

LIFE, ONCE AGAIN!

Chapter 7

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At that moment, Maru noticed that the other three in the group were looking at the flat-nosed guy. Almost as if they were paying attention to every one of his words. To think a boy would arouse that sort of a reaction from his friends...

'He might be more influential than that second girl, even.' Maru thought.

These people were truly interesting. The flat-nosed guy seemed to be the type of guy who was way more thoughtful upon further notice. But why was a guy like that working as a stage manager? Well, he probably had his own story. With just four people in the entire club, it must've been pretty difficult to do anything.

"So just come on over. We'll explain things later on." the boy finished.

The four people bowed. Unfortunately, not many people in the class seemed interested in the club.

"Not a fan, man," one of the students said after the four left.

"How difficult is it if they warn you about it from the start?"

"Easy stuff is the best."

The four seemed to have failed to really get anyone. When Maru looked over, he found them cheering each other on. They were probably planning on making rounds across the entire floor.

"Yo, Maru," asked Dojin. Maru turned to look over at his friend.

"What's up?"

"Doesn't this seem fun?"

“The acting club?”

“Yeah.”

“You’re gonna do it?”

“Dunno yet. So...”

But just as Dojin was about to finish, the English teacher tapped at the board lightly.

“Now, now. We can continue the small talk later. Flip to page 15. What day is it today?” she asked.

“It’s the 11th, ma’am.”

“Number 11, stand up and read the first sentence.”

The class resumed. Dojin immediately shut his mouth and started paying attention. Maru took a look at the list of clubs in front of him again. The acting club. Everything else on the paper became smaller and smaller until the only thing on that paper he saw was the word ‘acting’.

‘The acting club...’ he found himself thinking.

Right below it was the movie review club. Joining that club would let him spend his first year leisurely.

‘Leisurely...’ leisurely. He tried whispering the word to himself. What was his life of 45 years like? The question that he thought of on the way back home hit him again. How did he want to live?

“...Fun.” the answer reared its head from his mouth almost unconsciously.

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‘Looks like a bunch of zombies.’ Maru thought as he looked over the entire class.

The state of the classroom after the fifth period looked like a bunch of zombies struggling to stay awake. As expected of English class... it was stronger than even most sleeping pills.

“Yo, Maru, want to check out the acting club?” Dojin asked.

“You mean the room?”

“They told us we could come so how about it? You said you didn’t choose a club yet, right?”

“Yeah.”

“Hell yeah, let’s go!”

Dojin seemed just a little bit excited. Well, quite a bit, actually.

[Hell yes! Thanks Maru! I didn’t want to go alone.]

The bubble floated above Dojin’s head briefly before disappearing.

“Let’s go after school, then.” Maru said.

“Sure.”

Dojin was humming happily to himself. Maru was starting to figure out how this word bubble thing worked.

‘I need to look at their eyes first.’

He could always see the word bubbles out of the people whose eyes met with his. This seemed to be the first condition. Second, the person in question needed to think about him. At least, that’s what it seemed like. All of Dojin’s thoughts seemed to have been directed at him.

‘Same with Daemyung.’ Maru realized.

Maru called Dojin over and started staring at the boy’s eyes. Dojin seemed a bit confused, but he didn’t look away. Ten seconds of staring after...

“What’s up?” Dojin asked.

“It’s nothing.” Maru said, as he put a hand over his chin.

Dojin must’ve thought of something just then, amongst the lines of ‘what’s up with this guy?’ But no word bubble appeared.

“Hey, Dojin.”

“Yeah?”

“Did you think of anything when I was looking at you?”

The boy looked confused by the question, but he shook his head in denial.

“Of course not. What’s there to think about?”

Ah. Now Maru understood. Friends wouldn’t think something like ‘what’s wrong with this kid’ between each other. No, to begin with, most people don’t usually think deeply when going about their lives. Maru looked down at his hand. He was playing around with a red pen in it. Of course, he wasn’t actively thinking ‘let’s play with this pen’ as he did it. He just did it out of habit.

“Hey, Dojin.” he asked.

“What up?”

“Stand up a bit.” “The hell are you trying to do?” Dojin said, standing up anyway.

“What did you think just now?”

“Think of what now? I just stood up.”

“Right?”

“Flipping heck, is this because of the MP3?”

Maru turned to look at Dojin right there. But there was no word bubble still. Was there a different condition as well?

[Ah, this guy's probably in trouble too, huh. Ugh, I should tell my mom about this.]

The word bubble came just then, allowing Maru to draw a single conclusion. The word bubbles only appeared when a person thought of something specific.

"No need to tell your mom. I'm fine," Maru responded.

"No, but if you keep looking at me like th... W-wait wait wait, what? How did..."

"How do you think? Just a smart guess, man."

"...Did I look too obvious?"

"Don't worry about it. Can I have a piece of candy, by the way? And just forget about the MP3. I can't believe you're still worried about it."

"My dad's always told me that if I care about a person, I have to treat them with utmost respect. You're a friend, so you deserve it," said Dojin as he threw him a piece of candy.

Maru received it with a smile on his face. Dojin sounded like he grew up under a wonderful father. He agreed with the sentiment completely. The more you value a person, the more you should respect them.

"What a sentence," he said.

"Agreed. Ah, anyway, are we going to the acting club or not?"

"We are."

Maru realized that he really was treating his new life differently. In the past, he might have felt an interest in the acting club, but just wouldn't have gone. He would just have said something along the lines of 'looks fun, but too hard' and turned away. But Maru knew now... that this was the only chance he had in life where he was free to do anything. He couldn't live freely in college

because by then, he had to start worrying about entering the real world. In that case... shouldn't he do everything he could to try to live as fun a life as he could now?

A small smile crept up on Maru's face. He had made a decision. He threw the club list away. He didn't need it anymore.

"Ah, crap. Homeroom time."

The bell rang alongside someone's complaint. Maru drove off all his sleep with that as the signal. He really couldn't afford to sleep in this one. Getting hit by a cue stick was a big no no for him.

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The classes ended, and all the students went off to their cleaning areas. Those who weren't assigned to areas ran off to the front entrance. Yoonjung ran for the club room instead. She wondered to herself how many people would come to visit.

She hoped to see a few.

She went up to the clubroom at the fourth floor of the school. The lights were still off. Yoonjung squeezed through the door to get inside.

"I should clean this all up, first." she found herself saying.

The club room was quite large. But despite that, all the props and costumes inside made it look small. There were four hangars full of costumes, even.

"I guess... Cleaning all of it's a bit of a stretch."

When would she even finish? Yoonjung grew sick of cleaning the place up before she even started. She didn't notice because she got used to the place, but... If the newcomers were to see this...

[How dirty. I'm not going to join.]

[So complicated. I don't think I'll join.]

[What the hell? Smells. I won't join.]

With multiple voices of imaginary club members streaming in her head, she immediately pulled up her sleeves.

She can do this!

The club room reverberated with loud noises.

* * *

As Lim Danmi stepped outside of the classroom with her bag, a friend of hers stopped her.

“Hey, Danmi! We're going to the karaoke. Want to join?”

Danmi found herself shaking her head without a moment's pause.

“Sorry, I have to go to my club.” she responded.

“Acting club?”

“Yup.”

“Think you got a lot of people?”

“Dunno. Hope we did though.”

“You said there were just four left?”

“Yeah, I heard a few seniors come help every once in a while, but they're all probably busy.”

And... there was a different reason, but there was no need to talk about that. The friend waved her goodbye with a ‘let's go together next time’.

Danmi wondered to herself since she started going to the club so frequently. At one point, she only hung out with her friends after checking that no one

was in the club room. She had no idea that she'd be working so hard when she first joined the club.

Danmi went up to the fourth floor through the central staircase, this was the staircase the third years used to get home. Danmi turned the corner with a strange sense of nervousness. And.

"Good god." she said.

Half the corridor was flooded with just... stuff. Just who did this? She stuck her head into the corridor window with a frightened face. She could see Yoonjung there coughing in the massive cloud of dust. Of course it was Yoonjung. There was literally no one else who'd do something like this.

"The hell?" Danmi heard someone talk behind her.

"Acting club?"

"They must be digging through their pile again."

She could hear that the third years starting to take notice. She bowed to them as a quick apology before jumping into the mess herself.

"Lee Yoonjung!" she shouted.

"Ah! Hey Danmi, nice timing. Could you just..."

"Ugh, you bitch!"

Danmi pinched Yoonjung's cheeks tightly, causing the girl to groan in pain.

"It hurts!" Yoonjung said, hitting Danmi's hands off of her.

"Good. It's supposed to hurt."

Danmi took a look over the room. It was a room filled with a decade full of memories. Memories passed down between each generation of seniors. Every prop the club has ever made remained here year after year. Of course

Danmi thought about fixing it up at some point. She didn't want this place turning into a storage room either.

But why did it have to be today?

"What do you think the newcomers would think when they look at this, huh?" she said.

"Well... I tried to fix this place up really good, right? But every time I move something, more stuff just appears. So..."

"So you decided to take everything outside first?"

Yoonjung nodded energetically. Danmi could feel a stab of pain at the back of her neck. If only she could pry open that girl's head at one point...

"How were you going to do all this by yourself? Don't you remember? We promised to do this over the weekend."

"I know, I know, but if the newbies came to see the club like that..."

Yoonjung had become visibly deflated. The girl's mood changed way too fast all the time, especially in failure, she would just drop down like a doll that just ran out of battery.

"You give me a ton of stress, you know that?"

"Please help."

"Of course I will. Didn't you notice all the seniors saying stuff outside?"

"Ah... I knew it."

"Oh, so you did. The entire corridor's been blocked off by stuff. What if one of the teachers..." Right when Danmi said this much, someone cut her off from behind.

"Look at all this, oh bother."

Yoonjung and Danmi whipped around in surprise.

“I told you before, didn't I? That you need to clean all this up at some point! Ugh!”

It was the Hanja teacher. He was wearing his modified traditional clothes with a hot pack in his hand. His narrowed eyes were looking around the club room, annoyance written all over his face. The man was clicking his tongue in disapproval.

Of all the teachers, did it really have to be the Hanja one? Danmi found herself thinking. The teacher was one of the faculty members that didn't like the acting club at all. Last time, she was scolded because the corridor outside the club room was dirty. She didn't say anything despite knowing that the students of design from class B were in charge of it since this particular teacher really hated having students talk back to them.

“We'll clean it up.” Danmi said. Yoonjung immediately followed up from behind.

“We're sorry.”