

## Baby steps

### External Dormitory, Room 613 – 9.12 AM

Spring break was over. After fully recharging on her last trip, Lexi was back in the soul city. She hasn't been living here for long, but she missed it more than she did her hometown ... or was it the food?

The minute she arrived to her dorm, Lexi hugged her bed. She still had an hour before going to the company. The minute she started unpacking her belongings, her phone rang.

"*Yoboseyo, Lexi-ssi*" the secretary pointed out "*Sajang-nim* asked me to let you know that a meeting is scheduled for today and your presence is requisite".

"*Jang biseo-nim*, what is it about?" Lexi inquired "Is something wrong with my contract?"

"The only information we have is that the whole staff will be present. Please, make sure to attend by 10 AM".

Despite soliciting a permission slip from the CEO himself, Lexi knew it was a risky move for her to leave midst training. Namjoon wasn't even notified of her absence until he noticed that she was nowhere to be found, so she couldn't expect him to have her back if the situation went awry. Chasing her negative thoughts away, she got dressed and went to the company.

### BIGHIT Conference room – 10.13 AM

With a heavy heart, Lexi accessed the conference room. The staff members of every department were already seated: composers, producers, choreographers, publicists, even the legal and marketing teams ... and Namjoon. From the looks of it, the meeting has already started prior to her scheduled appointment. Seeing her mentor in the room confirmed her doubts: whatever this reunion was about, a decision has already been made.

Motioned by her boss to take a seat, Lexi stepped forward and away from the door with a thumping heart. She didn't know if she should appeal before they continued with their meeting, so she just prayed in silence that today won't be her last.

"Our company has worked very hard to scout talent and sculpt it to fit in with the Hallyu image" the CEO initiated the second meeting "Golden trainees: vocalists, dancers, actors, all in one: a triple

threat. However, a piece of the puzzle is still missing” he paused “We need a fourth trait to complete the image”.

Even though they already knew the outcome of the reunion, the staff listened patiently. On the other side of the table, Lexi was struggling internally, impatient to hear her verdict.

A turn of the door knob snapped the young trainee out of her bubble of confusion. A girl of average height entered the room: dark hair with long bangs, almond eyes, and fair skin. She entered the room, bowed and sat on the other end of the table, facing the audience.

“Everybody, I would like you to meet our youngest trainee and future solo act Min Shinah” the CEO introduced the young lady “She has been with us for about two years now, she’s a triple threat, and she recently started writing her own songs. She will debut in the next fall as BIGHIT’s first female rapper, please take care of her”.

A round of cheers and applause invaded the room. Apparently, everybody was looking forward to Shinah’s debut. Among the crowd, Namjoon showed a visible grin.

“However ...” this word sent chills down Lexi’s spine. She still didn’t know her role in the meeting held before her, and it only took one word to guess her fate.

“As we are trying to present a fierce concept to the public, we have decided to put an emphasis on the lyrical flow” he explained further “While Shinah’s Korean rapping and writing style are flawless, we’re considering to include full English verses in her songs so as to add a signature to it. Hopefully, this will grant our future rookie a place in the industry, both nationally and overseas”.

The CEO looked Lexi’s way to address her next; he was met with a blunt look of confusion in return “Lexi-ssi, as of today, your trainee contract has been terminated”.

Lexi sat frozen in her seat, at a loss for words. It’s not that she wasn’t expecting it, but the sudden load of information hit her like a blow. Not knowing how to respond, Lexi faced the ground and waited to be dismissed.

“Lexi-ssi, starting tomorrow you will be appointed as one of the company’s official songwriters. We’re exchanging your old contract with an exclusive one, tying you to Shinah as her respective lyricist” he announced “I also understood that, aside from songwriting, you have an eye for

literature. There is a new section in the contract which indicates that all your literary work inside Korea will be managed by us in the future”.

It took Lexi a good minute to wrap her head around what just happened in front of her. She thought to herself that Hitman Bang might have a thing for manipulation and mild heart attacks aside from his eye for talent.

Finally coming back to her senses, she got up from her seat and bowed “*Sajang-nim*, thank you for believing in me, I promise not to disappoint”.

“Lexi-ssi, I believe in all of my people. Nonetheless, you’d better keep your promise to him” the CEO pointed at Namjoon, hinting that he was the one who suggested her.

Lexi turned to her coach and bowed again “Thank you for everything”. But for some reason, Namjoon refrained from looking her way.

“Well then, Idol rookie meet Lyricist rookie” the CEO jokingly introduced the girls to one another “That will be all for today”.

An overexcited Shinah jumped all the way to Lexi’s seat “*Annyeonghaseyo Unnie*. Please take care of me”.

“Shinah, have you tried the cafeteria downstairs?” Lexi proposed as the two ladies left the conference room linking arms.

### **BIGHIT Cafeteria – 12.30 PM**

Shinah was Lexi’s junior by five years. She was energetic, joyful and lively. While her parents allowed her to train to be an idol, they prevented her from debuting until she graduated, which was due in two months. She was born and raised abroad until she was a teen; afterwards her whole family moved back to Korea because of her dad’s work. She spoke English fluently with a perfect accent.

“Tell me, Shinah. What made you want to be an idol?” Lexi’s curiosity initiated the conversation.

“I love performing. Ever since I was a little girl, I used to sing and dance around the house. Guests always triggered my inner performer, nothing would stop me from putting on a show despite my parents’ embarrassment” the newbie told “Following the fuss that Hallyu created in the last few years made me want to put myself out there”.

“Well, I guess we have something in common” Lexi joyfully stated.

The two ladies sipped on their milkshakes as the aspiring lyricist told her tale. They shared few more stories, allowing each other to grow closer and even opened up about their darkest fears. Finally allowing her to prove herself in the field, Lexi looked forward to her first day as a tutor instead of a trainee.

“Since the contracts won’t be officially valid until tomorrow, you can have the rest of the day off. Your weekdays are probably busy because of school but you can drop by whenever you want, you’ll find me here starting noon. I know that you also have your vocal and dance lessons on the side, so I’ll try my best to accommodate with your schedule” Lexi elucidated “I may not be of much help when it comes to Korean rap, but I can read your English drafts and correct them for you. I believe that an artist should always express his thoughts with his own words”.

“*Kamsahamnida Unnie*, I will work hard and cherish this opportunity” an overjoyed Shinah expressed her gratitude.

“I’m sure you will. I will see you tomorrow” Lexi advised “If you have any drafts, bring them along. We’re starting this right”.

#### **BIGHIT Recording Studio – 4.12 PM**

It’s been almost five hours since Lexi broke free from her previous contract. She’s been a trainee for six months and she grew to like it. Switching responsibilities made her anxious, but she was looking forward to experiencing new things. After a long chatter with her now-assigned trainee, the young writer rushed to the studio to look for Namjoon.

“Namjoon-ssi!” she called once she arrived at the floor. At the office, the idol was busy going through his bookshelf, looking for a certain book. He was startled by Lexi’s unexpected presence, and put back his book before turning to face her.

“Namjoon-ssi, I am forever in your debt. For training me all these months, for bearing with my attitude, for caring after my health and for recommending me, *Kamsahamnida*” she praised him.

However, her sparkling eyes were met with a rather cold gaze. He snickered and stepped away from the bookshelf to face her “You could’ve told me, you know”.

Immediately recognizing her mistake, she eyed the floor with regret. She didn't know what to say, she basically fled the country without a warning.

*"Ya Lexi-ah ! One call, a text, or maybe a note to be delivered by the secretary! How hard could that be?"* he shouted, red with anger *"I had to hear about your whereabouts from the cafeteria gossip. I couldn't even ask about you elsewhere because what kind of coach will I be if I don't even know where my trainee is?"*

Lexi stood silent. Her clumsiness has always put her in dire situations and this one was no different. She could think of a million things to say to justify her last-minute flee but she wouldn't dare worsen the situation *"Joesonghamnida Namjoon-ssi, I wasn't in my right mind when I took that decision"*.

As much as he was still angry with her, he couldn't bear to see her pouty face. Her red nose signaled an upcoming waterfall of tears, another thing he despised even more.

*"Aish ... Hajima"* he vented *"Kwenchana, no harm done. However you have to make it up to me; you still owe me five days of training"*.

Upon hearing his ruling, Lexi was reassured. She bowed again and took her usual seat, trying to brainstorm a schedule to balance between her remaining program and her newest task. A pop ringtone lighted up the mood in the office, the screen showed a certain Lee Jae Suk calling.

*"Nae David-ssi"* she answered.

*"Oraenmaniya, fugitive"* he guilted her *"You know it's rude to go away without a warning and turn your phone off. Since when is Pr. Jenkins your best friend to tell me about your whereabouts?"*

*"Ah jinjja! David-ssi, not you too! I just got told off by my coach and I barely made it without dying of guilt. I will make it up to you, just pick your treat"*.

*"Actually"* he eluded *"I need to talk to you about something. I have some news I want to share"*.

Relieved that her dose of scolding ended for the day, she suggested *"I'll be home in about two hours. Meet me there?"*