

## LIFE, ONCE AGAIN!

### Chapter 9

#### *Chapter 9*

“Is something wrong?” the boy asked, confusion written across his face. He turned to talk to the girl who questioned the club earlier.

“You should leave before you’re late to your thing.”

“...Sure.”

The girl looked at him, a small frown apparent on her face before leaving with her friend. That was the cue for five people to walk out of the room.

‘We’re screwed.’ Yoonjung thought to herself. It was five people! Five! They were incredibly short on people to begin with. Perhaps she should’ve offered them goodie bags or something? Right as her anxiety started to set in, someone spoke up with a question.

“What kind of plays have you done so far?” one of them asked.

“Excuse me?”

The question caught Yoonjung by surprise. She hadn’t expected that shouting ‘monodrama’ earlier would prompt this kind of a question.

“I was just curious. About the kind of plays you’ve been doing.”

“Ah.”

Yoonjung regained her confidence when the students started asking her questions she actually wanted to hear. Man, monodramas. What wonderful little things.

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“Yoonjung really needs to work on her face.”

Joonghyuk found himself echoing Danmi's statement. Yoonjung was straightforward with her thoughts and sentiments. This was a bit problematic to most people. Even now, the girl was getting way too excited when she really needed to be calm. Of course, she was completely serious whenever she grabbed hold of a script, but most times she did stuff that would confuse most normal people.

"Would you look at this for a second, first years?" Joonghyuk decided to step forward, which indicated Yoonjung to cool off.

Joonghyuk took out a picture book from the cabinet. There were 12 of them in total.

"We made one of these each year. Each book contains a full year's worth of events in the club. Here, let's take a look at a recent one."

He opened the book from 2002, drawing the first years to gather around the dusty book.

"The first picture is always a group photo of the members in the club room. If you join, you'll be able to get in the 2003's group photo."

"Whoa." one of them said.

"There's a lot of people."

The first years all voiced their own comments. Joonghyuk found himself looking back at his friends with that last comment. The four club members all wore bitter looks on their faces.

"Yes, there were," he said.

His voice was significantly lower than before. Joonghyuk tried to stifle the awkwardness with a cough. The others were sending him signals that he was making things look a bit too depressing.

“In any case, this was the first play we ever performed. A third year took charge at the time, and us four here were the supporting actors right... here.”

Right then.

“Supporting actor my ass. He was a lead actor, too,” Minsung butted in.

Joonghyuck immediately cut the other boy off with a low voice.

“Don’t act so friendly here.”

“Ah, sorry.”

Minsung immediately corrected his sentence to ‘this guy was a lead actor as well’ to the first years. The members of the acting club all spoke formally to their new members. They would become casual when the students joined, but before that, they treated the students as formally as possible. This was a tradition that was passed down from the very first year the club was created. Joonghyuck had no intention of breaking that tradition today.

Minsung turned the page of the picture book with a smile. There were pictures of the club after the curtain call.

“This is Joonghyuck. He’s barely recognizable, isn’t he?”

The first years nodded vigorously as a response. Joonghyuck tried to turn the page quickly in embarrassment, but Minsung didn’t let that happen.

“This guy here’s actually great at acting. Even the seniors recognized that. You’ll be able to see more of his cool side if you join.”

“Unfortunately, I’ll be acting as a stage manager this time so you can just ignore Minsung here.” Joonghyuck continued as he pushed Minsung backwards, “Here, take a look. Looking at our past accomplishments can help you make your decision.”

He'll give them plenty of time. So that they have the freedom to make their own decision. He won't try to force a decision on any of them. That's just not how this club works. After around ten minutes of looking around, the first years raised their head. Joonghyuk could tell a few of them had made up their minds as well. Not in a good way, unfortunately.

"Um... that stage over there that looks like a shack," one of them asked.

"Yes?"

"Did you make all that?"

"Yup."

"All the hammering and sawing too?"

"Of course."

"....."

The first year nodded with a heavy look, earning a bitter smile from Joonghyuk. If things go badly here... the entire club might consist of just four second years.

"Hm. Would you like to look at the costumes as well?" Joonghyuk exit the room after speaking. The first years followed closely behind him. When he opened the doors to the auditorium, he got a few wows out of the students.

"A lot of these were either made by us, or bought from companies. We ended up collecting this many over the years."

Joonghyuk was proud of these costumes. They were the symbol of hard work and perseverance of the club. But the heavy looks from the first years didn't really go away regardless. All of their accomplishments only proved how difficult the club was going to be. It was understandable. He decided to shake them up a little bit more.

“The acting club costs a bit of money as well. The budget granted to us by the school isn’t nearly enough. Plus, there’s the fee for inviting a teacher over.”

Money. High schoolers were especially sensitive to money. Joonghyuk knew this incredibly well. Almost as proof, the faces of the uncertain students changed to ones of certainty.

“S-sorry, a few of them said as they left.”

Joonghyuk honestly didn’t want to take their goodbyes, but he had to. He couldn’t catch them. He couldn’t force any of this on a student. Students forced to act was just the club asking for a bad play.

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The first years disappeared after saying their goodbyes. Maru could visibly see the second year’s face get darker by a little as each student left. Yoonjung especially looked like she lost the entire world or something. The other two second years seemed pretty calm on the surface, but they were fidgeting nervously in some places as well. Man, even he was starting to feel a little nervous because of them.

“They’re all gonna get out at this rate.” Dojin whispered to him.

The more the second years talked, the more people started running away. Time and money were pretty valuable, after all. Asking for both was being pretty greedy towards the first years. The picture book was pretty pressuring as well. Sure, it was cool to look at, but it served as the evidence of the dedication this club required. Making each and every prop with great care, and acting on stage... pretty much prescribed hard work. Even now, he could feel some sort of energy from the pictures. It made sense that a few first years would leave after looking at it.

“Hum, hum.”

The second year with the buzzcut stepped forward. The thing about buzzcuts was that it often made a person look pretty scary, but in this case the dude looked like an acorn with it. At least it was easy to look at.

“Looks like all the wishy-washy people left,” he said with a clap. “We’ll be introducing ourselves, then. I’m Choi Minsung, in mechanical engineering.”

Minsung sent a glance towards the girl with the short hair.

“I’m Lim Danmi, second year in design. I like talking and making costumes.”

Danmi pulled the other boy over next to her. Maru could tell that this guy was pretty much the leader of the club, despite Yoonjung being the one in name.

“The name’s Bang Joonghyuk, in electrical engineering. I’ll introduce myself more once you join.”

Now he knew the four second years’ names. Maru took a look around. There were six first years left. Four guys and two girls. The two girls seemed to be friends with each other. That left one other guy. Was he by himself? The boy had quite a big physique with a pretty large forehead. He looked pretty serious and quiet. That was a rarity in high school.

“Will you be joining?” Yoonjung asked with a gleam.

“Yes.”

The first to answer was the big boy Maru was just eyeing. He turned in his form and returned to his spot.

“Yayy!”

Well, she seemed excited. Just looking at the girl made Maru cheerier. What an energetic person she was.

“What about the two of you?” Maru turned to Dojin and Daemyung with the question.

The form in Daemyung's hand was coupled with a determined look. Dojin seemed to have made up his mind as well.

"The three of us will be joining as well."

Maru handed three forms to Yoonjung. The girl's head nodded vigorously in response.

"Thank you very much," she responded.

No need for thanks, really. Maru turned to look at the other two girls. They talked amongst each other for a quick moment, before filling out the forms right on the spot.

"Here you go."

With that, there were 6 first years joining the club.

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"We're accepting members till tomorrow, so do try to bring more people if you can. Also, we'll be acting a lot more casual with you starting tomorrow, so don't be surprised."

The group separated with Danmi's announcement. Maru headed for the restaurant next to school. Dojin was going to treat them in celebration.

"Isn't Danmi really pretty?" Dojin said. It was the first thing out of his mouth as soon as they got their food.

"I vote Yoonjung. Ah, the other first years were cute too." Daemyung responded, fitting kimbap into his mouth.

"And here I thought you were a big old pussy. You're quite the perv, aren't you?"

"N-no I'm not."

"*No I'm not*' my ass! Hey! It's normal for guys to like girls, right Maru?"

Maru nodded. He was thinking. The acting club... there were a few points of concern. Firstly, the fact that there were no third years at all. There were bound to be a few, considering how many there were in the 2002 photo book from last year. But none at all? Something must've happened.

The second years seemed like they were hiding from them. It made sense, thinking back on the faces they made in the club room as well. They didn't just seem sad about having first years leave.

"Why were there no third years, by the way?" Dojin seemed fairly curious about it as well. Daemyung started thinking with the other boy.

"Do you know who the advising teacher is?" Maru asked. Dojin was the type of person who hobbyed in collecting information around school. Maybe he'd know?

"Of course I do. He's the guy that teaches us history."

"Park Taesik? That guy?"

"Yeap. Good guy. Pretty boring though."

Maru had a pretty good impression of the history teacher as well. The man was a little boring, but he often told old stories to the students. Just as Dojin stood up to order some more food, someone entered the restaurant.

'Not very handsome, though.' Maru added to his mental notes. It was the history teacher who walked in.

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Taesik waved at the three students inside the restaurant.

"What are you three doing? It's late," he said.

"We're just building our friendship, teacher." Dojin responded with a joking look.

It's been 13 years since he's started teaching. In that time, Taesik made a promise to himself to memorize every one of his student's names. So that he wouldn't have to resort to 'hey, you' everytime he needed to call out a student. Instead, he'd refer to them by their name.

Thanks to this, Taesik knew the names of most students he taught. Though he still didn't know the names of a few of them. It's only been a week, after all. That kid with small eyes in the back was one of them. He didn't quite know the boy's name yet.

'Dae...sik? Was it? Ugh, so sorry. I haven't memorized your name yet.'

Loud kids like Dojin were easier to remember for sure. The quieter ones made memorizing their names pretty hard, though.

'And that's Maru over there.'

Han Maru. The kid from electrical engineering with a weird name. The boy was pretty well-known among the faculty. That kind of a name just kind of sticks in your head. It's unusual, after all.

"Having fun with friends is fine, but you should eat actual food, too. Not snacks like this," he advised.

"No worries, sir! I'll go on over home and smack down a bowl of rice!"

"Good to hear. You're still growing, so eat a lot."

Taesik asked the lady to pack him some tteokbokki, soondae, and some fried vegetables. He recalled seeing the club students working hard to clean out the club room when he finished work. They looked like they were going to be stuck cleaning for a while, so he decided to buy some snacks for them.

"Teacher, I have a question."

Taesik turned back to look at the noise. It was Maru. The boy with a square jaw and confident eyes. Looking at Maru made him think that the boy must

have a very strict father back home. You couldn't really find any of the playfulness you'd find in abundance in the other students.

The other members of the faculty agreed with Taesik as well. Especially the boy's homeroom teacher. The homeroom teacher thought Maru was very mature.

"Sure, what is it?"

"We entered the acting club today."

"Ahh! So you're the three out of the new six, huh?"

Taesik bought another serving of fried vegetables to give to the three.

"Thank you, sir."

"Thank you."

Dojin and Daemyung started digging in pretty much instantly. Maru was more fixated on the question, though.

"So what are you curious about, then?"

"There were only four second years when we went today. We didn't see any third years."

"Ah..."

Taesik smiled bitterly inside. The boy just came straight at him with the hardest question from the get go. Well, it was understandable. Why wouldn't he be curious about it?

"Did something happen? The second years seemed to be hiding something as well."

The other two started paying attention as well. They didn't seem to have noticed until now. What a perceptive lad, this Maru kid. He's caught onto what

was going on in the club before anyone else. He was different from the others for sure.

“Something did happen.”

“Is that so.”

Maru finished off right there, and started digging into the food as well. Well, that’s confusing. Wasn’t he curious about what happened? Why there weren’t third years, and why the second years were making that face? Why wasn’t he asking? Wasn’t he curious?

“Aren’t you curious?” Taesik asked.

“I’m curious.”

“Can you tell us?”

Dojin and Daemyung were the ones to answer in his stead. Maru just shook his head from the back, though.

“I’ll hear it from the second years. I think that would be more appropriate.” he said.

“...Right. Sure. It’d be better to hear it from them.”

Taesik stood up after hearing the lady call at him. Maru stood up with him. The other two looked at him for a split second before standing up as well. Man, the boy resembled a junior employee at a company or something. Knowing exactly how to act to avoid getting on the teacher’s bad side and all.

‘The father’s taught him well. He’s not going to give anyone a bad first impression at the very least.’

Taesik walked out with the three boys bowing at him as a farewell. Ah, come to think of it... He walked back over to the restaurant. The lady asked him from the window if he forgot something inside.

“Nope, but could I pay for their food as well? How much is it?”

“6000 won.”

“Alright. Here it is.”

Right then, his eyes met with Maru’s from inside the building. Maru bowed his head as a greeting, making Taesik smile in response.

‘Eat well, club juniors.’

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“Hell yeah, managed to save a ton of cash money.” Dojin waved his hands in the air in joy. He and Daemyung seemed to live in the same direction, seeing how they were walking home together. They spoke a bit with each other on the way. There really was no better way for kids to become friends than to hang out together.

Maru watched the two walk away before heading back home himself on his own bike. The first thing he did after going back home was to finish off his homework. His mother looked at him with a little grin, muttering ‘he’s matured finally’ under her breath.

“I might be late on Saturday, mom.”

“Why?”

“I joined a club. The acting club.”

“Really? Don’t do it if it takes too much time.”

“It’s fine. I’ll call you if I’m late.”

“Ugh, like father like son. You just don’t listen to your mother, do you? By the way, Maru, do you need more allowance?”

“Still have enough.”

“That’s new. Weren’t you saving up for a new pair of shoes?”

Mom took out a 10,000 won bill from her wallet.

“Take this. Use it when you need it.”

“Just keep it. I don’t need all that money.”

“...Did something happen to you?”

“Told you I’ve matured. Just give the money to Bada. She’ll need it more than me.”

Maru pushed his mother lightly back out of his room and closed the door. If he wanted to live a leisurely life, he needed to study up first. Of course, it wasn’t like he was going to try to succeed in academics. He’s learned the hard way last time that studying just wasn’t for him.

‘But I don’t want to live my life restricted because of grades.’

He didn’t understand adults when he was younger. Why would he need math in life? What would he even use physics for? Of course, he’s learned that he didn’t really need those subjects to get by, but he’s also learned that understanding the subjects provided him with various choices.

Studying, to Maru, was just a way to give himself more options in life. But...

“Ugh.”

It didn’t really work out as he first intended.

“This is annoyingly hard.”

Maru decided to put the pen down for now.