



A / MILLION
beginnings

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A Million Beginnings

- The Millions Series Pt.1 -

by Sabrina T. Rudolph

K-Pop Boy Group Millions Returns With InVision, Old Label EW Entertainment Under Fire!

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From EW to InVision, the chart-smashing K-Pop boy group **Millions** is making a surprise comeback to the entertainment industry only a few months after finishing their five-year contract with their old label, controversial **EW Entertainment**.

Earlier this year, public attention was directed towards EW Entertainment as several lawsuits were filed against the label, including mistreatment of their artists and money embezzlement. The prosecutor in charge of the EW case declared that such behavior of K-Pop entertainment companies should not be overlooked and promised to fight for a fair outcome. The lawsuit sparked strong interest, both nationally and internationally, particularly among the fans of Millions.

Millions, who debuted under EW Entertainment on January 17, 2017, were active for only three years before the group went on a sudden hiatus in the summer of 2020. Without prior announcement, the eldest members **Kang Junyoung** and **Im Taejun** enlisted to serve out their military duty, which sparked controversy among the fans. The fans also showed great concern for the remaining members **Sung Siwoo**, **Lee Minseo**, **Park Aron**, **Lee Bryen** and **Choi Eunkyu**, who remained inactive during the past two years.

In a recent press conference, Millions' leader Junyoung stated, "Our time with EW Entertainment taught us a lot. The members and I are excited to start this new chapter with **InVision Entertainment**. We are most grateful to the court that ruled in our favor to keep our group name, and we promise to work hard to show our fans a better and stronger Millions."

As Millions are to make their comeback soon, we wish them all the best and join the fans in their excitement for the group's future.

TRACK 1

HERE TO STAY

- Seohee -

“The group’s future,” I mouthed as I looked down at my phone, which was still displaying the news article about the ‘chart-smashing K-Pop boy group’ Millions.

At the bottom of the article, there was a photo of seven handsome young men. Taking in the elaborate hairstyles, colorful makeup and fancy accessories, I rolled my eyes and chuckled. The picture must have been a few years old as the group had been inactive for about two years now. They were due to make their comeback within the next few months.

Millions—a name that I had just been reintroduced to a few days ago.

After their debut about five years ago, I must have been one of the few people in South Korea that had never paid attention to them. All of my fellow students had instantly fallen in love and couldn’t stop talking about them: Oppa is so handsome! The maknae is the cutest! Their singing is so superior to other groups! Look at their powerful dance moves!

These conversations, still so familiar, had been just background noise to me. The final exams had been right around the corner, and I couldn’t afford to be distracted from reaching my goals: graduating with good grades, continuing my studies somewhere abroad and finding a well-paid job.

Most of my plans had worked out well enough: Graduate with good grades, check! Master’s abroad, check! A well-paid job?

I sighed, looking down at the picture once more. The idols were almost taunting me with their cheeky winks, perfect smiles and heart signs. I might

as well have gone to all those fan events with my classmates. I could have skipped a lecture and fawned over that pretty Millions guy. What was his name again? Minseo? The effect on my bank account and résumé would have most likely been the same either way.

Patience, Seohee, you are just at the beginning of your career!

I straightened my shoulders with determination. Right! With a bit of luck, things could already be taking a turn for the better in only a few hours from now. With that thought, I checked the time. I had another forty-five minutes to go before my job interview at the company on the other side of the street.

Looking at the news article once more, I felt my resolve strengthen. Having all of the most important Korean news outlets report about Millions in such a positive way today of all days had to mean something. It had to be a good sign.

I locked my phone screen and continued to stroll through the convenience store. Apart from the cashier, an old man, the place was empty. The overhead lights were humming steadily, and soft music was playing from the speakers. It was the perfect place to distract myself and stall for time.

Perhaps I should buy a small snack? On second thought, feeling my stomach tense in a clear sign of nerves, food might not be the best idea! Maybe something to drink?

My eyes scanned the shelves, coming to a halt on a small yellow bottle. I raised an eyebrow and smiled. Reaching for the banana milk, I felt like a teenager again. The drink had been my cheap and tasty companion during all of my exams.

I approached the counter to pay for my drink.

The elderly cashier greeted me with a glint of interest in his eyes. “This is your first time in my store, right?” he asked, a friendly smile appearing on his lips and eyes forming crescents.

“Ah, yes, how did you know?” I replied, returning his smile.

The man gave me a knowing wink. “I would remember a pretty face like yours!”

I chuckled and bowed. “Kamsahamnida, Ahjussi!”

The man raised his brows and burst out into laughter. “Ahjussi? You are a polite young lady, aren’t you? I am probably more the age of a harabeoji! Go on, call me that!”

I smiled conspiratorially at him. “You don’t look a day older than forty!” That was a blatant lie, and we both knew it. The store owner had white hair and, judging by the wrinkles around his eyes, was around seventy.

He laughed quietly and scanned the banana milk. “Will you stop by often from now on?” he asked with sincere interest.

“There is a chance I might become a regular!” I replied happily.

The man smiled delightedly. “Oh, did you move to this area?”

I shook my head. “No, but I am hoping to get hired by a company across the street. I have a job interview in about thirty-five minutes.”

He looked at the drink on the counter and tapped on its lid. “I will give you this milk for free to wish you luck! But if you get hired, you have to come to my store often, alright?”

I tried to argue that I would pay, but the harabeoji insisted. Eventually, I nodded and bowed quickly to thank him. “Deal! Thank you so much, Harabeoji!” I then took a glance around the store, my eyes landing on some chairs in front of the window. “Harabeoji, is it okay if I sit at the counter for a while to wait for my interview?” I asked and received a nod in response. He gestured for me to take a seat.

I settled in one of the chairs and unlocked my phone once again. The article about Millions had links to similar topics, which led me further into the world of K-Pop. I was curious to read more. Although I had already done quite a bit of research ahead of the interview, there was still so much more to learn.

The music industry wasn’t my field of expertise, but seeing how I had always been a quick and eager student, I didn’t worry too much about my lack of knowledge. If I were to be hired by InVision, I would need to make sure that I caught up on this whole other world.

I read through more and more news, shocked to see how many K-Pop groups existed nowadays. A few years ago, there hadn’t been that many groups, or had there? There were girl groups, boy groups, solo artists, groups that seemed to have debuted just a few months ago and other groups that had debuted already during my school days or before.

I blinked at all the names, some more and some less familiar: EXO, Blackpink, Seventeen, Everglow, Girls Generation, Super Junior, Ateez, Stray Kids, Winner, Twice, Treasure and many more.

Who could possibly know all of these? I groaned. I definitely still had some catching up to do. I had read a lot of names over the past few days, but there seemed to be an infinite amount of them. Weren't some of these kids even too young to debut? Who the hell came up with these outfits? Could people really look like that?

"WHAT? Harabeoji, are you serious right now?"

I almost jumped when I heard the loud, desperate voice from across the store. I looked over at the counter to see a young man standing in front of the store owner. I blinked a few times. I must have been so immersed in my thoughts that I didn't hear him enter.

"I am sorry, but I sold the last one just a while ago!"

At these words, the young man groaned and slumped on the counter in an overly dramatic fashion. "You must be kidding me!" he whined.

The old man behind the counter chuckled. "Sorry, kiddo! But maybe it's for the best! He can't just live off that milk all day, you know?"

I watched the stranger lift his body from the counter slowly, clearly exhausted. "Harabeoji, it's easy for you to say that! You don't have to live with his cranky mood all day when he doesn't get his beloved banana milk!"

My eyebrows shot up. Banana milk? I glanced at the unopened bottle on the counter next to me.

"I didn't even know that a convenience store could run out of banana milk. And today of all days!" the man added, ending with an exasperated sigh.

I almost felt bad for him. He sounded so disheartened.

"I am really sorry," the owner said with a huff.

The man groaned and mumbled, "Great, now I have to cross the street, enter that building and meet my maker! He will have my head, and work will be unbearable for the rest of the day!"

I tilted my head, listening. Did he just say that he worked on the other side of the street?

My eyes scanned over him, and I noticed a badge hanging from his jean pocket. I tried to make out the writing, and recognized the logo instantly from all of the research I had done before sending my application to InVision Entertainment.

I wondered. Could he be a manager running an errand for Millions?

I took a closer look at him. He was tall and athletic, his jean-clad legs seemed endless. I raised an eyebrow. His height and stature definitely fit the image of those strong-looking managers I had pictured. His profile looked quite handsome. Straight and defined nose, thin but still nicely-shaped lips, light brown hair that seemed tousled in a carefully styled way. Some strands were falling into his eyes which enhanced his attractiveness. I frowned. Did everyone in the K-Pop industry, managers included, look like god-damn models? This guy definitely could pass as one. He was unfairly good-looking.

“Harabeoji, please, please tell me that you can magically find one last bottle of banana milk in your well-hidden storage for very desperate customers!” The man clapped his hands together in a begging way and bowed in front of the shop owner.

I snorted. If it wouldn’t have been so funny and almost cute to watch, I would have sincerely pitied the guy. Maybe I should reconsider applying for a job at his company. Either his higher-ups or the band members seemed to have a very bad temper if he was so desperate for a simple bottle of banana milk.

I took another glance at the time. Twenty minutes to go before I needed to be at my interview. I slipped my phone into my bag, grabbed the banana milk and walked up to the counter.

“Taejun-ah, I’m really sorry. How about you just buy a real banana for once? That might do him some good! Fresh fruit is much healthier.”

“Harabeoji, the banana will probably end up hitting my head, and that’s all the good it will do! I can’t go back without that milk!”

I considered this the perfect moment to intervene.

“Uhm, excuse me?”

I was startled by the sudden voice next to me. I turned to see a young woman standing at a respectable distance on my left—a very pretty young woman, I might add. I couldn't help but look her over quickly.

Her expression was calm and friendly. Her long wavy hair was dark brown and tied in a low ponytail, a few strands softly framing her face. She was dressed in a simple but elegant business outfit—light blue dress pants, a white blouse and a beige blazer with blue accents. Her outfit, although meant to be professional, made her look beautiful in an effortless way.

I blinked a few times. Beautiful? Where did that even come from?

I snapped out of my shameless staring when she cleared her throat.

Right, I was supposed to say something! Why was I so awkward? I rubbed my neck in an embarrassed gesture, a sheepish smile on my face.

She responded with a playful grin before she lifted her hand and held it out towards me. "I'm sorry to disturb this very dramatic display of desperation. I couldn't help but overhear that you have quite a situation on your hands concerning banana milk?"

Looking at her hand, I could see that she was indeed in possession of a very big treasure—one bottle of banana milk. I had the sudden urge to reach out and take it, but then an internal alarm went off.

Wait a minute! Damn it, I had forgotten to wear a mask again. Did she recognize me?

I looked from the banana milk to her face. While I was trying to read her expression, one of her brows lifted slowly in question. Her eyes shone brightly, glinting with intelligence and undisguised humor. Would she be the kind of person to use her intelligence against me?

Looking her over from head to toe once again, I weighed my options. She might actually be a nice and sincere person, but just as easily, she could be a reporter trying to get an inside story. She could also be a fan trying to flirt.

Man, life as an idol was hard! It made you develop a mistrust of people and a constant fear of being used.

"So? I would be willing to give my banana milk to you if you want it," she said, moving her hand a bit closer to me.

I slightly narrowed my eyes. “What’s the catch?” I asked carefully.

She blinked and asked in confusion, “Catch?”

I rolled my eyes in response. “Yes, what do you want in return?”

She seemed honestly taken aback when she replied, “Nothing! You just seemed to need it more than me. That’s all!”

She seemed sincere, but perhaps she was just a good actress?

I was very conflicted. On one hand, I wanted to just trust her, but on the other hand? I forced myself not to get too deep in my head and sighed. It couldn’t be helped; I needed to make sure. So I just asked, “Did you put something inside that drink?”

She gasped, and something flashed in her eyes. “Excuse me?” There were sparks of a fire that she might usually keep hidden. Interesting.

Better safe than sorry, though. It wouldn’t be the first time an anti-fan had put something into an idol’s drink. Things do happen!

“That drink! Did you put something inside it?” I asked again.

The woman lowered her hand in surprise then propped both hands on her hips. “Why, pray tell, would I put something in the drink?”

I hoped again she wasn’t an undercover reporter or someone with bad intentions. It would be such a shame. Her indignation was quite endearing. She had been beautiful from the start, but that annoyed glance that she was shooting at me right now gave her a special spark. Was it really possible to look prettier while glaring at someone? For this woman, it seemed to be.

“People have done crazier things,” I said offhandedly.

“Okay, you know what? Forget about it! I wanted to help you out because you seemed to potentially run into some trouble with your boss. But I have changed my mind! I will keep this very delicious banana milk that Harabeoji gifted me. I need to go anyway. I have a job interview, so I really can’t be late. Good luck with that boss of yours!” ending her rant, she turned on her heel to leave.

Wow, that was an explosion right in my face! And, there was no way of denying it—she was just stunning, angry or not. My first impression of her was of a very composed and polite young lady, but the fire in her eyes said otherwise. After our short encounter, I could already tell that she was hiding a whole different person. It made me wonder.

I considered giving her the benefit of the doubt. Maybe she really was who she claimed to be—just a stranger that wanted to kindly help someone out.

“Taejun-ah, don’t you want to follow her and ask her for that drink?”

At the store owner’s words, I snapped out of my thoughts. I started when I noticed the door closing behind the woman. She had actually left me standing here like an idiot. I shook my head and chuckled.

“See you soon, Harabeoji!” I mumbled with a bow to the older man before quickly following her outside.

“WAIT!” I called out to her.

She stopped and turned around to look at me indignantly. I caught up with her quickly.

Here goes nothing!

“I’m actually really desperate for that bottle of banana milk,” I said sheepishly.

She looked at me in silence for a while, and I tried hard not to blush under her scrutiny. After a moment, her lips started to twitch in amusement. Eventually, she stretched out her arm again to offer me the drink. This time I took it from her hand right away.

She huffed and mumbled, “That wasn’t that difficult, was it?”

I grinned and feigned offense. “Didn’t your parents ever teach you not to take presents from strangers?”

She nodded appraisingly. “Touché!”

For a second, we just stood there, assessing each other, then she leaned in with a conspiratorial glint in her eyes. “So, do you get poisoned in the middle of the day very often?”

I couldn’t help but laugh at that. “You would be surprised!” I winked at her, making her curl her lips into a small smile.

“Right!” she said, amused.

Our eyes met, and there was a bright light in hers that entranced me. Eventually, she lowered them again and started to play with the watch around her wrist.

Right, didn’t she have a meeting?

For some reason, I didn’t want to let her go just like that, so I needed a way to stall for time. “So, you’re headed for a job interview?” I asked her.

Her head snapped up in surprise. “How did you know that?”

I raised my eyebrow. “Someone blew up in my face with a very long rant. I believe this particular piece of information was a part of it.”

“I didn’t blow up in your face, and I didn’t rant!” she replied, miffed.

I chuckled. “Yes, you did!”

She scowled. “I would never do such a thing!”

I could hear the laughter in her voice. Not even she believed her own words.

“So, what job is it?” I asked, still stalling for time.

“Actually, if things work out, we might run into each other more often,” she said with a smile.

Was that a faint blush on her cheeks?

“Oh?” I was intrigued.

“The interview is actually with InVision Entertainment. God, on that note, I should hurry up before I am late!”

InVision? Right, the job interviews! That was supposed to be today.

An irritating thought crossed my mind. If she was about to go to a job interview with our company, shouldn’t she know who she was talking to right now? Was she pretending not to recognize me, or did she just not care? All things considered, that would have been actually quite decent of her. It wasn’t every day that I got to interact with people on a normal basis. Or maybe, she really didn’t have a clue who I was? I wasn’t sure if I should be offended or intrigued.

“You don’t have to frown so much. Don’t worry! I’m not a creepy stalker or anything. I just noticed your badge earlier and figured you work there.”

Did she really not know?

I couldn’t stop the grin from spreading on my lips. “How about we head over together then?” I suggested.

She smiled and gestured for me to lead the way. We walked next to each other in comfortable silence for a while.

“I am curious, though,” she suddenly said, gazing up at me.

I looked at her again. “About?”

“Who is it that is giving you such a hard time over something as mundane as banana milk? The management or the idols? Who do I need to be afraid of?”

I blinked a few times and then laughed. Okay, now I was convinced she had no idea who I was.

“Somehow, you don’t strike me as someone who gets scared easily!” I pointed out.

She seemed to think about that for a second. “I guess I am quite determined, and in my line of work, in order to succeed, you can’t show fear.”

I nodded approvingly.

She was planning on joining the K-Pop industry, an industry that one definitely needed a certain level of strength to survive in. I didn’t know which job she was aiming for in InVision Entertainment, but I had a feeling she would be able to handle it just fine.

“So, do you have a pro-tip for me? What can I expect from the interview? A scary boss? Idols with a bad attitude? Horrible working hours and bad pay?”

I tried not to be offended. Bad attitude? I actually thought we were quite down to earth, but then again, I was running after an unknown lady for a tiny bottle of milk for the sake of keeping our maknae happy. Maybe there was a quirk or two after all.

She slapped a hand to her mouth, and a blush started to spread over her cheeks. “Oh god, I’m really sorry! Those questions were inappropriate. Everyone at the company is probably very nice, and your boss is most likely a good person, especially seeing as to why he started the company in the first place.”

Looking at her, she seemed flustered, and her eyes clearly displayed how sorry she was. Cute! I bit my lip, trying hard not to chuckle, but her reaction made it difficult.

“Don’t worry about it! Actually, the boss has his scary moments for sure, and I think some of the Millions members have a bit of an attitude from time to time,” I said, trying to calm her down.

People could definitely lose their patience with some of us. I grinned as I envisioned our leader, Junyoung, and his hatred for waking up in the morning. The glare you would receive for trying to wake him up was scary as hell.

Bryen, on the other hand, absolutely refused to enter any stage without his lucky ring. That damn thing had caused quite the ruckus more than once. Try finding a thin ring in a big, busy backstage room.

So yes, there could be some attitude to deal with!

I glanced at the young woman next to me. She seemed to relax a bit.

“Still, I shouldn’t have said those things. I am usually more professional!” she mumbled, almost seeming to scold herself.

I smiled, amused. “Really, it’s alright! Everyone needs to relax from time to time. I won’t tell on you,” I promised.

When we reached the company building, she stopped and turned to face me. “Thank you...,” she blinked for a second, then let out a tiny, melodic laugh before continuing, “Actually, I don’t even know your name!”

“Taejun, Im Taejun,” I introduced myself slowly, slightly dumbfounded. I tried to catch her reaction.

She bowed slightly and smiled. “Nice to meet you! I’m Min Seohee!”

I just looked at her for a second, not sure how to react. Nothing in her eyes had shown any sign of recognition. She really didn’t even know my name?

Seeing her look at me questioningly, I quickly replied, “Nice to meet you, Seohee-shi!” I returned her smile, trying not to show my irritation.

“Well, Taejun-shi, I will head inside. Wish me luck!” She bowed once more, and I copied the gesture.

“Good luck!” I said as I watched her turn towards the door.

The black glass doors opened automatically, and she took a step inside. “Seohee-shi?” I heard myself say before I even knew what I was doing.

What was with me always calling out for her like this?

She turned once again and looked at me expectantly.

“I hope you get the job!” I said awkwardly.

Her eyes lit up before the doors closed, and she was gone.

I blinked and then looked down at the banana milk in my hand. I felt a smile form on my lips. For some reason, I was looking forward to the next few months.

Min Seohee. That name sounded nice and oddly familiar. I tried to remember why the name seemed to ring a bell. It took me a few moments, and then I grinned. I pulled my cell phone from my back pocket and

searched through my contacts before quickly dialing a certain number.
After a few rings, it connected.

“What’s up, Hyung?”

“Siwoo-ya, listen, remember our talk last night?”

TRACK 2

HUMPH!

- Seohee -

I just stared in disbelief at the three men sitting in front of me. Well, mostly two of them. The third one seemed to be just as irritated as me.

I was sitting on a chair in the middle of a large room; the men sat opposite behind a big table in front of me. It made them look like some kind of intimidating jury.

Seriously? Did they watch too many movies? Was this some kind of casting show? Was I here to try out to become the next rising star?

I almost chuckled at that.

Imagine that: Seohee, the singer! I was a horrible singer and dancer. I just didn't have it in my blood. Maybe that was also a reason why I never got into bands much.

Looking at the three men in front of me again, I had to suppress the urge to shake my head at them. Perhaps they'd watched too many crime TV shows? Was this a hearing? Did I commit some crime? This felt more like an investigation than a job interview.

Well, actually, this couldn't even be considered an investigation. They hadn't even bothered to ask me a single question yet. I'd entered the room, we did the usual introductions, I took a seat on this very awkwardly positioned chair, and then they had ignored me. They ignored me for a whole discussion about why I wasn't suited for the company.

If it wasn't so ridiculous, I would have actually been mad. They basically had already decided not to hire me, and still, they made me come and sit through this ridiculous interview. Who did that?

"Hyung, I think she would be a great asset for the company. Just look at her résumé! She has the right qualifications, has had only top grades and even did her masters in the US!"

I stopped my internal rant to, once again, focus on the hushed words shared between the two younger men in the room. They were still discussing the matter of me being not what they were looking for.

Watching them, it was honestly no surprise that these two were idols. No surprise whatsoever!

The guy who was currently defending my honor had earlier introduced himself with a bright smile as Sung Siwoo. His blue hair was tousled in a rakish way, and his stylish outfit was a perfect mix between a businessman and a handsome actor. His fine features were too charismatic for him not to be an idol.

"We can't afford to hire someone to take over for you, Siwoo-ya!"

I blinked at that sentence and heard the third-wheel-guy groan. I was pretty sure this kind of topic was not supposed to be blurted out so openly in a job interview. Judging by the way the third man glared at the younger two, he agreed with me on this. The actual owner of the company, on the other hand, didn't seem to care too much about it.

Before my job interview, I had done my homework and had learned the basics about InVision Entertainment. Kang Junyoung wasn't just the owner of the company but also the leader of the boy group Millions.

Junyoung, I had to admit, was an impressive man to look at. I could definitely see why so many girls would swoon over him. He was tall and muscular, with broad shoulders and strong features—he had an aura of power about him. He was the epitome of a perfect man in the eyes of a lot of women.

"But she is at the beginning of her career! She has barely any work experience, so her salary expectations can't be that high yet!"

I raised an eyebrow at Siwoo's words.

Excuse me? Well, he was right, of course, but still...!

“Even if we start with the lowest salary for a position like yours, that’s still more than we intended to put in for the actual open position!”

I heard the third guy cough slightly, which made the two others pause for a second.

Junyoung turned to him and patted his back. “No offense, Kijun-hyung, but you know what I mean!”

Now I was curious as to what the third guy’s role in this scary panel was. Kijun was a bit older than the other two. He was insanely big and even more muscular than Junyoung. His face was quite friendly, though. He almost looked like a big teddy bear. Apart from a courteous greeting, he had stayed mostly silent, just sitting next to the two idols.

“She could start as a manager!” Siwoo blurted out and looked at me with a proud smile as if he just had the smartest idea ever.

A manager? As in a band manager? As in—I will be constantly busy running errands for an idol, keeping track of their schedules, making sure they eat and drink, and driving them from A to B—that kind of manager?

“She is overqualified for this job, Siwoo-ya!” Junyoung said with a groan.

I wanted to nod along. He was right. I was overqualified to be a manager aka PA to an idol. I had planned to work within the business department as a simple employee, get promoted within a year and eventually reach the very top. But starting as a manager?

“That might be true, but she might consider it. Think about it, Hyung! We’ve just started this company, and there is still a lot of potential for upcoming positions and promotions!” Siwoo said as he threw a winning smile at me.

He wasn’t wrong about this; it was part of the reason why I had applied for InVision in the first place. My résumé would have allowed me to aim for a bigger, more established company, but when I had seen the job opening for this company, it had intrigued me. Sure, a big plus had been that the position was open immediately, but the pull towards helping to build something from scratch and being part of a potential success story had been even stronger. A young and upcoming company with only a few employees and mainly led by the idols themselves? There definitely were plenty of opportunities!

Millions, as a boy group, had a big enough fandom to actually make this company work. Even though they had only been fully active for three years before their mysterious hiatus, they had managed to get an insane number of fans right from the start. Their debut back then had caught a lot of attention, the songs catchy and the members good-looking and talented. The follow-up album had already gained them quite a number of chart show wins.

When their old company announced the hiatus of the group, the entire fandom was shocked. The military enlistment news of the two eldest members soon after had the fans even more confused. Idols starting their military service at a young age wasn't the norm for companies and bands. This usually meant there were bigger issues with the idols. The fans had many theories about what had happened with Millions behind the scenes. Most of them were sure the company had punished the group for something, but there was no way to officially confirm this story.

Despite the issues and the mystery, Millions hadn't been forgotten, though. Their fandom was still going strong, and therefore, I could easily see this company doing well in the near future. All they needed to do was to release their first self-produced album. I was sure that would guarantee them attention and a steady income flow.

So, as Siwoo had put it, InVision Entertainment had a lot of potential for upcoming positions. Granted, I hadn't thought about starting as an idol manager, but then again, I also had never worked at a brand-new company.

"But she is a woman! Women rarely ever work as managers for male idol groups, right, Kijun-hyung?" Junyoung said, turning to Kijun.

Okay, now I was officially offended. As if there was any job done by men that couldn't be done just as well by women.

"Don't you think that is a bit sexist, Hyung?" Siwoo asked with an apologetic smile in my direction.

Thank you!

I smiled back at him. I was really starting to like this guy.

"But he is right! Actually, thinking about it, I don't know any female managers that work with male artists. There are female managers, of course, but they usually work with female artists!" Kijun said.

Oh, so now he felt inclined to talk?

Kijun threw a glance at me that clearly said, “I’m sorry!” Obviously, it hadn’t been his intention to disagree but simply to state the facts.

I appreciated the honesty and not sugar-coating problems. Still, that didn’t make the issue any less wrong.

“See, she just isn’t right for the job, so we...,” Junyoung started, but Siwoo didn’t let him finish.

“Think about it, Hyung! She might be just right for the job. Firstly, she has a lot of potential to take on a better position once our company is a bit more stable moneywise. Secondly, I think it would be great for her to start in a manager position before being promoted. As a manager, she can learn about our needs and concerns and will be more willing to take our opinions into consideration when making decisions in her later role. And the fact that she is a woman might cause some issues here and there, but honestly,” Siwoo stopped for a second and seemed to contemplate his next words, “I feel like she could be exactly what some of the younger members need.”

There was definitely some underlying meaning behind Siwoo’s words. It seemed to be a hidden message that I couldn’t figure out, but it made Junyoung actually stop and reconsider. For the first time since I entered the room, I had the impression that he actually looked at me. I tried to meet his eyes with a firm and calm expression.

His scrutiny lasted for what felt like an eternity, then he looked down at my résumé and back at me again. “Seohee-shi, what do you think about all of this? I’m sure you must have heard our entire unprofessional discussion,” Junyoung tried with a small smile.

Wow, they actually got around to asking me something? A question, like in an actual job interview?

I relaxed my arms from their former crossed position and smiled slightly. “First of all, thank you for actually including me in this discussion. Listening to you and Siwoo-shi gave me some insights into the company and several things to consider!”

Junyoung raised a brow in curiosity.

“You are right! I’m overqualified for the position of an idol manager. It’s not exactly what I was aiming for when I sent in my application...”

Junyoung whispered to Siwoo, “See? I told you!”

“...however, Siwoo-shi isn’t wrong with his assessment either.”

Siwoo sent a triumphant smirk at Junyoung.

“Before I sent my application, I did a bit of research about the company and Millions.”

They didn’t really need to know that I had barely known anything about their band before that. They also didn’t need to know that it had taken me a bit to connect their names to the faces I had seen on the internet. Those pictures had obviously been outdated, and the kids, smiling back at me from those photos, had looked nothing like their more mature versions sitting in front of me now.

That needed to be addressed. Millions desperately needed to release new pictures. They needed to refresh the memory of the public as soon as possible. Only active groups would get investors. Companies would hire only the most popular idols for modeling jobs. Sponsorships worked for those who could sell the brand with just a touch. TV broadcasting stations would only let well-liked groups appear on their shows.

I had to stop myself. Here I was, already trying to make the company more successful before I was even hired!

“As you pointed out earlier, you and I are both just at the beginning stage of our goals. This doesn’t need to be a disadvantage for either of us, though. From my perspective, it gives us the possibility of learning together, creating something successful and working from scratch. We can grow together as a team and turn this company into something innovative.”

I saw Siwoo’s encouraging smile and Junyoung relaxing a little in his seat.

“I understand that the financial situation isn’t the best right now, but I am aware of the many talents of Millions and also did a number check on your fans. As I see it, it is only a matter of time before the money will start to come in. It will probably take just as long as your first album being released. The group had an insanely large number of fans, both nationally and internationally, before you went on a hiatus two years ago. Interestingly enough, they still seem to be out there and waiting. The reaction to the news about you parting ways with your old agency and starting your own company was overwhelming. The public’s and fans’ eyes are on you already. So if you manage to release your album soon, you will definitely ride on the wave of this excitement.”

Junyoung had an appreciative sparkle in his eyes, whereas Siwoo chuckled, impressed.

“So?” the latter asked.

I smiled. “So, I actually wouldn’t mind starting in a manager position with a lower salary if the option for a new position, promotion and a pay raise is there—and will be considered as soon as manageable. I am willing to work hard and will help out in any way I can to make sure this company thrives and sees growth as soon as possible! Also, for what it’s worth, if it means I have to work harder or be more careful in the way I handle things because I am a woman, I will do so. This is not the only business where women have to work harder to be recognized for what they are doing!” I leaned back in that god-damn chair and tried to make my body relax. I tried to seem as confident about myself as possible, a calm smile playing on my lips.

It was silent for a minute before Siwoo nudged Junyoung’s arm.

Junyoung cleared his throat and straightened himself. “Well, Min Seoheeshi, how about we go over the details of your contract before you sign?”

I suppressed the sigh of relief and replied with a smile, “I would appreciate that!”

I heard a soft chuckle and turned to look at Kijun.

“I can’t believe that you are actually willing to sign a contract with these two idiots. I think that must have been the most unprofessional job interview I have ever sat through!”

I couldn’t help it. I had to laugh out loud at that. “Well, there is definitely room for improvement!”

- Taejun -

I got a bit impatient as I checked the time again.

Eunkyu was already fifteen minutes late for our appointment. The maknae, our youngest member, was supposed to meet me in the recording studio to work on the guide for one of the songs for our new album.

The thought of ‘our album’ always made me a bit giddy. Our old company had never given us the option of doing our own music, even though it was one of Junyoung’s and my biggest passions.

As trainees, we had noticed that we complemented each other quite well in that department. I liked to play around with lyrics and melodies, sitting endless hours in front of my keyboard, and Junyoung was into production, sound mixing, beats and adding his special twist to songs.

It had been Junyoung’s plan to record with Eunkyu today, but as he was now otherwise engaged, he had asked me to take over.

I sighed and then decided to call our youngest member.

When the call connected, I was instantly greeted by loud music and a lot of noise in the background. Then, there was a bored voice. “What?”

I narrowed my eyes at the rather rude greeting. “Is that any way to answer the phone when your hyung is calling you?”

Though I couldn’t see it, I could imagine the younger member shrugging his shoulders. “Well, how about you don’t call me if you don’t like the way I pick up!” he replied.

I snorted. That little brat! I decided to drop the matter. I wouldn’t be able to win this kind of argument with Eunkyu anyway. He was just too headstrong and, unfortunately, too cute for my heart.

“Where are you, brat? Our recording was supposed to start twenty minutes ago!”

I heard more noises in the background, a loud squeal, and then some shouting. Eunkyu sighed, before hissing, “I am in the dance studio!”

“Why are you in the dance studio when you are supposed to be here?” I asked, getting slightly annoyed.

“Yah, Bryen-hyung, you want to come over and tell Taejunie-hyung why I am in the dance studio instead of the recording studio?”

I could hear the annoyance in Eunkyu’s voice, and I started to get an idea of why he seemed to be in such a mood.

“I TOLD YOU, I WAS SORRY!” I heard a bright voice shouting in the background. That was Bryen, for sure.

“HYUNG, COME AND SAVE US!” shouted another deeper voice that belonged to Aron.

I furrowed my brows. What the hell was going on? I stood up and headed for the dance studio. “What is going on, Eunkyu-ya?”

“Very good question, Hyung! I would tell you, but then I have to think about it, which means I would remember the stupidity of a certain someone, and that would mean our band would need to survive without one of the fan favorites. Do you think we really need three rappers? Maybe I can make the fans forget about him.”

Okay, what did Bryen do this time?

I reached the dance studio and was about to enter when I almost slammed into the door while trying to open it. Confused, I pressed the door handle down once more, using more force this time around. The door didn’t budge. What the...?

“Hyung?” I heard a soft, muffled voice from behind the door.

“Minseo-ya?” I called out to our main dancer.

“Hyung, we are stuck inside the studio!” Minseo stated calmly.

“YES, BECAUSE SOMEONE LOCKED THE DOOR AND BROKE THE KEY!” I pulled the phone away from my ear at Eunkyu’s annoyed shouting.

There was some commotion behind the door.

“*I’m really, really sorry, Eunkyu-ya!*” I heard Bryen say in English, his thick Australian accent unmistakable. Despite having moved to Seoul seven years ago, the Korean-Australian still tended to use his native language when he was distressed.

“He didn’t do it on purpose, Kyu-ya! Calm down!” Minseo tried to reason.

“Humph!” Eunkyu huffed before the phone call got disconnected.

Whatever was happening behind the door was slightly alarming. You really didn’t want to piss off our maknae. He was cheeky, fun and cute most of the time, but once he got angry, he was just—you didn’t want to see it.

“Let go of me, Hyung! I promise I won’t hurt him! Maybe just a little bit!” Eunkyu’s voice had a bit of a crazy edge now.

I shook my head at that and knocked at the door to get the kids’ attention. “YAH, CHOI EUNKYU, YOU BETTER NOT TOUCH BRYEN!” I shouted through the door.

“But Hyung, he...”

“LISTEN, BRAT, I DON’T CARE WHAT HE DID! NO HURTING OTHERS!”

I heard a frustrated groan that made me roll my eyes.

“Don’t worry, Hyung. Minseo-hyung won’t let him get near Bryen!” this time, it was Aron’s voice behind the door.

“Ryeoeunie?” I called out using Aron’s Korean name. “What happened?”

Aron chuckled. “Bryen had one of his especially idiotic moments.”

“Yah, I wasn’t being idiotic!” Bryen instantly defended himself.

“We were having fun in the studio when Eunkyu said he needed to leave. Bryen didn’t really want him to go as we were having a good time, and after clinging to him didn’t work, he went for the door to lock it!” Aron continued, ignoring Bryen’s whining.

“I just wanted him to stay a little bit longer!” Bryen said, most likely pouting.

My heart went out for our youngest rapper. He sounded really pitiful. Sometimes, I tended to forget how young they all actually were. At nineteen and twenty, they were barely more than teenagers. It shouldn’t really surprise me that, from time to time, they just wanted to play around a bit. They just wanted to enjoy each other’s company.

“It’s okay, Bryen-ah!” I said, trying to reassure him. “So what happened then?”

I heard some shuffling behind the door. “The key broke off inside the lock, Hyung,” Bryen said with a small voice, now right behind the door.

I tried to stay calm, praying for some patience. The kid already felt bad enough he didn’t need me yelling at him too. I figured Eunkyu might have done that enough for the both of us already.

How did the three younger members always manage to get themselves into situations like this?

Last week, Aron fell into a pond because he was aiming for the perfect angle to take a picture. Fortunately, he managed to keep the camera dry. A few days before that, Bryen had talked Minseo into letting him color his hair. The result was a disastrous, spotty orange. I ended up taking Minseo to a professional to restore his pretty blonde. Luckily, Minseo had always had a soft spot for Bryen, so he wasn’t too angry with him. It only took a

teary-eyed apology and for Bryen to cook Minseo's favorite food for them to make amends. If it had been Eunkyu's hair, Bryen would have probably been six feet under by now.

And Eunkyu? He was his own walking disaster. He constantly got into trouble for his bratty behavior but still got away with almost anything. Damn that cute wide smile and those adorable dimples! We were all just too weak for him.

A while ago, Eunkyu accidentally deleted one of Junyoung's music files. It was a project our leader had been working on for quite a while. Remembering Junyoung's face back then, I was sure our maknae's days had been numbered. To everyone's surprise, Eunkyu had walked out of that alive. He somehow had managed to calm down our leader in the blink of an eye. Sure, Eunkyu wasn't allowed to touch any of Junyoung's devices without supervision again, but he was still here to tell the tale.

In other words, our maknae-line was a destructive force to be reckoned with—adorably cute, but so much work!

I sighed. "How long have you been stuck in there?" I questioned, already trying to think of a solution.

"About thirty minutes?" Aron pondered.

I blinked before asking, "Thirty minutes, and none of you considered calling Siwoo, Junyoungie-hyung, or me for help?"

A short moment of silence.

"Thinking about it, we should have probably done that!" Bryen said, the humor slowly returning to his voice.

I wanted to hit my head against the door. Idiots!

"Hyung, please let us out before Eunkyu decides to at last kill Bryen!" I heard Minseo's muffled voice from a bit further inside the room.

I looked around the hallway. What should I do? Break open the door with something? Bust it open with my incredible strength? I shook my head. Absolutely not! I tried that once, and it just resulted in a sore shoulder.

I was still trying to find a way to free my dongsaengs when a door opened down the hallway. I looked up and saw the woman from earlier today as she was leaving the conference room.

Seohee, Min Seohee! I wasn't likely to forget her name anytime soon.

She closed the door with quite the satisfied smile playing around her lips. The job interview must have been a success.

She took a few steps down the hall when she suddenly stopped, and her eyes met mine. "Oh, Taejun-shi!"

I smiled at her. "Judging by your smile, I'm gathering the interview went well?"

She nodded happily. "It was, how to phrase it? Let's say it was an interesting experience with a happy end."

"That is good to..."

"HYUNG!" I was interrupted by Eunkyu's impatient voice behind the locked studio door. "STOP FLIRTING AND LET US OUT!"

I instinctively kicked the door, trying to shut him up. Sure, it didn't help much, but at least it gave me some satisfaction.

Why was he trying to embarrass me?

I awkwardly looked at Seohee, whose attention was luckily already on the door.

"Is there someone locked inside that room?" she asked with wide eyes.

"Uh, yes! Some of our members managed to lock themselves in the dance studio, it would seem."

She blinked a few times. "For real?"

"YES, UNKNOWN LADY, FOR REAL! SO CAN ONE OF YOU FINALLY GET A MOVE ON AND FREE US?"

With some satisfaction, I heard a muffled 'ouch' behind the door. I hoped someone had hit Eunkyu hard, even if it was me who had made the rule of not hurting others.

"That is absolutely no way of talking to a lady!" I heard Bryen scold.

I glanced at Seohee, and her eyes were brimming with mirth.

"Do they do things like that often?"

I sighed dramatically, "More often than I dare to count!"

She chuckled. "Oh boy, what have I gotten myself into?"

We stood for a second, just smiling at each other.

"Uh, Hyung? Not to be rude or anything, and sorry to interrupt your chat, unidentified lady, but could you maybe start to find a way to let us out?" Aron's voice seemed to draw Seohee's attention.

She took a few steps to stand next to me. “Did you lose the key or something?” she asked calmly.

I shook my head. “No, they...”

“I accidentally broke the key inside the lock, Noona!” Bryen said, sounding very pitiful.

“How do you even know she is a ‘noona’?” came Minseo’s soft voice.

“Well, seeing as Taejunie-hyung flirted with her, I just assumed that she is about his age. That makes her a ‘noona’!” Bryen said, sounding very pleased with himself.

I tried not to blush. “Stop saying I flirted, you little brats, or I will leave you in there!”

Seohee chuckled and inquired, “Did you already call a locksmith?”

Now I actually couldn’t stop the blush from spreading across my cheeks. How stupid could I be? A locksmith, of course!

“Who even uses keys in Korea?” she pondered.

I shrugged. “It’s an old building!”

She took a look around, and understanding started to dawn on her face.

“I will call the locksmith then,” I said, suddenly feeling a bit awkward.

She nodded, and I took a few steps down the hall to make the call. Once I managed to find someone that could be here within the hour, I returned to Seohee’s side.

“Noona, I found one in my bag!” I heard Minseo say.

“Great, now try, with a very steady hand, to grip the end of the broken key and pull it out.”

“What is going on?” I asked in confusion.

“Shhh,” Seohee shushed me. I raised my brows and did as I was told.

After a few seconds, we could hear cheers from inside. “HE GOT IT, NOONA! THE KEY IS OUT!”

Seohee straightened herself and happily exclaimed, “Great job, you guys!”

“What just happened?” I asked curiously.

“I just looked up ways to get a broken key out of a lock on the internet. One way suggested using normal tweezers. I gathered, since the locksmith might take a while, it wouldn’t hurt to try.”

I was honestly impressed.

“Now all you need are the spare keys, and the guys are free within seconds!” she said, quite satisfied with herself.

She looked up at me, eyes sparkling with excitement. Very adorable!

“Hyung, do we even have spare keys?” I heard Aron whisper behind the door.

I didn’t want to seem like a complete idiot, so I hurried to say, “Of course there are spare keys! I will just accompany Seohee-shi out and then find the key. We’ve taken up enough of her time.” With that, I placed a hand on Seohee’s back and guided her in the direction of the elevators.

“But...,” she seemed to disagree with not seeing her mission through. She turned to look at the still locked door.

“Don’t worry, they will be out in a few minutes!” I said, trying to ease her concern. We reached the elevators, and I pushed the call button.

“I should have said goodbye. It’s really rude to just leave them like that,” she mumbled, throwing another glance down the hallway.

I grinned and turned in the direction of the dance studio door. “GUYS, SEOHEE-SHI SAYS BYE!” I shouted very loudly to make sure the others could hear me. She didn’t look amused.

“BYE, SEOHEE-NOONA!” came the faint reply.

The elevator arrived, and the doors opened.

“I have a feeling that my job here will be full of surprises!” she said, now looking at me suspiciously.

I smiled, knowing that she was most likely correct about that.

Seohee entered the elevator and then turned back to face me. “See you Monday, Taejun-shi!” Her words were accompanied with a final polite bow.

I mirrored her gesture and replied, “See you Monday!”

The doors started closing.

“Those guys better not still be in there then!”

Her scolding look made me laugh.

“HYUNG!” came an annoyed yell from the dance studio.

Today really wasn’t Eunkyu’s day. This probably wasn’t the time to tell him that I accidentally dropped his banana milk earlier, spilling its contents all over the floor. I decided for my own good to keep that piece of information to myself.

I walked back to the dance studio and knocked softly on the door. “Uhm, you guys, how does fifty minutes sound to you?”

Silence.

“There is no spare key, huh?” Minseo asked, sounding amused.

“Of course not!”