

LIFE, ONCE AGAIN!

Chapter 8

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The hanja teacher was still dissatisfied after the two's apology.

"Why do you keep collecting trash anyway?" he muttered to himself.

Danmi realized the scolding would go on for a while. As she was about to let out a deep sigh, someone came in.

"Teacher."

"Ah, Bang Joonghyuk." the hanja teacher responded as he turned.

Danmi looked next to her with a sigh of relief. Bang Joonghyuk, the boy with the flat nose, was greeting the hanja teacher.

"I apologize. We'll clean it up right away." he said.

"Sure sure. Clean it right up," the teacher responded as he made his way back down the corridor.

"Yessir."

It was a good thing Joonghyuk arrived on time. The hanja teacher was someone who had a very defined sense of who he liked and didn't like. Fortunately, the boy was not on that list.

"Nice timing." Danmi said.

"I knew something might be going on. Especially with Yoonjung being excited like that."

Yoonjung looked away with an ashamed face.

“Cleaning all this is difficult right now. The auditorium in the fifth floor is open right now, so let’s just dunk it all in there,” he continued.

“Can we use it?” Danmi asked.

“I got permission.”

“Oh! As expected of Joonghyuk.”

Danmi tapped the boy’s shoulder with a proud look.

“We need to do well. Not many people in the faculty think well of us,” Joonghyuk spoke in a heavy tone.

Danmi and Yoonjung made an apologetic face. They were well aware of what the boy was talking about.

“Let’s go. We set the costumes aside and carry the hangars first. Let’s take out some props along the way. This should do for now.”

Joonghyuk continued as he took the hangars to the fifth floor. Danmi shook Yoonjung awake from her depressed stupor.

“Let’s clean up.”

“Ok.”

Danmi shook her head as she watched Yoonjung move forward lifelessly. The girl must’ve been reminded of last year. Danmi took a look at the widened club room. The room filled with memories with the seniors, but they were no longer here.

“Ugh, let’s just work.” Danmi said, as she grabbed a large bunch of clothes with her arms.

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“Han Maru.”

“Yessir.”

“Just listen during break time.”

The homeroom teacher threw Maru the MP3. Maru waved the device at Dojin with a smile.

“Ugh, that guy. He really had to wait a full week before giving it back?” Dojin complained.

“Hey, at least I got it back.” Maru responded.

“You’re too nice.”

“Hey, don’t you forget. You started all this.”

“...Want some candy?”

Dojin tried changing the topic. The cleaning session was over. It took a little longer than normal since the class was in charge of cleaning the bathroom this time. Since no one wanted to touch the toilets, they played a game to decide.

“The others don’t seem very interested in the club.” Dojin realized.

“Of course not. It’s too much work.”

“Does it seem like too much work to you too, Maru?”

“No, seems pretty fun.”

“Really? Then we’re registering together, right?”

“Never said anything about registering. Let’s check it out first.”

Just as they were about to get out though, someone stopped them from the back.

“U-um.” It was Daemyung. He seemed to want to say something. “Y-you going to the acting club?” he asked.

“How’d you know?”

Dojin said with a curious look.

“I overheard you guys.”

Maru nodded. Dojin was a pretty loud guy. If he decided to get a tiny bit loud, pretty much everyone on the corridor would hear him. It really was unfortunate. The guy didn’t seem to realize how loud he was at all.

“So what?” Dojin said as he scanned Daemyung a little bit.

Daemyung stepped back a little bit with a scared face. It was understandable. The boy was just afraid of people who looked like delinquents. Dojin looked plenty like one even to Maru. Then again, engineering schools never had serious students to begin with. Daemyung was just the weird one out.

“Hey.” Dojin asked with an annoyed look. Daemyung froze up like a deer in the headlights.

“Y-yeah?”

“You’re funny.”

“W-what?”

“Why are you scared? Did I do something?”

“...No.”

“So why are you acting so scared? Just tell me straight if you want to say something. I hate indecisive people. Hah, I’m getting pissed off just thinking about it. Hey, why are you...”

Maru yanked Dojin back with a slight smile, causing the boy to lose his balance for a second.

“Gah, what the hell?”

“What are you doing?”

“You pulled me back!”

“Yeah. I did.”

“.....”

“What the heck are you getting mad by yourself for? Hey Daemyung, what did you want to tell us?”

“...It’s nothing.”

Daemyung turned away with an awkward smile. Look at this kid. Maru’s eyebrows twitched a little in annoyance. This time, he grabbed Daemyung and pulled the boy back. He was pretty quick with this kind of stuff. His father was an amateur boxer, so Maru played a few different sports in his youth. Of course, he ended up gaining a bit of weight when he aged, but his speedy reflexes remained.

“Tell me straight if you want to say something,” especially since you wouldn’t get the chance to after this.

Maru felt bad about Daemyung. The first year of high school was the time when students were truly free. The time when they really could focus on having fun more than anything else. Maru was thankful that he could start life again. He knew Daemyung didn’t have this chance though. He didn’t want the boy spending his first year with shame and fear. That just wasn’t right.

Thankfully, Daemyung seemed to have understood Maru’s intent a little from his voice.

“I want to join the acting club.”

“You too?” Dojin responded with a surprised look, earning him a nervous nod from Daemyung.

“W-well... The second years told us, didn't they? That our faces didn't matter.”

Maru knew how much courage it took for the boy to say that. It made him feel pretty proud, to be honest. It was hard for people to change. Maru wasn't a fan of people who didn't even try to change themselves in life. In that sense, Maru found Daemyung's courage admirable.

‘Come to think of it, Gaeul was around his age, wasn't she?’

Han Gaeul was Maru's daughter in the previous life. He could remember her as clear as day despite the fading memories.

[Daddy, the other kids told me my name's pretty.]

Maru felt something come up his chest when he remembered the little girl's voice. What happened to the girl as he came back to the past? Did she disappear, or was she continuing to live in the reality where he died?

“Hey, what are you doing?” Dojin slapped his shoulder.

Maru just waved the other boy off and put his arms over the two boys' shoulders.

“Let's go.”

Maru lifted his two feet in the air for a second, causing the two to frown.

“Ah, you're heavy.”

“M-Mar.”

“Let's just get a move on, guys. Ah, do you know each other's names, by the way?” Maru asked. Daemyung nodded, and Dojin shook his head.

“Han Dojin, meet Park Daemyung. Daemyung, meet Dojin. Good, good. Now, this great Han Maru finally has his minion number 1, and minion number 2.”

“Stop speaking bull.”

“Minion?”

Maru strengthened his grip on the two’s neck.

‘I’ll be able to meet them both some day. Both my wife and daughter.’ he thought.

So... he should just focus on the present for now. Thinking this, he went up to the fourth floor with Dojin and Daemyung.

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Yoonjung was pretty amazed that fifteen first years were waiting for them in the club room. It made her happy. Happy enough to want to hug the lot of them to bits. She had been pretty worried. What if they don’t come? What if all this preparation was for nothing? But they ended up getting fifteen students. Fifteen!

‘Yahoo!’ Yoonjung shouted inwardly. She coughed a little bit to gain a bit of composure as she stepped forward. The first years all looked at her with interest.

“You’re all here to join the club, right?” she asked.

“Yes.”

Only a few of them responded. Well, that was fine. They were just being shy. With a little bit of work, they’d all be smiling and laughing just like before. Right. Like before.

“Nice to meet you. I introduced myself before, but I’ll do it again. I’m the president of the acting club, Lee Yoonjung. I’m a second year majoring in computers.”

“.....”

The first years seemed a bit confused by the introduction. This won't do. Yoonjung decided to invite them into the room before things got worse.

"Come inside. This is the club room."

There was space for fifteen people inside thanks to the prior cleaning. Good job, Yoonjung. Cleaning out the room was a nice decision. Right then, she noticed a webbed stocking on the floor. It was something they used in the last show.

"Hm," she snuck the stocking into the corner with her foot.

No need to show something like this to the students right now. Especially not with girls here.

'6 guys and 9 girls... Not bad.'

They all looked very different from each other as well. This was a good thing. Plays were more fun if the actors were diverse. Yoonjung was getting more and more excited. Plays would be very fun with kids like this. And with 19 people in the club... they'd be able to do a lot. That kid looks like he'd be good at talking. That kid as a prop maker maybe? That...

"Excuse me," one of the girls raised their hand.

"Ah, yes, do you have a question?" Yoonjung responded.

"Yes, I do."

"Fire away. I'll answer anything."

"I noticed you have meetings on Saturday, along with a practice day at the end of every month."

"Yes."

"Around when do you guys finish practice every day?"

The girl seemed very curious. This killed Yoonjung's excitement a little bit. Right. Home. Going home was important. But... that was the first question? Really? Thankfully, Danmi stepped forward to answer the question for her.

"It's not very regular," Danmi answered.

"Not regular?" the female student seemed quite surprised.

"Yes. Like we said, this requires a lot of practice. Actors need to act, and stage managers need to make props and practice timings. Sometimes we have to do both."

"So when do you finish, then?"

"Ah... well..."

"Does it end as the list tells us? 3 o'clock on Saturday, and 5 on practice days?"

"That's unlikely to be the case. We might have to do overtime based on how difficult the play is. Because of that..."

"Ah, I understand."

The girl stepped back. She seemed to have completely lost interest. She fiddled with her phone for a little while before saying her goodbyes.

"I'm sorry, I don't think I can do it."

"Oh, really?"

"I really wanted to do it, too. Sorry."

Yoonjung found herself getting a little bit peeved when she heard that. She wanted to do it? If you really wanted to do it, you would've thrown everything away and done it! You wouldn't even have worried about when practice would end to begin with.

'No, Yoonjung, get a hold of yourself. You don't know what's up with her life. She might have to help out her parents after school. Or her dad might be super strict...'

That calmed her down. Right. Everyone had their own stories. Everyone...

"I don't want just a club taking up so much of my time," the girl finished.

Yoonjung's cheeks twitched a little right there. Just a club? Then... what was the entire point of her first year of high school? What did this girl even know about the acting club? How dare she...! Oh my gosh, this is stressful. This is a junior, too! But right as Yoonjung was about to unleash an outburst...

"Then go." someone said.

It seemed to be a first year. The middle one out of the three boys in the back. He seemed pretty familiar. Where did she see him again... Right! The electrical engineering class!

"Monodrama!"

Yoonjung pointed at the boy in the middle. The other students looked at her in confusion.

"Ah, it's nothing. I-I'm sorry."

Yoonjung laughed nervously and stepped back. The other kids looked at the boy in confusion.