped that it becomes busy later on. Oh, can you give me some water?”

Mijoo poured some water for her into a cup. Even though Gaeul told her that the plastic bottle was fine, she would always pour it into a cup. Mijoo was of the opinion that drinking from the bottle was unbecoming for an actress.

“Gaeul, your expression looked good,” senior Yoon commented as he passed by.

Gaeul lowered her head and thanked him. It felt very good to hear a compliment from a senior actor on the scene even if it was done in passing. Being told that she was good at acting made her feel more touched than being called pretty.

“Unni’s expressions are definitely good.”

Somehow, it was Mijoo who became proud. Gaeul looked at the script while the camera was being moved. When she looked at the pages filled with red writing on it, she suddenly recalled Maru. She started filling every corner of her script with words ever since she saw Maru’s script. That sense of fulfillment from analyzing and deriving a conclusion and then writing her own world of acting onto a piece of paper; she would probably not change this habit even in the future.

The shoot resumed. After the get-together scene with senior Yoon as the center finished, she was left alone with Giwoo. The eyes of the staff that surrounded them were filled with expectations. It was probably because of the director’s words saying that this was the ‘last scene’.

“Do you have anything to do after this?” Giwoo asked while the director was talking to the camera director.

Gaeul snatched a dried snack that was placed there as a prop and put it in her mouth. The savoriness and the crunchiness of the dried filefish filet made her smile. I should stay away from fried food – a late regret knocked on the door to her reason, but the dried fish had already crumbled apart and was going past her throat.

“I do have something to do after this. Going home and going to sleep.”

“I think it’ll be around 1 a.m. by the time we’re done, so why don’t we get something to eat, together? I know of a really good budaе-jjigae restaurant nearby.”

“Where did you get the audacity to say that after seeing me eat half a sweet potato because of my weight?”

“Who was the one eating one of the snacks that were placed here as props?”

She quickly put down the dried sweet potato that she subconsciously picked up. Kang Giwoo was a really bad guy for giving her the irresistible temptation of budaе-jjigae. She sighed and looked away.

“You don’t look like you gained any weight.”

“Why don’t you say that after seeing my face on TV? If I eat something salty late at night, you’ll see a completely different person tomorrow.”

“That’s a pity. That place is really good too. Looks like I’ll have to go by myself. Still, I’ll send you photos. If you want, videos are fine too.”

Seeing Giwoo smile, she recalled her uncle who grinned at her while snatching her snacks away when she was young. This was why ‘grown up’ men were even scarier. Gaeul snapped back at him, saying ‘eat all you want.’

“I was joking. I know of a place that sells low-salt seasonal vegetable salad. How about it? If you have time, let’s go together. Oh, you too, Miss Mijoo, Miss Haemi, and Mr. Chanwoo.”

Hearing his offer, Gaeul retracted her pouting lips.

“I do want to take you up on that offer, but I have a shoot tomorrow morning. I really have to go home and sleep.”

“I guess it can’t be helped then. Let’s have one next time.”

“Alright, next time.”

The assistant director gave the standby sign. Gaeul collected her emotions. She had to turn from the actress Han Gaeul into an ER intern. While the members of the staff left the camera angle, she uttered her lines out loud: I don’t like politics, I became a doctor to save people, I’m fed up.

“Get ready, action.”

After the director’s soft words, Gaeul started saying her lines. She had her hands placed on her knees and her face lowered a little.

“I became a doctor to save people.”

Giwoo replied to those words,

“Who didn’t? Everyone does that.”

“Listening to professor Kim, I don’t think that’s necessarily the case.”

“He probably wants to save people as much as we do. There’s no doctor who wishes for a death on the table.”

“Really? Then how can he be so shameless? You heard him. The patient died, but his skills increased. Yeah, he’s right, I know. A cardiothoracic surgeon cut up a person’s chest, so it is true that his skills increased. But is that something to talk about while smiling? Really?”

“Then should he do it while crying?”

“Customer, in.”

A sound could be heard. Along with the assistant director’s signal, people started walking past inside the store. Gaeul suppressed the frustration that climbed up to her throat. The more she became used to acting, the more she found herself synchronizing with the character she was playing. There were times when she couldn’t differentiate between the Han Gaeul of reality and the Lee Chaeyeon of the drama. Ever since the ‘rabbit’ appeared, her acting style changed into that of throwing herself into the depths of the character she was acting.

“You’re pretty cold-headed.”

“I’m not cold-headed. I’m just stating the truth. Also, I don’t find the professor that bad.”

“That’s unexpected. Weren’t you a doctor of justice either?”

“Both the professor’s idea of justice and my idea of justice are founded on the fact that we want to save the patient. Lee Chaeyeon, you are like that too, aren’t you?”

“That’s what I don’t get. In my eyes, the professor just looks like a scholar freak who only wants to inspect special, rare cases. Not only that, he’s a money-seeker too.”

“So? What mistakes did he make during operation? The bleeding of a patient with a chest fracture. Do you think you can stop that?”

Gaeul clenched her eyes shut. She pictured the operation table in her mind. Artificially made human organs reflected the lights above the table while looking like the real deal. She was aware that the people gathered there, the equipment, and even the situation was all just made up and were parts of the shoot, but her senses accepted them as reality and reinterpreted it before scattering it to the various corners of her mind. That sense of powerlessness since she couldn’t do anything but watch because she was just an observer and the jealousy and anger towards the professor all gathered in one spot.

“I probably couldn’t. There’s no way an intern can do what the head of the CS department couldn’t achieve. That’s why I’m even angrier.”

She curled up and clenched her teeth. Giwoo placed his hand on her shoulder and patted her.

“Cut. Okay, that was good.”

Listening to the director’s words, Gaeul sighed in order to shake off the emotions that ‘Lee Chaeyeon’ had. The boiling emotions died down in an instant. She was absorbed to the point that she couldn’t discern who she was when she was acting, but once she got out of that, she could recover surprisingly quickly. Your acting will mesmerize the people – she recalled the rabbit’s words.

“Looks like I shouldn’t be goofing around eating either,” Giwoo said.

“What do you mean?”

“Looking at you makes me feel like I still lack acting skills. Even though people don’t tell me I’m bad at acting, you know.”

“Why are you putting me on a pedestal all of a sudden? You’re known to be good at acting, you know? Director, Giwoo’s saying that he lacks acting skills.”

The director laughed, saying that Giwoo was so greedy.

“Stop your nonsense. How was my tone just now? I think I was a little too emotional.”

“Not at all. You were Lee Chaeyeon herself. You can see that from how the director gave the okay in one go, can’t you? You did well. You did really well.”

Giwoo gripped his hand into a fist and held it out. Gaeul also held out her fist and fist-bumped him.

“I still have a cut left to do, so I’ll go first.”

“Do your best, Mr. Kang Giwoo. I’m gonna leave.”

Gaeul said goodbye to the director and the other staff members. Once they finished shooting the fourth episode, the first episode would go on TV. She was worried about the viewing rate already. As this was her first time challenging a medical drama, she wanted it to have good results.

Just then, she saw Giwoo talking with the other actors. As the moodmaker, he always made other people laugh. She felt awkward about fist-bumping him at first, but by now, everyone at the shoot fist-bumped him whenever they came across him.

“I’ll leave first.”

She left the set and got in the car. While waiting for the manager to come back from the bathroom, she had a look at the internet news sites. There was quite a lot of news about the two medical dramas about to air. As the KBS medical drama started airing first, they talked about how it would be in the lead and the other would have to play catchup.

“I wonder if Maru started shooting,” Gaeul muttered to herself as she tapped on her phone screen.

#### **Chapter 794. Sequence 7**

When he came to himself, he was looking down at his palms. Not long later, he realized that it was a dream. He was standing in the middle of the straight path in that darkness as he often was. He saw light in the distance, and right behind that was the darkness that was large enough to swallow even the light. The dream that came to him whenever he was about to forget about it was leading to the same conclusion again today. Maru sat down and looked at the light. He looked at the light until the darkness covered the entirety of his body. From his toes to his shin, then his thigh, waist, elbow, chest, and neck. One by one, the twinkling of his senses lost their light. Darkness pervaded his vision. He opened his eyes wide until the very end, trying to grasp the light with his eyes. Eventually, the world disappeared, and the thought process that governed his senses was also swept away by the darkness. A world of nihility; a time that could not be sensed. From his experience, this existing yet not existing period of senselessness

didn't last long. He would soon wake up from his dream and take his head off the drenched pillow with a big sigh. That was how the dream always ended after all.

Perhaps he wasn't even aware of whether his time here was long or short because he wasn't conscious of anything – he suddenly had this thought. The back of his neck suddenly became hot. He was still inside the dream. The dream that ended with him opening his eyes after struggling in that mysterious space, kept going on. He was even conscious. Something hot spread throughout his whole body through his neck. The first thing that returned was his vision, then his sense of touch. The light that he believed he could never reach was right in front of him. Whether the light came to him, or he managed to approach the light, he did not know. He reflexively reached out to the light that he desired so much. There was no resistance. The hand was softly sucked into the light. It was the warmth that he expected. He longed to throw himself into the light immediately. He wished to depart from this frustrating darkness and be enveloped in that warmth.

"Someone's happy ending is a bad ending for another. The story will not end without someone's sacrifice."

A voice sounded out from behind him. A rabbit was standing on top of the path severed by darkness.

"You've done well until now. Get some good rest."

Maru hesitated between the light and the rabbit before taking his hands away from the light. The light became distant, and the surroundings were filled with darkness again.

"You're Han Gaeul, aren't you?"

The rabbit, which was looking around with its ears perked up, took out a pocket watch. She looked like she was in a panic as she kept checking the watch.

"You're Han Gaeul, aren't you?" he asked again.

The rabbit put the pocket watch away.

"You and I shouldn't be able to talk."

"And yet, here we are, talking to each other."

"How?"

"That's what I want to ask. Rather than that, from how you aren't denying it, it looks like you really are Han Gaeul. The woman in the white suit that I met after I died is also you, isn't it?"

"You remember that? No way. There's just no way."

The rabbit's nose trembled minutely. The whiskers also shook. Maru took a step towards her. There was a thick layer of darkness, but he did not care. Even if he sank; even if he drowned, he would be satisfied as long as he could reach her, even for a moment.

"Don't! You can't come here. This won't happen again. This time, we can change for sure. This time, we can see the end."



The rabbit stepped back. The distance between them widened, but Maru did not mind. It was him who ran away first. This time, he would be the one approaching her. His feet sank into the darkness. He felt like his foot sank into a thick swamp. He couldn't take his foot out, so he just kneeled on the spot. He could become knee-length closer to her; however, he still wasn't close enough to reach her. He put his elbow on the ground. The moment he did so, thick darkness dragged him down. Seeing his left arm sinking down, he reached out his right arm with all of his might. His hand fell in front of the rabbit's paw.

"The light is over there. Go there. Your actions were the right ones. Do as you were doing until now. You don't need to look back. You have no reason to sink into this place. Just go forward. Please, I beg you," the rabbit pleaded desperately.

Maru turned around to look behind him. The light was blinking as though it was gesturing for him to come. The light that he so wanted; the light that always coquettishly abandoned him, was waving at him, but Maru shook his head.

"Too much warmth isn't my style. I need a little more coldness like you. If I go there, I will definitely feel good. I don't know what it is, but the conclusion I always desired must be waiting in there. Perhaps it might mean the end of this endless cycle of reincarnation."

"If you know it, then go. Please, I beg you."

The rabbit started hopping on the spot. At that moment, the pocket watch she was holding fell down. Maru looked at the pocket watch with the lid open. There were no hands that indicated time. Only an unpleasant hour hand was ticking and drawing a circle. The darkness reached his chin. The rabbit trembled in anxiety and kept telling him to go to the light.

"What happens to you if I go there?"

"Don't think about things like that and go. If you go there, everything will be resolved."

"Does that 'everything' include you?"

The rabbit's mouth curved up softly. She calmly picked up the pocket watch she dropped and spoke,

"Of course."

Maru chuckled after hearing her answer.

"You told me, didn't you? That I can't lie. But hey, who would've known? They say husband and wife become similar to each other. I can tell that you're lying."

The moment he said those words, darkness pervaded him. Maru slowly opened his eyes. The air conditioner that he had set up a timer for before sleeping was spitting out cold air.

"That's how it is, huh."

Right before he was buried in darkness, Maru looked into her eyes. She was looking at her husband with a scolding look for not listening to her words. It was her earnest feelings without a shred of pretense. She tried to stay behind alone in the darkness.

While he took a shower, he did not think about anything. He just washed away his sweat and had a light breakfast before sitting down on the sofa. He was about to turn on his laptop, but he ended up going to get a notepad and a pen instead. He opened the last page of the notepad that was filled with hypotheses and deductions. He put a dot with the pen and started thinking.

He confirmed the existence of the rabbit. It was a big harvest to meet her, the one that he had always imagined meeting due to the conversations he had with the masked man. She also seemed to know everything that was going on. The shriek-like pleading explained everything.

'You can't come here', 'Go there'. There was no need to even think about what she said. The fact that she said 'someone's happy ending means a bad ending for another. It will not end without someone's sacrifice' also clearly explained the current state of things. If the masked man was another Han Maru that had broken off from 'Han Maru', the rabbit should be another Han Gaeul that had broken off from 'Han Gaeul'. She had acquired an ego just like the masked man and was probably fed up with the endless cycle of reincarnation.

"Just like how I want the reincarnation to end, she must also want an ending to this story."

The important bit was that she was the cause. She seemed to be aware of the method of ending this cycle and that the method was none other than sacrificing herself. She seemed to think that if they couldn't have a happy ending together, one of them would have to fall into the abyss.

Unlike the masked man, it was likely that she was aware of not just the reason for this matter and the solution, but everything else as well. At the same time, it was likely that she wasn't able to speak of the solution. What blocked her mouth must be that mysterious god with unknown intentions. That damned god.

"But don't give me divine retribution. I lived a pretty sad life until now."

Maru quietly stared at the things he wrote down. The first thing he had to find out was whether the current Han Gaeul was aware of the existence of the 'rabbit' or not. If the two were communicating, this situation would enter a new phase.

He picked up his phone and quickly tapped in the number that was engraved into his head, but Maru sighed and put his hand down. This wasn't something he should be talking about over the phone, and above all, this required a careful approach. The masked man holed himself up in the room of silence just because he found out a facet of the truth. The rabbit, who held the solution, would likely be silenced as well. In the dream, she was shocked by the fact that they could converse at all. Talking might be a taboo that god set.

The rabbit said that things could finally change this time. The fact that the wheel of reincarnation that had turned dozens, or even hundreds of times, had been moved off-axis was probably related to finding out the truth. The 'Han Maru's that died in vain before weren't aware that their lives were being repeated after all.

"So the turning point was the breakup with Gaeul after all?"

The ending that the rabbit wanted was probably for Han Maru and Han Gaeul to end their relationship not as a married couple but as strangers. That was the same thing that he thought, and he even put it

into practice. He was still keeping it up. However, the rabbit said something awry: 'Sacrifice' and 'remain behind'.

"The most important condition in order for Han Maru's life to repeat."

Maru bitterly looked at his own writing. For 'LIFE' to come about, the precondition was 'DEATH'. Someone's happy ending means another's bad ending. Someone's life means someone's death. The marital ties that kept connecting them despite the numerous repeated lives. There was only one conclusion he could derive from that.

"Screw that."

Maru closed his notepad and stood up. It was time to go to the shoot.

\* \* \*

The first thing she saw when she opened her eyes was Mijoo's face. She reached her hand out to Mijoo, who was dozing off.

"Unni, Gaeul-unni!"

"Gosh, you're startling me. Why are you so surprised?"

"How could I not be? You collapsed, you know?"

"Me?"

"Yes. I told you that you need to eat food on time. When I found you collapsed, I thought I was going to have a heart attack."

"I see."

She remembered going back home after the shoot and leaving the bathroom after washing her face. From how anything after that was pitch black, it seemed that she had collapsed in front of the bathroom. Gaeul grabbed Mijoo's hand and smiled.

"Thanks for saving my life. You can even do emergency treatment and not just makeup, huh? I'm proud of you."

"This isn't something to laugh about! Sheesh, you made me worried, you know?"

"I'm okay, aren't I? But why did you go to my house? You were going to come late because the shoot is in the afternoon, weren't you?" Gaeul asked as she looked at the clock on her phone.

It was 11 a.m. Mijoo originally planned to come at 4 p.m. with the manager.

"Because I felt iffy."

"Iffy?"

"I had a dream about some man that kept shouting at me. The man that kept shouting at me was pitch black from top to bottom, and suddenly I became worried about you, unni."

"What the heck is that? Also, why would you worry about me when a man is shouting?"

"I don't know. The man kept shouting something like he was crying, and I felt like he was calling out your name. I can't remember properly because it was a dream. I can only remember that the man was really desperate."

"That's why you came to my house?"

"I tried calling you first. You're a light sleeper, unni, so you usually pick up right away. But you didn't pick up my call. I tried ten minutes later, but you still didn't pick up. I found it strange, so I made a visit. I opened the door and found you collapsed on the floor while the TV was on. It still makes my heart thump if I think about it now."

Gaeul thanked the tearful Mijoo again. It would have been pretty dangerous if she was abandoned in a collapsed state for long.

"But you don't really believe in stuff like dreams, don't you?"

"That's what I find strange as well. Usually, I would have just treated it as a weird dream and gone back to sleep, but the man in the dream was pretty strange. He was pitch black and scary, but he didn't feel like someone bad. If I think about it now, I think he was crying too."

"What a strange dream."

"It's a strange dream, but it saved you, unni, so it's better than a dud. Oh, we shouldn't be like this. I'll go call a doctor. From what I heard, I found you early, so there were no big problems, but you should still get checked up. Wait a minute."

Mijoo shouted 'doctor' as she stood up.

### **Chapter 795. Sequence 7**

"Don't walk around anywhere and stay here. Also, switch your phones to silent mode. The director is sensitive to things like that. If your bell rings during the shoot, consider your time here over. You can take photos, but you'll be in big trouble if you upload any photos that contain crucial information about the piece on the internet, okay?"

After a staff member uttered words like a barrage, he went somewhere. Hyungseok switched his phone to silent mode as instructed for now.

"Didn't I see you at KBS last time?"

"Yes. I was wondering that too. You were that emergency agent, weren't you?"

Hyungseok exchanged greetings with a man he knew from before. It was the guy he talked to throughout the whole break in the last shoot.

"You're an emergency agent this time too, huh?"

"But I still have some lines to do: The patient is from a three-way collision. It looks like a simple abrasion, but the patient is expressing abdominal pain."

The man smoothly said his line before smiling. Hyungseok put up his thumb.

“On the other hand, you’re wearing a doctor’s gown today?”

“After a bit of up and downs, I managed to join the drama.”

“Really? What role are you playing?”

“I would love to play a role with a proper name, but unfortunately, I’m just an intern who’s still the whole time. I don’t have any lines, but I’m still rather fortunate since I will be appearing in many scenes.”

“Someone I know started like that and ended up becoming an actor. Try continuing and who knows? The producer may give you a line. I’ve been doing this for quite a long time, and I saw quite a lot of events like that. They pick out the decent ones and give them some lines. I’m one such case too.”

“If you ever become big like that, then teach me how too. I’m still learning right now.”

At the entrance of the set, there was a voice looking for the emergency agent. The man told him that he’d see him later before running over. From the look of things, it seemed that the shoot was going to begin soon. Hyungseok pulled on his doctor’s gown. His name tag on his left chest collided with the pen inside the pocket and made sounds. There was a time when he was young that he wished to become a doctor, and he never imagined that he’d become one like this. He was smiling in satisfaction while checking on his clothes when someone placed a hand on his shoulder. It was Maru.

“You sure do look good in that doctor gown since you’re so tall.”

Maru showed his own sleeve, saying that it was a little too long for him.

“You just arrived? I was looking for you as soon as I arrived but didn’t see you. I had to walk around awkwardly, you know?”

As he wasn’t participating as a background actor, he was waiting by himself in an awkward fashion, but after a while, he couldn’t help but join in with the background actors. It was fortunate that there was someone he knew. Otherwise, he would have been standing in the corner of the set by himself. Although he wasn’t the type to be shy around strangers, he became nervous whenever he was at a set. The fact that he was in the same space as real actors made him very nervous. Not only that, the director would be there as well.

“You aren’t a kid. You should’ve just greeted anyone who seemed like a superior.”

“Do you think I don’t know that? But there’s something called the atmosphere. If I walk around like I don’t belong here and someone tells me off, I’d be in big trouble, you know? That’s why I stayed still.”

Ever since he saw a minor actor greet the producer at the previous set and get an earful from him, Hyungseok decided to stay quiet until he grasped the nature of everyone present. It wasn’t a joke when people said that half of the industry was filled with sensitive people, while the other half was even more sensitive people.

“Is that the script for this episode?” he asked as he pointed at the script that said ‘Doctors’.

This was the first time he saw a script that was actually used during shoots from up close. The name of the writer and the director were written underneath the title.

“Wanna have a look?”

“Can I?”

Maru handed him the script. He received it with both hands and flipped over to the first page. The appearing characters, lines, and instructions were separated into boxes. Among the numerous mentions of the main characters was the word ‘interns’. Interns circling around the main character, interns running towards the emergency unit, interns being scolded in the office.

“So that’s me.”

It wasn’t like he had any lines to say in the script, but the fact that he was in the script at all made him proud. That was perhaps because he wasn’t doing this as a part-time job as he had signed an official contract with the TV station. His pay per episode could definitely not be called a lot, and how many episodes he will appear in wasn’t set in stone, but what was important was that he made an official debut on public TV. As he had taken his first step, he would be able to come back here not as a minor actor but as a supporting actor or even the lead actor in the future.

“This is your role, right?”

Hyungseok pointed at the role that said ‘Doctor Choi.’

“Yeah, I’m doctor Choi.”

“You have quite a few lines. Are you a comedic character?”

“I’m probably the character that’s there because the audience would be stifled if they had to keep watching medical stuff and political stuff just because it’s a medical drama.”

“But I don’t think it suits you. Han Maru and comedy. These two don’t fit together.”

“I believe myself to be quite humorous, though.”

“You? If I look back at my two years of military service, then definitely not. You’re actually more suited to be the senior who gets involved in bribery or a stuck-up goody-two-shoes civilian. If it’s regarding comedy, I’m more suited for it instead. I even look the part.”

“Looks like I should show you my comedic skits. Watch well. I might get scouted by comedy programs later.”

“Like hell you will.”

He skimmed through the script for the first episode on the spot. From the first episode alone, it didn’t look any different from the medical dramas that aired on TV until now. He could already imagine what the meeting of a surgeon – skilled but uninterested in politics – and a doctor with many different tricks would bring about in the future from the first episode alone.

“Hey, isn’t it pretty similar to the one they’re doing at KBS?”

“Probably.”

“Like this, the latecomer will be at too much of a disadvantage. I know this from running a business, and if the store next to me releases a new, similar lineup to ours before we do, our sales will drop by half you know? If you want to catch up, you need to do one of two things. Either sell the products at a discount or use a really good model.”

“Well, the really good model you’re talking about is coming from there.”

There was a man scratching his head while yawning in the place Maru pointed at with his chin. When he had a closer look, he found that it was the actor Lee Heewon. He looked very shabby and nothing like how a main character of a drama should be. He didn’t look that bad, but his unmotivated face as well as his crooked posture made him look uncool. It was to the point that it made him wonder if an actor could be like that.

“He feels so different. He looked really cool when I saw him in a movie.”

Hyungseok had gotten his hands on all of the movies that Heewon appeared in and played them back several times. He even watched the law movie that was released last year five times over the course of three days.

Heewon, who played the role of a man who had his life ruined because of a false accusation, showed what it meant to be at the depths of desperation through his act. He could still vividly picture the scene where his innocence was proven 7 years later and he could leave the prison. That scene where Heewon screamed towards the door of the prison with dazed eyes was beyond freaky, it was unsettling. He had been too absorbed in Heewon’s act.

“Actors just have to be good at acting. What they’re like usually should be up to them.”

“That’s true but that’s also not. If I was a fan and a girl, I would have started crying already. He always looks so sharp in movies. Why does he look so much like a slob up close?”

Thinking about how Heewon, who looked like he was going to fall down and sleep at any moment, was the one who showed such a freaky act in a movie, he felt amazed and yet simultaneously scammed. He even wondered if Heewon’s face underwent a CG facelift in the movies he watched. Just as he was imagining useless things, Heewon looked at him and waved. He wondered if he was staring too intensely or if Heewon was doing that out of fan service. He waved his hand because he couldn’t just stay still after being waved at, but that was when he realized that something was wrong. The one Heewon was looking at was not him. It was next to him.

“Hey, Han Maru.”

Although he was called out, Maru just continued skimming through the script. Although Hyungseok said that there were a lot of lines, it was just more than he expected and was not something that needed a long time of analysis. While Maru was wrestling with lines that weren’t enough to fill up even half a page of A4, Heewon continued waving as he came over.

Hyungseok stood in between the approaching Heewon and Maru, who still wasn’t lifting his head up, before taking a step back. Many people followed Heewon with their eyes. It was to be expected since the main actor had just arrived. The bombardment of eyes also fell on Maru, but Maru’s mind seemed

to be holed up inside a bunker or something, and he didn't budge at all. In the end, Hyungseok moved. He reached out and tapped on Maru's arm hard.

"What?"

Seeing Maru ask what was happening, Hyungseok looked around; he was indirectly telling Maru to have a look around before asking questions.

"You're here?"

Maru just greeted Heewon like it was nothing.

"I am."

Heewon also yawned as he replied. When Heewon stopped, the stylists adhered to him again. They touched up his hair, did his makeup, and put on a watch for him. Hyungseok looked at the two people focusing on their own stuff. On one side was the actor that everyone had their eyes on, and on the other side was just a minor actor. It was curious that the two knew each other at all, but looking at their attitudes was even more surprising.

"Take good care of me today."

"There's nothing for me to do to take good care of you. You're the main actor."

"That's how you're gonna be? I'm actually kinda looking forward to this, you know? We never acted together apart from that time we did it as a practice during high school. It'll definitely be fun, right?"

"Well, I wouldn't be too sure about that. I don't have many lines."

"Should I beg the director to give you some more lines? No wait, I gotta do that to the writer, huh."

"Why are you being so generous today? Where's Haewon?"

"I'm free today. He caught a cold, so he's resting at home."

"No wonder you look so happy. So you're enjoying your freedom right now?"

"It's so good to have no one nag at me. I'm going to go to the PC bang after the shoot today. I'm going to order ramyun, a burger, and even grilled squid legs and stay up the night. Screw diets."

"You're going to get beaten up by Haewon like that."

"He might act like that, but he doesn't do something as atrocious as hitting his brother."

"Well, I think he will."

Maru pointed a finger and Heewon's eyes followed it. There was a man with a mask walking onto the set. Seeing him, Heewon groaned and took a step back.

"Hello, Maru-hyung."

"I heard you caught a cold. You should've stayed at home."

"I wanted to, but I had a bad dream. Where's my brother?"



“He went there as soon as he saw you. He told me that he’s going to go to a PC bang and eat ramyun once he’s done.”

“Thank you for the intel. This is why I can’t take a good rest. The guy who will gain weight as soon as he eats something keeps wanting to eat. When I look at him, he doesn’t look like he likes food that much, but he keeps eating. It’s not like he’s some boy in puberty either.”

“You have it hard.”

The man with a mask seemed close to Maru. Hyungseok looked at the man walking towards Heewon before asking,

“Who’s he? The manager?”

“The little brother, the manager, and someone who is like a mother.”

“What the heck is that?”

“He’s the guy who created the actor Lee Heewon. Looks like there won’t be any trouble during the shoot today. As long as Haewon is around, that guy will do his job,” Maru said as he closed the script.

#### **Chapter 796. Sequence 7**

To Heewon, acting was something forced upon him. It wasn’t something he started because he liked, but he found his talent in it, so he started focusing on acting according to the generally accepted opinion that a special talent can resolve living expense problems. He was quite uneasy since he had never focused on anything for an extended period of time, but he didn’t give up on it, believing in his little brother’s words that he could do it. After all, his brother was never wrong. When he started learning the basics after entering an agency, Heewon realized that his talent was something beyond special.

“You will become a one-of-a-kind actor.”

Those were the words of Choi Gyeonmi, his instructor. Under Choi Gyeonmi, Heewon focused on differentiating and expressing the color of emotions that only he could see within him. Borrowing Gyeonmi’s words, that was the process of bringing out the world hidden within him behind a shell. He alternated between the boredom and ecstasy given to him by learning until one day, Gyeonmi gave him a script for a drama, saying that it was time for him to do something. Ever since then, his only wish had been to live in his house without leaving for a month. His schedule was just that tight.

He couldn’t remember how many times he planned to runaway. He even prepared a car without his brother’s knowledge and almost made his escape, but whenever he attempted, he recalled his brother’s dead-still face as he slept. His brother worked several times more and slept half as much.

“I’m going to go to the military.”

For the first time, he went against his brother. The part below his brother’s eyes had turned dark, but he kept trying to persuade him that going to the military would have a severe impact on his career. Heewon wondered if he had gotten any sleep or had any food. Whenever he asked, Haewon always replied that he was okay and that he slept more than his brother, but his face betrayed his answer every single time.

“If you go to the military right now, everything you’ve done until now might go up in flames. You have gained a reputation and you are an actor whose skills were acknowledged, but I don’t think it’s enough to withstand a two-year gap. Why do you want to go to the military in the first place?”

“To take a break. Both me and you.”

“Hyung.”

“Let’s take a break! Please! Do what you want for two years, get some sleep, and eat some food. I’m saying you should stop wiping my ass and do what you want. I don’t care what it is. I’ve earned quite a lot of money. You know that, don’t you? You can use it all. I can always just earn more.”

His brother, who said they should talk the next day, ended up going to the hospital because of a cold. Due to fatigue, stress, and malnutrition, his brother was practically a general hospital himself. When he habitually said that he was okay, he actually wasn’t. He had never sniffled even once when they slept in that cold basement room, so this just went to show how arduous his manager life had been for the past three years.

His brother had even put aside going to Seoul University in order to work as his manager. He was also stubborn to the point that he didn’t look out for his own body while working as a manager. Heewon had to semi-forcefully have Haewon rest, and the conclusion he arrived at was the military. Saying that he’ll look for a new manager wasn’t something he could say to his brother who had abandoned the most important period of his life for the bigger brother’s sake. If they were going to work, they were going to work together, and when they stopped, they would stop together as well. Even Haewon wouldn’t be able to interfere with his military service despite being determined to follow him to the depths of hell, and during that period, he would spend meaningful time, whether it was taking a break or doing what he wanted to do. It was a pretty decent method that he came up with in his narrow mind.

“Why did you come?”

“Because I could move pretty well.”

Heewon shook his head as he looked at his little brother with a mask on. His brother, who had barely returned home after being hospitalized for days, did not listen to his words to take a rest and ended up coming to the shooting set. The ‘Lee Heewon rule’, which stated that catching a cold should put a stop to everything, didn’t apply to his brother.

“Like that, the cold will become the flu.”

“That’s not likely, so don’t worry. Rather than that, Maru-hyung told me that you’re going to go to the PC bang and eat ramyun once you’re done here.”

“He said that already? How’s his mouth so light when we’re supposed to be friends?”

“It’s not that his mouth is light. He’s looking out for you. You always swell up when you eat, so why do you keep trying to eat?”

“Well, people want to do the things they’re told not to do.”

Haewon frowned before coughing dryly. Heewon quickly handed him a bottle of water and scolded him, which was unlike usual as it would usually be the other way round. After taking a sip and a breather, his brother spoke,

“You even told the president, huh? That you’re going to the military. You were always so slow when it came to other things, but you just have to be quick with this matter.”

“I do things when I set my mind to it. I’m going to enlist after the drama is over.”

“Is it because of me?”

“Yes, it’s because of you. You just won’t listen to me when I tell you to rest, so I have no choice but to take a rest myself. I’ll have to go to the military once I’m thirty anyway, so I might as well go early. Looking at Maru, I feel like going earlier might be the better choice.”

“I’ll quit being your manager. Is that enough?”

“No. I don’t want that either. I thought about it. Would I be doing this job if not for you? If you quit, I’m going to quit as well and go to the countryside to farm or something. I have enough money for that after all.”

“You’re going to farm?”

“I can do it if I set my mind to it. I can just plant seeds and pick the fruits when it’s all grown. Easy.”

“It’s clear from just listening to you that you will never be able to do it.”

His brother sat down next to him, taking slow breaths without talking. Heewon also did not speak first. His brother was probably clearing up his mind right now. He was a smart kid, and so would be able to come up with a wise, correct decision.

The staff within the set started running around. Their business signified that the shoot was about to begin. Producer Jayeon was shouting within the set. Once the shouts died down, the standby sign should probably fall.

“Looks like there’s no helping it. You usually don’t like to do anything, but you’re stubborn and you’ll never relent once you’re set on something.”

“Me? I’m like a reed compared to you.”

“Leaving that aside, now that I think about it, I think I pushed myself too. Perhaps my desire to make you succeed contained my disappointment regarding the things I gave up on. Maybe that was why I was even more persistent even though I knew that I was ruining my body in the process.”

“Yes, so take some rest. And do the things you wanted to do. You said you wanted to go traveling, didn’t you? How about Hawaii? Or Japan? Even Jeju islands fine since it’s close.”

“That’s good, but I thought of an even better method. As you said, there’s probably no one else but me who can control you.”

“I’m not some robot that needs controlling. It is just that if you aren’t my manager, my plans of fleeing will just have a higher chance of succeeding.”

“Not only that, I also don’t want to stop being your manager. While I did say I gave up on many things, strictly speaking, I chose to become your manager because helping you is more fun and profitable for me. It’s definitely quite hard to bring someone as stubborn as you to various places, but I think it’s quite suited for me.”

“So take a two-year break and do....”

“Joint enlistment.”

Heewon blinked several times. Joint enlistment was a program where two people would be able to enlist into the same boot camp and get assigned to the same service base. Haewon’s mention of that would mean none other than going to the military alongside him and spending two years in the same space, but it also meant that the hellish nagging would follow him for another two years.

“I didn’t mean that. I was telling you to take a two-year break while I’m not here.”

“Compared to what I’m doing right now as your manager, the military is practically a vacation for me. Don’t worry about me.”

“That’s not what I’m saying. Listen to me. I’m going to the military and-”

“So am I.”

“No. I’m saying we should spend the two years apart.”

“That’s just terribly inefficient. We should take a two-year break simultaneously and return to work together. Now that I think about it, I don’t think going to the military is a bad idea. As long as you leave a deep enough impression on the audience through this drama, it might even bring about a good reaction from them. There are many people who are getting in trouble because of military service, aren’t there? But here, there’s an actor who goes to the military on his own accord when everyone else is delaying it until they’re 30? This can even make the news. I should talk to some journalists about it. I think we can also fool the enlistment date by a day. Then, the articles would go something like this: Lee Heewon’s silent enlistment; His distinct choice.”

“I think you’ve been staying too close to the president. No wait, your words just now sounded like Han Maru’s.”

Heewon told him to reconsider, but his brother didn’t seem to have any will to relent. He immediately looked up joint enlistment on his phone and even put in a query on the military’s website.

“Hyung, let’s leave behind a really deep impression through this drama. Maru-hyung is here too. I’m sure it’ll go well. I mean, Maru-hyung’s acting is exceptional, isn’t it? He’ll definitely support the drama well. You’ll be shooting the best drama before you enlist. Good, that’s splendid news material. I’ll go talk to Maru-hyung for a bit.”

“H-hey! Haewon, Lee Haewon!”

Heewon desperately called out to his little brother, but he rushed over to where Maru was without even listening. Now, it looked like he had to suffer for two years more from super close range under his scolding.

“Should I just keep working?”

His regret was a little too late.

\* \* \*

“It is better to go to the military as early as possible. But why do you look like you’re going to die?” Maru asked as he grabbed Heewon’s shoulder.

Heewon looked like his soul had left him. He chuckled like he had lost it, muttering that he hated his brother.

“Stop your nonsense. The director’s coming. She seems to be looking for you, so go on.”

“If I fail this drama, I wouldn’t be able to leave behind an impression, and I think I would be able to reconsider going to the military.”

“Why don’t you pray for our doom instead?”

“You don’t know how I feel.”

Maru greeted Jayeon instead of Heewon, who kept sighing. Jayeon looked at Heewon, who had shriveled up, before asking in a small voice,

“What’s up with him?”

“He’s just a peculiar guy. Don’t worry about him. He’ll do well once he starts acting.”

“Well, for me, I don’t care as long as the outcome is good. Rather than that, my husband has been nagging me these days.”

“You mean producer Park Hoon?”

“Yes. He’s grumbling about how I got to work with you before he did. No matter how many times I tell him that you’re just a minor role and that you won’t appear that much, he keeps acting mad like he’s some kid. Hey, I heard you told him that you were definitely going to work with him but didn’t live up to that promise?”

“Yes, I did that. That’s why I promised him that I’d definitely do it the next time he calls for me.”

“He’s not a kid. Anyhow, I’m really tired from receiving that man’s grumbles all week. It’s partially your fault, so don’t you dare make any NGs. I’ll definitely nag you about it.”

“I have full faith that director Yoo Jayeon isn’t someone who would let her personal feelings get in the way of work. You’re known to be very fair.”

“You’d at least look cute if you didn’t retort like that. Seeing how your mouth hasn’t changed, it puts me at ease to see that you’re just like how you were five years ago. Err, lord main actor, this humble producer has come, so can you please say hello?”

Heewon stood up powerlessly.

“Let’s do this. This is the first shoot.”

Jayeon grabbed Heewon by the arm and walked towards the set. Maru smiled at Heewon, who waved his arms around in a flurry as though he was asking for help, while waving at him.

“Standby!”

### **Chapter 797. Sequence 7**

“You just have to come in, look left and right once, and then rush over there. Also, doctors, follow the rushing man with your eyes, and then Heewon, you come forward. There will be nurses going back and forth behind you, so make sure you check your lines and don’t overlap. Don’t collide with each other.”

“Yes.”

“Also, intern actors. Just relax a little. You think you can go on TV like that? You have to act like you’re tired, not dazed. Get yourselves together.”

Hyungseok pulled on his collar and heaved out a short sigh. It was finally his first appearance. While the main actors talked with the director, he frowned and straightened his mouth repeatedly in order to make his face look like it was full of life. There were two other actors playing interns apart from himself. The director promised that one of them who ‘looks good on screen’ would be given lines. The sudden appearance of an appetizing bait made Hyungseok look at the faces of the other two. Both of their eyes lit up as though they were dogs who had been starving for days. It looked as though they were ready to do anything in order to catch the director’s eyes once they began the shoot. It seemed as though he had to show off himself if he didn’t want the other two to get ahead of him.

“I wonder what I should do in order to catch the director’s eyes?” he asked Maru, who was waiting next to him.

“You should show skillful acting of course.”

“Not something obvious like that.”

“Then what? Are you going to do a backflip or something? Try staying in line with what you should be doing. Director Yoo’s eyes for discerning people are frighteningly accurate. Don’t think about doing useless stuff and just focus on your role.”

“Of course I want to focus on my role. But all I’ll be doing is zoning out as an intern.”

“Didn’t the director tell you to express what is happening on your face after seeing the patient rushing in? She’s someone who pays attention to little details when she produces things. Also, she wants the actors to remember everything that she says. If you’re still thinking that all you have to do is zone out, I think those people will be the ones to take the lines.”

Maru pointed at the entrance and drew a line towards the exit of the emergency unit that the director had pointed out before. Did you even try moving your eyes along that line? – Maru seemed to be scolding him.

“Of course I should listen to teacher Maru’s words. Have a look and see if I’m not awkward.”

Hyungseok moved his eyes, looking at the imaginary patient rushing in.

“How was that?”

“You’re good at looking.”

“That’s it?”

“That’s all I can see after all. How am I supposed to evaluate just looking? I believe that chasing the patient with your eyes is different from moving along the line.”

“I was looking at the patient though. I’m right, aren’t I? The patient comes from there and rushes towards the counter.”

“If you say so, then I guess it must be true.”

“Why are you acting so cold-hearted? Give me some tips. I used to get told that I’m quite bad at improvising when I studied at the acting school, you know? Give some pointers to your junior.”

“You always call yourself junior in situations like these even though you don’t use any polite speech.”

Maru pointed at the entrance of the emergency unit.

“I’m not skilled enough to explain to anyone, so I’ll just show you how I would do it. First up, I create a story before an act starts, whatever it may be. For example, in the case of a patient rushing in, there is nothing like a back story mentioned in the script or the producer’s directions, but I still create my own imaginary story. Well then, the patient is rushing in from over there. Ready, cue.”

Maru’s attitude changed in an instant. He was sighing like he had just been scolded before slowly moving his eyes towards the entrance. He yawned as he moved his drowsy eyes slowly. Hyungseok looked at the place where Maru was looking. It felt as though someone was there at the counter even though there was no one there. After scanning the counter for a while, Maru turned around and stretched his arms out.

“Like that, I guess?”

“So there’s no need to be in a hurry, huh.”

“If the patient came in on a stretcher to the emergency unit, then you should be tense, but if a perfectly intact-looking man is walking over to the counter, there’s no real need to look at him with much interest. Dozens of patients would be coming each day, so don’t you think it’ll be too tiring if you have to concern yourself with every single visitor? Interns should already be tired from all the errands they have to run. Even if someone visits the ER with an anxious face, I, at least, would react like that since both my body and my mind would be tired. That’s the character I set up.”

“Conversely, if it’s a passionate doctor who loves not only the patient but their families as well, they would look at the patient and his family intently, right? Filled with worries.”

“Probably.”

“I like heroic figures, so I shall embrace everyone with my love.”

Just because there was no line didn’t mean that the characters didn’t have a personality. How are you going to react to the incoming patient? – the character’s personality would be settled according to the

answer to that question, even if they didn't have any lines. If all that was needed was for the intern doctors to look at the patients as they came in like what the director said, she might as well have a staff member put on a doctor's gown and play that role instead. The fact that she was using an actor meant that she had some expectations. Either be a scarecrow who looks only in the direction she pointed at or become an actor who can think. The choice was obvious.

"I guess there are things you can learn even if you are an actor who doesn't have much acting to do at all, huh. Hey, wasn't that like a hip hop rhyme just now?"

"Why don't you quit acting and switch to hip hop then? MC Hyungseok sounds good."

"You can't take a joke, can you?"

Hyungseok locked his fingers together and started thinking about a character that wasn't too overboard but could still attract the director's eyes.

"This is why I don't give advice to smart people. They quickly learn and make it their own."

That was Maru's way of complimenting someone. Hyungseok knew that because they had spent two years together in the military.

"Please give me more advice in the future so that this old dog can learn new tricks. But hey, have a look at this. This time, it'll be different."

"If you think it's different, then that's fine. Even I would be able to tell that it's different if you have thought about what you're acting."

"Don't say that, and please have a look."

Maru shook his head in vexation. In Hyungseok's opinion, no instructor could match Maru when it came to acting or his advice. Maru kept looking away, saying that he didn't want to, but he would probably listen if he pestered him. He might look cold-hearted on the surface, but looking after each person was his personality and his nature. Hyungseok knew that.

He practiced a few more times and was about to have Maru check it for him. Just then, he saw a woman walk over to the director with her hair tied. The rather large gown wasn't able to hide her curves. Looking at the white curves, Hyungseok spoke,

"It's Yoonseo. Man, she looks really pretty in real life. These days, I don't think top-tier idols would lose out to actresses. Don't you think so?"

"I guess she is pretty."

Maru took his eyes off the script for a moment and uttered a line before looking down at his script again. Is it his concentration that is a marvel or his preference for women that was firm? – Hyungseok wondered before exclaiming and looking at Yoonseo who was smiling next to the director.

"Female idols always jump into dramas once they start doing well. It seems like dramas do make quite a bit of money, huh?"

"I wouldn't know."



“Look at her nose and lips. These days, even if you do undergo surgery, you have to do it discreetly like that. She’s totally my type.”

“If that’s the case, why don’t you go over and try talking to her? Stop mumbling next to me.”

“I’m only a bottom of the run actor. I don’t dare go there. Oh, you said you were close to Mr. Heewon, weren’t you? Can you set up a place with him and Yoonseo as well? I’ll treat you like my big brother for life.”

“I wonder what bad luck I had to meet someone like you in the military. Did I commit that many wrongs in my previous life?”

“You were so giddy when I got you Han Gaeul’s autograph, yet now you’re doing this to me?”

“That... I guess I’m grateful,” Maru said as his lips twitched.

From how Maru of all people was hesitating to speak, it probably meant that he felt really pleased. Han Gaeul over Yoonseo, huh. He really had a tight preference.

“If I catch the director’s eyes here, Yoonseo will look at me at least once, right? I’ll get her interest through my acting skills.”

“Now the crazy guy is talking nonsense huh. I’d like to remind you that you might get cut by the next episode.”

“Watch me. I’ll show you how a mayfly survives.”

“What, you’re going to do a backflip?”

“No, acting.”

\* \* \*

“Over there! Did someone stick an iron rod in your eyes? Why are you so tense! Loosen up a little!”

“I’m sorry!”

Heewon giggled as he turned around. The man who introduced himself as Maru’s friend slapped his own cheeks, saying ‘get yourself together.’ He was an interesting person. Heewon took a liking to him, thinking that it wouldn’t be boring if someone like that was around.

“Where did you meet someone like that? I haven’t said hello properly, so introduce him to me later. He looks interesting.”

“Forget interesting. He’s overly confident and uselessly optimistic. He’s quite tiring. In some sense, he’s the complete opposite of you.”

“Would I be able to get some energy if I’m next to someone like that?”

“Your laziness is a curse from heaven, so you’ll never be able to fix it. Haewon is the only solution.”

Maru poked him on the back and pointed forward with his chin. The director was looking at him with her eyes open crookedly. You dare get distracted when an adult is speaking? – her eyes seemed to say. Heewon smiled awkwardly. Director Yoo Jayeon was a scary person, so there was a need to stay docile.

“Well then, let’s do that again.”

At the director’s signal, a man rushed in. The world of pure white turned colorful again. Heewon colored the face of the man in front of him, who he had never seen before, with the color of his close friends. That process didn’t take that long. Looking at the man colored in light pink, Heewon could act happy like he had met an old friend after a long time.

“Heewon, your expression looks good. Look a little more worried at that part.”

He changed his emotions according to the director’s words that entered his ears. To Heewon, this was easier than using clay to form a shape he wanted. Everyone else said it was hard. Talent was a thankful thing.

“Interns, move your eyes, yes. The man falls back. Heewon recognizes him. That’s it. A little more friendly and with a little more worry.”

The director’s words stopped. He could hear her voice but couldn’t comprehend her as though it was an alien tongue. His brother always told him to fix the habit of not listening to others once he was absorbed in something, but he couldn’t do what he couldn’t do. He just did what his body willed him to do and according to the directions from before. After a while, he could hear a ‘cut’ sound that snapped him back to reality.

“Okay! Yoonseo and Heewon, come over for a sec. We’ll do some monitoring.”

Heewon yawned. He felt like monitoring wasn’t necessary, but he still walked over since Haewon’s prickly gaze was on him. He didn’t want to get nagged after all.

“Both of you are doing well. Yoonseo’s doing good too.”

“I think I’m blending in well thanks to Heewon.”

“I guess that’s not entirely incorrect.”

“Director, you should say that I’m not at times like this.”

“I told you I can’t speak empty praises during the get-together.”

“I didn’t know it would be like this. Please give me more love. And you too, Heewon, look at me in a good light.”

Heewon nodded. He felt like he had talked to Yoonseo about various things during the get-together but nothing remained inside his mind. It wasn’t like he was disinterested in her since she was quite pretty, so it was quite strange.

“What?” Yoonseo asked, seemingly weirded out by his stare.

“A good person or a bad person. I was just wondering.”

“What do you mean by that?”

“Nothing. Forget about it.”

“You can’t ignore me, okay? You of all people should be on my side. Isn’t that right, director?”

Yoonseo smiled softly.

### **Chapter 798. Sequence 7**

“A professor I know is in Daegu, and there are zero residents for GS<sup>[1]</sup> this year as well.”

“Weren’t there zero people last year as well?”

“There weren’t. I don’t think there were any the year before that either. I heard that the professors are taking turns doing night watches. At this rate, it looks like they’re going to have to get people from other cities.”

“Cardiothoracic surgery is pretty hard after all. But there are quite a few people applying for specialists in this hospital, right?”

“Senior Park, senior Choi, senior Kim, doctor Sooran, doctor Woongjin. That’s five people off the top of my head. That’s quite a lot.”

“I guess if you’re going to be sick, you’ll have to be sick in Seoul too, huh.”

“The land here isn’t expensive for nothing. Right, I heard you were moving? Did you find a good place to rent?”

“I did. I could barely get that with my intern salary. I told the landlord I’d only be staying for a year, and he ended up ripping another 50,000 won for rent.”

“It’s not like you’re going to be going home from the break room anyway, so why did you even bother? Not only that, don’t you have to go to Boryeong<sup>[2]</sup> in two months?”

“Still, there’s nothing better than going home and having a good sleep once a week or even once every four days if you’re lucky.”

Heewon, who was smiling in satisfaction while sitting on a chair, pointed at the entrance with his chin. The script said ‘looking at’, but Yoonseo did not mind and followed along. In actuality, a free character like Heewon was more suited to pointing with his chin rather than looking.

“Interns have it good. You have enough time to chit chat.”

The disdainful gaze was scornful. Senior Yoo, who played the role of a resident, must have learned how to piss people off in the worst ways. In reality, he was a really kind actor, but whenever he was in a shoot, he was so good at acting that it made her wonder if he actually had split personalities.

“How many times did you stab the patient with a preset syringe that cause the patient to end up screaming? If you have time to fool around, I’d be grabbing each other’s arteries.”

“I’m sorry, senior,” Yoonseo replied.

The role she was playing was an intern doctor who couldn't care less about charity and self-sacrifice. As the character she was playing was hung up on receiving good treatment from others, she acted cute with a hint of cunningness.

"And why aren't you replying?"

Senior Yoo glared at Heewon. She found his eyes so curious for looking like they were about to pop out at any moment.

"Because I didn't do anything wrong."

"Oh, that's your attitude?"

"I get that you hate me, senior, so just stop. You don't want to waste your energy either, do you? I was just born with this nature, and I can't fawn over people, so please just understand."

Senior Yoo's lips curled upwards, and the part below his eyes shook a little. Yoonseo intently watched senior Yoo's acting. Although she was confident in her facial expression acting, she would probably find it hard to look as natural as senior Yoo. Though, if it was just about smiling, she had the confidence not to lose out to him. The amount of smiling practice that idols did was probably on par with stewardesses.

"Hey, are you going to keep behaving like that in front of your senior?"

"Yes. I think I am going to keep behaving like that in front of my seniors. The only time I fawn over others for no reason is when I collect blood from granny Chunhwa over there. That granny is really stubborn. If I don't beg, she won't let me put a needle in her, so I don't have a choice but to fawn over her."

"Hey, you!"

"Senior, I'll be off first because I have a wound to dress. If you have anything more to tell me, please do it through text."

Heewon jutted out his head like a turtle before slowly heading towards the door. Senior Yoo turned around abruptly to the point that his doctor gown fluttered, but Heewon twisted his body and escaped like a slippery eel. The way he said 'I'm off' while peeping from outside the door made him look just as scornful as senior Yoo. Although this was the case with all good actors, Heewon's acts felt very realistic. He looked like he had become a real doctor instead of just acting as one.

Yoonseo slowly stood up and neatened out senior Yoo's disheveled gown. She spoke as she straightened his collars,

"Senior, don't get too angry with him. You know that's just how he is. It'll be your loss if you get angry."

"How can you two colleagues be so different? I will never let someone who looks down on his seniors like that into the doctor's office."

"I'll tell him off later. Don't worry about it too much."

Senior Yoo left, saying that he was fed up. Yoonseo chuckled after seeing him leave. It was her signature 'kitty smile'. It was something that her fans titled for her, and they said that she looked cute yet rather

precocious. She showed it to the director before, and she said that it would be good if she could use it when she was in character. She hoped that the smile she practiced in front of a mirror countless times would work.

“Okay. That was good, let’s do that again after we switch the camera angle.”

She gathered her slightly shaky lips together and shivered. Fortunately, there was no NG. She was so worried after hearing that her smile looked stiff in the previous cut. She felt good that she wasn’t wasting people’s time. She stretched her neck from side to side. Perhaps it was because this was her first drama, but she felt like she would spasm if she didn’t stretch out her neck and shoulder muscles every break. Her body wasn’t able to bring out its fullest potential in a foreign environment even after all that harsh choreography training.

“Director, wasn’t I strange?”

“Why? Do you want to look strange?” Jayeon replied as she crossed her arms.

“There’s no way that’s true.”

“Then why did you ask such a useless question? Acting is about confidence. You have to have the confidence that no one else but you can do your role. Especially if you’re a lead actor.”

“If it’s doing performances, I have the confidence that I’m the best, but this is a place I’ve never experienced before. I keep wondering if I’m doing okay, and I feel anxious.”

“You’re anxious about useless things. It was you who confidently declared to me that you can do anything during the get-together, wasn’t it?”

“That was because I was drunk back then and did it in a fit of anger.”

“Then bring back that fit of anger. You’re doing plenty well right now. I can’t imagine that this is your first time acting.”

“You aren’t complimenting me just to relieve me, are you?”

“Was it obvious?”

“Director, I’m really gonna cry.”

Jayeon patted her on the shoulders, telling her that there was nothing to worry about. Her hand gestures were just as hearty as her voice. It even hurt to the point that it made her wince. Yoonseo rubbed her own shoulders, which had become hot due to Jayeon’s hand, as she spoke,

“I’ll leave everything to you then, okay? You’re the one who brought me here, so you have to take responsibility until the end.”

“As long as you can do the basics, then sure. The writer seems to have taken a liking to you too, so practice acting just as much as you practiced dancing. Then, you’ll be able to leave behind a good impression as the actress Yoonseo.”

“Yes, ma’am.”

When she saluted, Jayeon also greeted back in military fashion. When she first heard about Jayeon and about how she had become the first female producer of the YBS drama department, which was known to be a taboo area for women, Yoonseo imagined a burly woman who would be able to wrestle with a sturdily-built man. This was why she was pretty surprised when she met her for real. Jayeon had such a slender body to the point that Yoonseo thought that she was a former idol. Not only that, she had gotten married as well. Yoonseo felt nervous when greeting her as she heard rumors that Jayeon's personality was like a volcano, but she soon realized that the volcano didn't erupt at just any time. After a few meetings, they had a get-together, and Yoonseo ended up falling for the female producer who managed to make a place for herself in her harsh work environment. She looked at her with respect for another person. She even secretly made Jayeon her role model.

"Just relax. Once the first episode goes on air, there will be many people talking about you on the internet. You know how things work around here. You were a popular idol after all."

"I won't be shaken because of a few harsh comments."

"That's the attitude. A cut I said okay to has no problems. It satisfied me after all."

That was a reassuring answer. While the camera setting changed, Yoonseo sat down on a chair and took a break.

"We would've been in big trouble if we were shooting outside. Apparently, it's 31 degrees out there," Heewon said as he sat down next to her.

This man, who drooped down whenever the camera turned off, didn't fail to meet her expectations and looked like he was melting on top of the chair. Yoonseo was surprised every single time when Heewon talked about himself because she didn't know how lazy humans could become. Without his little brother Haewon, he would probably be able to laze around in his home for a whole year. For food, he could order deliveries, and for necessary items, he could use the internet.

"I'm really curious. How did you even study acting? You're so lazy about everything."

"I do things when I set my mind to it."

"Lies. Tell me honestly. Haewon was watching you from the side, wasn't he?"

"You know me too well."

Heewon closed his eyes. This guy would probably start snoring if let alone for a minute. She wondered how many people in South Korea knew of his personality. From an interview she read before, it said that Heewon was rarely at home because he liked traveling. That interview filled with lies was probably something that his company ordered him to say in order to manage his image.

"Stop drooping down and have a look at my lines."

"You were pretty good though. I don't think it's necessary."

"I'm just worried. The director said I'm okay, but I keep finding myself lacking if I look at other people. I do have confidence, but confidence and skill aren't related to each other. Since I'm doing it, I want to do it well. I don't want to lose out to others."

“You’re full of competitive spirit. Well, I guess that’s how you managed to endure such a harsh schedule. I was freaked out when I heard what you had to say about the lives that idols live. How can a human live like that? Ten hours of practice a day and practically no sleep? I would never be able to do it.”

“You can do it if you set your mind to it. Okay then, sit up and have a look at me. Look after your friend.”

Yoonseo grabbed Heewon by the shoulder and shook him. Heewon, who was half lying down on the top of his chair, groaned and sat up.

“I tell you this every time, but I won’t be of any help to you. I tried teaching you last time, and you didn’t understand me.”

“It’d be weird to understand something like that. How am I supposed to understand green something and yellow something? Can’t you just teach me ordinarily?”

“That’s the only thing I can tell you. That’s just how they look in my eyes, and that’s how I feel. I can’t describe green as being red, can I?”

“You’re really spiteful. I feel like that time when my singing teacher scolded me saying ‘you have to pull out your voice like this’, but I didn’t get it at all. I feel the same right now.”

“I can’t exactly teach anyone either. It’s not something I can teach either.”

“Fine, you’re a genius, okay? Good for you.”

“To me, you are even more amazing. It amazes me how the human body can move like that. If you look at it this way, it’s the same thing. You would probably understand how I feel if you try to teach me dancing, you know? Why can’t this guy understand such a simple thing? – that’s what you’d think.”

“I think I can relate.”

“If you really want someone to teach you, then ask him.”

“Him? Who?”

Heewon slowly raised a finger. There were men wearing white gowns inside the break room where the camera was being set up. They were minor actors for intern doctors.

“Which one?”

“The one who’s sitting down reading a script. He’s someone who acts in the complete opposite way to me. He even told me that he would sometimes let his instincts take over but fundamentally does everything based on calculation. If it’s about teaching, he’s a hundred times better than me.”

“Really?”

Yoonseo blinked and watched the man reading the script.

[1] General surgery

[2] About 140km away from Seoul

**Chapter 799. Sequence 7**

“You still have something to look at?”

Maru took his eyes off the script. Hyungseok was looking alternately between him and his script with a gaze mixed with expectation and anxiety. He looked like a child by the river who was wondering what would happen if he dipped his foot into the river.

“Are you a kid?” Maru said as he put down the script.

Hyungseok was someone smart as he led a successful business, but he was like a little kid with very little independence in a set. It was good that he chose conversation and asking questions as a way to adapt to this foreign environment, but he didn't like the fact that the target was him.

“There's a hill I could lean on, so it'd be a waste to be standing by myself. Anyway, what are you really looking at? You only have four lines in this scene, don't you?”

“Whether it's four lines or a hundred lines, it makes me feel uneasy if I don't keep looking.”

“Uneasy? You?”

“What, I don't have the right to be uneasy?”

“I didn't say that. It was just unexpected to hear that from you. I mean, you're good at acting, aren't you? It's just four lines, so I thought you'd just deal with it like it was nothing.”

Maru thought that it'd be great if he could just deal with it like it was nothing. He was always relaxed when he practiced his script. After all, practice was a process without any pressure and failure was tolerable. There was no one who would scold him because he messed up his breathing, words, and emotions during practice he was doing by himself. It was something that he spent his own time on and was something that was wholly his own responsibility. What made him uneasy was what came after practice. It was like that with plays as well. He was always nervous and uneasy during the waiting time before he started the real deal. Whenever he saw the members of the troupe running wild on stage, there was always a sense of unease blossoming within him, worrying about if he could do well amongst those people. As his thought process thought of the exclamations due to failure before the applause due to success, it was hard for him to be optimistic and calm his mind. He was already living a life riddled with imperfect elements, so it was hard for him to picture a hopeful result.

The script was the sole exit that allowed him to escape the pit of nervousness that existed between practice and the real performance. With the reason that he should consolidate the character to be conscious of the context of the situation and to bestow a sense of realism to the scene, he had written down numerous things in the corners of the script, but one thing he recently realized was that each of those actions was a way to escape the pressure given to him by the shoot. That identity of that sense of pressure was fear. The true identity behind the fear that seeped up between practice and the real performance was the gloomy reality embedded deeply in his life. No matter how much he practiced, this life was the 'true reality'. The sense of powerlessness from the thought that he would not be able to go to the real performance. Even before he was conscious of the terrible reality of repeated lives, his body was trembling in fear between practice and the real performance due to the sense of powerlessness that had piled up in his body.

“When I first played a minor character in a movie, I only had one line.”



“The movie that you spoke about back then? Twilight Struggles, was it?”

Maru nodded.

“It was just one line, and there was nothing special about it. It was just a line said by a street thug after all. Also, I practiced that line at least a thousand times. I was uneasy. Before my desire to do well, there was a sense of pressure from the thought that I must not fail. That hasn’t changed even now.”

“A thousand times huh. I can’t possibly imagine.”

“I like efficiency. Whether it’s personal relationships or anything else. I feel that it is desirable to gain the most for minimum investment. But with acting, it doesn’t work that way. It is the epitome of overinvestment and inefficiency. Even I can tell that it’s absurd. I even wonder if there was a need for me to go so far. And whenever I thought that there was only one conclusion I arrived at: I am still lacking.”

The repeated lives were no different from a long period of practice. The only thing he could do as he waited for the curtain call that had yet to arrive was endless repetitive practice. He tried following the script and tried doing it in a different way. The only thing he could do was to practice over and over and arrive at the best result. The reason he was doing it, despite predicting that there would not be a dramatic end, was because everything would be over if he just gave up.

The moment he finished those words, the standby sign fell. Maru placed his script under the desk. The other interns also put on their gowns and waited. Heewon appeared with arrogant steps. Producer Jayeon was with him.

“It’s a break where you eat snacks. Everyone sit down in your designated places and relax without being conscious of the camera.”

After giving instructions to the interns, Jayeon called Heewon and Yoonseo and took them around. She seemed to be telling them the movement lines.

“Yoonseo, you speak from here and then turn around and sit down. Heewon, you lean to the side. Should we try lines? Maru can respond too.”

Yoonseo entered the break room and pulled on Heewon’s arm. Heewon, being dragged over, sat on the edge of the table, while Yoonseo sat down on a chair as she clutched her head.

“Stop going against the seniors for god’s sake. You won’t get anything good from fighting them.”

Maru spoke as he rested his chin on his hand,

“So you caused a ruckus again, huh. Who did you go against this time? Senior Choi? Senior Park?”

“Senior Park. That guy is already out to get this guy, and this guy keeps baiting him.”

“Lee Joosung, you should put a stop to it, you know? If you want to finish your internship life without trouble.”

Maru looked at Heewon before throwing a snack on the table at him. This wasn't an action that was agreed upon beforehand, but he had the confidence that Heewon would respond. Indeed, Heewon caught the snack with his mouth. He put his hand into the doctor's gown and grumbled.

"It's just how I am. What am I supposed to do about it?"

"So you have no intentions of fixing yourself huh. If you're going to keep fighting, I guess you need more energy. Here, take this."

He threw another snack at him. This was an improvisation that he could do because he was aware of the director's nature. Jayeon was the type of person who would welcome actors trying various things outside of the script.

Heewon caught the chocolate snack with his mouth again and pushed it into the corner of his mouth before starting to chew on it. Seeing him act so natural as though they had practiced this beforehand, Maru thought that he was a natural. They weren't close enough to find out what each other was thinking through their eyes alone, but they were able to vaguely grasp what each other wanted in terms of acting. The moment Heewon's eyes landed on the snacks, Maru was reminded of the character's prankster nature, and Maru had the belief that he would eat it and start goofing around again if he threw one. Before he threw it, he put the snack between his fingers and flicked it slightly, and Heewon twitched his eyebrow as though he understood his intentions. The fact that the skit fit together when they had no practice beforehand probably meant that the process in which they put together their acting was similar. If there was a difference, it was that Heewon probably understood everything intuitively. While Maru went through the process of thinking about the director's personality, the character's nature, and ultimately the conclusion, Heewon would probably have arrived at the conclusion 'catch the snack' almost instantaneously. That was talent. It was Heewon's world that Maru could never understand nor wanted to understand.

"Did you two put that together?" Jayeon asked.

Maru shook his head. He also added that there was no way a minor actor would have the time to talk to the main actor.

"Maru told me with his eyes. He and I are in a deep relationship where we can communicate like that."

"Who's in a deep relationship with who?"

"See that? We're in a deep relationship, don't you think?" Heewon grinned.

"Try doing that once the camera starts rolling. It was pretty decent. I knew putting you in would liven things up."

"Don't say that when I haven't done anything. You know that putting me on a pedestal won't get you anything good."

"Did I say something? I only said the truth. Well then, let's get prepared and start rolling."

The director turned around. Maru snapped his finger and called Heewon.

"I'll throw it just like last time, so catch it."

“Sure.”

He grabbed the snack like last time and threw it at Heewon. Heewon caught it with his mouth proficiently before winking.

“Are you two close?” Yoonseo asked him.

Before Maru could say anything, Heewon spoke before him and said ahead of him and said, ‘we’re close’. Maru just shrugged. The person in question said they were close, so maybe?

“I see. Is your personality usually that bright? When I watched you just now, you seemed to be suited for the role.”

“An actor doesn’t become a murderer just because they play the role of one, right?”

“I guess that was a stupid question. Sorry about that. I really hate those comments too and yet I asked something similar. She wears sexy clothes, so she must be a slut; she looks like a prostitute from the way she smiles. I was fed up with those words too.”

Maru scratched his eyebrows. He was talking to Heewon just now, so his words weren’t exactly gentle.

“Not at all. I guess I put that in the wrong way too. I only act like that when I talk with him. As for my personality, it’s just ordinary. Doesn’t stand out but isn’t really flawed.”

“Oh, I see.”

While they were talking, Maru turned around to look behind him. Hyungseok was poking on his waist. Introduce me, now. The frown between his eyebrows was screaming that at him.

“The guy behind me says he’s a fan of yours.”

“Really? Thank you.”

Yoonseo said hello to Hyungseok. With that, the other interns also chimed in. Maru quietly stood up and took out the script that he placed below the desk.

“What happened between you and Gaeul last time?” Heewon asked as he pulled on the script.

Maru had been wondering why he wasn’t asking, but he didn’t know that he would ask now.

“Nothing.”

“Like hell it’s nothing. Obviously, something happened.”

“What’s something?”

“There really was nothing?”

“Even if there was something, I have no obligation to tell you.”

“You should at least say what happened to the person who set you two up. But I do get that you haven’t been in contact with her. You haven’t heard that Gaeul collapsed, have you?”

Maru let go of the script. Heewon's hands jerked backwards, and the script flew into the air before falling back down. People stared at the two before turning around.

"What do you mean by that? Gaeul collapsed?"

"Apparently, there was no big problem. I think it was over-exhaustion or something."

"Are you sure that she isn't hurt?"

"From what I heard. If you're so curious, you should give her a call. You have her number, don't you?"

Heewon stared at him. Maru grabbed his phone tightly inside his pocket before letting go.

"It's fine if she isn't hurt."

"You should give her a call at least. She would be sad if you don't take interest in her when she's hurt."

It was right around the time he had that ominous dream. The rabbit that decided to remain behind by herself in the darkness as well as Gaeul who fell over – for it to be a coincidence, the timing tugged on his mind. Han Maru's death signaled the start of a new life. What he could deduce from the rabbit's words was the future that would arrive after Han Gaeul's death. It was probably the end of the cycle of life. Maru clenched his teeth. He had not accepted all these new lives in order to accept such an outcome.

"Don't make a scary expression and just try giving her a call. Or at least text her. You're making me nervous. I don't know a lot about Gaeul, but I know that she held a big meaning to you. Well, I'm sure you'll get it sorted by yourself."

Heewon told him to keep it a secret that he was the one to tell Maru the news if he was going to call Gaeul. The reason being that he didn't want to get beaten up. Maru spoke as he picked up the script from the floor,

"Thanks."

"If you appreciate it, help me out when I ditch Haewon later. His radar is easily turned off when you're around. I wonder how he can trust you more than his own brother. It's a sad thing."

The assistant director announced that they were going to begin soon. Maru heaved a sigh before sitting down. Right now, it was time to focus on work.

### **Chapter 800. Sequence 7**

She felt like her skull was ringing. She felt like someone had hit a large gong right in front of her. When one side subsided, the ringing on the other side became bigger. She even felt like she could make out the shape of her skull if she closed her eyes because of all of the chaotic reflections of those waves; this part is the top, this part is the back, and this part is the temple. She was reminded of when she rode a boat when the waves were rocky. She felt like she was floating in the air as she stepped onto the ground. An urge to vomit that could not be prevented by seasickness medicine and could only be resolved after she vomited everything out. She felt exactly like that right now.

She sat up and drank some water. Fragmented memories sparked in her splitting mind. They were things that she saw in her dream. In the darkness was a man intently staring at her. That man did not close his eyes until he was devoured by the darkness. The gaze made her heart thump. The moment she was about to wake up from the dream, she realized that the man's eyes were not on her; they were on the small creature next to her. It was a small, feeble-looking rabbit.

"You were up?"

Gaeul smiled joyously as she looked at the face of the person coming in.

"Why did you come? Aren't you busy?"

"How can this unni not visit you when you've collapsed? How do you feel?"

"I'm okay, apart from my headache. The doctor said that there's no big trouble either. Apparently, it was malnutrition and fatigue."

"I knew this would happen from the moment I heard that you were going on a diet without eating."

"I've been doing it for a long time though. I didn't think I was in this bad of a condition. Heck, I'm even more puzzled because I suddenly collapsed."

"If there's one thing that people get mistaken about easily, it's that they think they know their own body. I'm sure your body must have given you signals beforehand. 'Hey, owner? I think I'm going to collapse, so can you get some rest?' You probably ignored that and continued working."

"How am I supposed to make a living if I take a rest because my body is complaining?"

"I guess that's the problem. Here. Oh, you don't have to watch out for any specific food, right?"

Gaeul opened the white box. There was a chocolate cake in it. The color was thick, and the smell was sweet unlike the food given to her at the hospital.

"I wanted to eat something too."

"You should have had your manager buy things for you."

"I just thought it was etiquette to eat hospital food while I'm in the hospital."

"If that's the case, I'll eat it."

"Unni, if you bought it for me then it's mine. Don't even think about touching it."

"Don't wanna. Half of it is mine. Also, I didn't buy it. I made it."

Gaeul smiled and undid the wrap. She ripped open the plastic packaging for the plastic fork inside and gave it to Chaerim.

"Isn't it busy at the store?"

"I'm someone who just collects the money, so I don't have any reason to be. Though, sometimes I make coffee and sell stuff."

"You're an evil owner."

“Try looking for an evil owner who pays 1,000 won above minimum wage before saying that. Here, have a taste. It’s the new cake that we’re going to sell.”

“My palate is pretty picky, you know?”

“I’m expecting a picky evaluation from you. Hand it to me. I’ll slice it up for you.”

Chaerim got the cake and started moving the knife delicately as though she was some master craftsman. Inside the thick cake was red syrup.

“Strawberries?”

“That and many other things. It’s a specialty menu.”

“Er, every specialty menu you thought of usually disappears from the menu.”

“Don’t you think I’ll hit a jackpot someday?”

“Please think about me, who’ll be eating it.”

“Stop complaining and eat it. This time, I’m confident.”

She put the slice of cake inside her mouth. Before she could even taste the sweet chocolate that touched the ceiling of her mouth, a sour taste kicked in. The identity of the red syrup was grapefruit. Gaeul put her lips together.

“How is it?” Chaerim asked, filled with expectation.

She put down the fork.

“It’s sour.”

“Sour?”

“Really sour.”

“That’s strange. The ratio should be right.”

“You didn’t try it?”

“I did, the ingredients, I mean.”

“You should have tried out the final product.”

“I didn’t touch it because I wanted to present it to you first. But that’s strange. I thought it’d be pretty good. I mean, red grapefruits have been gaining popularity these days. The combination of chocolate and red grapefruits. Don’t you think it’s marvelous?”

“There’s a marvelous saliva party occurring in my mouth right now. I think you put way too much syrup in it. The bread is not moist, it’s soggy. Here, have a taste.”

She sliced the end of the cake with her fork and gave it to Chaerim. This unni kept averting her gaze and refused to open her mouth. When she kept pushing it against her mouth, Chaerim ended up eating it.

Her expression changed instantly – to that of someone who had swallowed about four to five lemons straight.

“But it’s pretty decent as a gift for a patient. I mean, sour things are good for patients, aren’t they?”

“I’m pretty sure dessert isn’t exactly the kind of thing you eat for health.”

Gaeul brought the cake placed on top of the mini-fridge over.

“But it’s a present, so I should keep eating it. Who knows? I might get attached to it if I keep eating.”

Chaerim, who was smiling next to her, turned on the TV. She watched the news for a little before changing the channel. She went through the regional TV channels and eventually stopped on a cable channel that regularly broadcasted entertainment shows. Gaeul looked at the screen as she ate the sour cake. A celebrity with mud all over her face was staring at the ground in the middle of a mudflat. From the way she was scattering salt, she seems to be catching razorfish. The subtitle said ‘Dayoon struggling with all of her life.’

Gaeul pressed on the fork with her lips. Although she didn’t say anything, her eyes couldn’t help but be attracted to Chaerim’s face.

“Why are you watching it so intently?”

“No reason, really.”

“I don’t think it’s nothing.”

Chaerim opened the fridge. She asked if she could drink a bottle of orange juice. Gaeul replied that she could drink two.

“That unni is doing pretty well these days. I guess it’s a good thing.”

“Do you still contact her?”

“For how careful you were looking at me, your questions are pretty blunt.”

“You’re the one who brought it up first.”

“There’s no one I’m in touch with among the members of ‘Blue’. At most, I just check if they’re alive or not through social media. Moreover, I’ve already retired and started running my own store, so I don’t have any point of contact with people in the media.”

“Don’t you want to go back?”

“I’m not sure. I’ve had a tough life since high school, so I don’t feel the desire yet. I would have kept doing it if my acting career went well, but that just went so-so.”

“There are many people around me telling me that they used to be your fans, you know?”

“I’ve seen journalists visiting my store. They apparently want to know how a retired idol from 3 years ago is doing. I feel grateful, but at the same time, it’s bothersome. Last time, there was a writer from a TV station asking me if I wanted to appear in a TV program.”

“What program was it?”

“It’s from a cable TV. I think it was ‘A Cup of Coffee’?”

“I know that one. It’s one of those where celebrities have an honest talk with the hosts.”

“To be precise, celebrities who lost their popularity.”

“If you return, I’m sure you won’t be treated like a celebrity who lost her popularity, you know? You aren’t even thirty, so you can’t exactly say that you lost your popularity.”

“It’s been three years already. Not only that, I just disappeared after my group disbanded besides briefly showing up as an actress. At this point, it’d be kinda funny to call myself an idol. It feels somewhat like a dream when I think about how I appeared on TV and sang and danced.”

“It’s somewhat strange for the star of our school to say that.”

“Isn’t Myunghwa High’s current star Han Gaeul?”

“I only succeeded you.”

Gaeul drank the orange juice that Chaerim poured for her. Perhaps thanks to the sourness of the cake, she found it very sweet. Chaerim pushed a bit of the cake into her mouth as she fixed her eyes on the TV. When Dayoon, who was on the TV, fell over on her butt, she chuckled before talking about old times with a longing look in her eyes.

“It’s strange. When we were a team, I couldn’t find that unni more scornful, but after all this time, I think I might be missing her.”

“Try calling her to see if you can meet up with her.”

“But if I see her, I’m pretty sure I’ll end up fighting with her again. You can only smile at bad memories if you leave them behind as memories. Bringing them up again might make both of us feel upset.”

“If you say so. But I still find it a pity.”

“That we aren’t getting back together?”

“No, that you retired. I definitely like a senior who makes delicious cakes like this for me, but I think it would’ve been even better if the senior was someone I could act together with.”

“You’re indirectly saying that my cake is terrible, aren’t you?”

“You have a twisted mindset. How did you come to that conclusion?”

She sliced a bit of the cake before putting it against Chaerim’s mouth. After initially declining, she eventually sighed and ate it.

“Why don’t you try?”

“I’m busy running the store.”

“I guess you should take a break from running the store then.”



“Isn’t it kinda funny to go back when I’m supposed to be retired?”

“From your expression just now, I think staying still will be even more funny. You’re someone who reached the top in that fiercely competitive idol world. You don’t know what will happen if you try acting with that kind of passion. There’s no one saying that you can’t become the second Lee Youngae<sup>[1]</sup>.”

“You’ve clearly gone too far.”

But the second Lee Youngae sounds nice – she whispered to herself.

“Tell me if you have any thoughts about it. I’ll help.”

“Alright, I guess that’s what’s good about having a successful little junior. I’ll tell you if I do make my mind up. But instead, you have to give me proper support at that time, okay?”

“Don’t worry about it. I’ll support you so high that you might fall over.”

After giggling her heart out while covering her mouth, Chaerim wiped her mouth before shaking off the laughter.

“It’s pretty strange if you think about it. I thought I’d never become close to you.”

“Why is that?”

“Why? Because if my memories serve me right, we were romantic rivals. No wait, I never even got to the starting line, so I guess we never did become rivals. This makes me jealous.”

“When the heck did that happen? I don’t even remember.”

“I’ve never seen people who actually don’t remember with a face like that.”

Gaeul shrugged. It was just as she said. The memories of that day would probably remain behind forever if her memories weren’t erased outright. It was just like an old nail protruding out of the smooth wall; a memory that would remain behind no matter how many times the frame hanging on it had been switched out.

“Since we’re at it, are you going out with anyone these days?”

“Me?”

“Who else is in this ward but you?”

Chaerim smiled sneakily.

“I wonder why the people around me are so concerned about my romantic life.”

“From the way you speak, I think the ‘people around you’ that you speak of must be Choi Seol.”

“Yep. Only you and Seol are nosy about my love life.”

“Stop changing the topic and tell me about it. Such a pretty girl collapsed, but there’s not a hint of a man in sight. Are you still living that single life?”

“What are you talking about? There are many men who want to go out with me, you know?”

“What’s the point in that? You’re a total nun-in-training.”

“I do have one.”

“What?”

Chaerim blinked. She, who many people would believe to be a high school student if she put on fainter makeup and cut up her bangs a little, sat down on the bed as though even her heart had become that of a high school girl and gabbled onto her arm. Curiosity started filling her eyes. They were full of surprise and expectation as she asked,

“Who is it? The man you told me about back then?”

“No.”

“Then who? Someone I don’t know?”

“You know him pretty well.”

“I know him pretty well?”

“Yes. But I don’t think I should talk about it yet. He avoids me.”

“Who the heck is avoiding my cute little Gaeul’s romantic interest?”

Try guessing – Gaeul was about to say that when she picked up her phone. She got a text message. Looking at the number and the name on the screen, Gaeul bit her lower lip.

“Unni, wait a sec.”

Gaeul pressed on the screen with her thumb. Her fingertip was slightly shaking.

-Don’t push yourself.

It was an uncute text message.

“Who is it?”

“A green frog<sup>[2]</sup>. No, I guess he’s a green frog on a horse, huh.”

She subconsciously smiled.

[1] A real actress who became famous as the ‘most Korean-style beauty’ after the drama ‘Jewel in the Palace’ became a hit in Korea.

[2] Korean (as well as Chinese/Japanese) folklore, about a green frog, who always did the opposite of what his mother frog told him to do, and the mother frog told him to bury her in the river once she died, in hopes of having him bury her in the mountain. The green frog decided to really bury her in the river and mourn for her every day, protecting her grave so that it didn’t get washed away. Here’s a link to the full story.