

Once Again 18

Chapter 18

"You should rest for a bit. The instructor's going to come soon."

"She's coming today?" Yoonjung asked. She only heard about all this today.

'Hah, what do we do about the money, though?'

The teacher was smiling happily at the kids talking about the extracurricular fees. Yoonjung couldn't look at that smile straight. Especially not after hearing about the full story by accident.

[You checked the amount properly? I'm sorry about being so late. My paycheck didn't come through on time. Yes. Please take good care of the kids.]

She heard the phone call by accident. Taesik was lying about the club funds. The budget allotted for the club was nowhere near enough, so he probably used his own paycheck to fill the rest. Yoonjung struggled with the information all day before telling her friends about it.

Joonghyuk told her to stay quiet right away. He didn't want the teacher to be troubled over it.

[But we can't ignore it. I don't want to.]

Yoonjung agreed. This had to do with the club. A club she's dedicated a full year to. Money didn't matter when it came to club affairs.

Minsung and Joonghyuk exchanged a quick glance. Did they have a plan or something? Minsung raised his hands.

"Teach! How much did you end up paying this time? Is it the same person as last year?"

Minsung liked to ask all sorts of questions from the start, so this wasn't such a strange question out of him.

"It's a different person. She's been an advisor for university clubs after working at an acting team for a while. I managed to get hold of her this time. She's experienced, so you'll learn a lot."

Taesik kind of skimmed over the money part. It'd look suspicious to try to ask about it now, so Minsung kept quiet.

'Ughh, I want to know.'

Yoonjung's mouth trembled. She needed to know. Was it a lot of money? Could she pay for it? Oh gosh, her insides were burning in curiosity. Why did the teacher have to deal with this by himself? She stared intently at Taesik. She needed to ask!

But right before she managed to raise her hand, Danmi pinched her waist. It hurt so much that Yoonjung let out an audible shout of pain. The first years turned to look at her in surprise. Yoonjung turned to look at her friend in annoyance. Danmi, of course, was pretending nothing happened.

'Annoying!'

Good on her for that, though. She might've just asked otherwise. Danmi had a really good eye for this kind of stuff. She knew what Yoonjung was about to do almost all the time.

"That hurt, you know."

"I had to, you looked too curious. You should know, right?"

"...Tsk."

She wasn't wrong. Yoonjung decided to let it pass for now. She turned her attention back to Taesik. The teacher looked at his phone for a second before heading out. Probably because the new acting teacher was here.

"I wonder who it is."

"Yeah."

Minsung and Joonghyuk seemed nervous too. The person from last year was a very gentle guy in his thirties. The man taught each of them like he was teaching a child.

'He was pretty hard to approach.'

The instructor was nice, but he kept a distinct distance from all the students. He was a busy guy, so it was understandable, but she still felt pretty sad about not being able to know him more. In the end, he probably just wasn't interested in teenage acting clubs.

The instructor would ask the club members to do something, and that was it. Yoonjung remembered feeling like a puppet while being coached by him. For sure the play was getting better, but not from the effort the students were putting in. In the end, things started to go south between the students' and the instructor's relationship, and the instructor resigned by summer break.

Maybe that was part of the reason why all the second and third years never came back.

Yoonjung shook her head.

'I need to focus.'

No point in reminiscing on the past right now. She turned to look at the first years again. This was a mark of a new beginning. New friends, new play. This time, she'll achieve what she couldn't before.

The doors of the auditorium opened with a creak. Taesik walked in first with a skinny woman behind him. She had a blonde ponytail, and was around 170cm in height. The first thing she did upon entering was to glare at all the students, almost as if she was a cat that spotted mice in her area. Yoonjung was impressed. This person seemed to be the polar opposite of their last teacher.

"This is Ms. Yang Miso, your teacher for the next year," Taesik said, clapping a little with his hands. The rest of the club followed with the applause.

"I'll be leaving it to you, then. Instructor."

"Yes."

Miso had a very high voice. Very off putting due to the contrast to her looks. Maybe she wasn't that assertive? But right after Taesik exit the auditorium, Miso's face stiffened up completely.

"That," she said, pointing up to the stage.

What was she pointing at? A few props? Even Yoonjung was confused. Right then, one of the students stood up. He grabbed a chair from under one of the tarps and walked back.

It was Maru.

He dusted off the seat a little before setting it up in front of the teacher. Ah, so she was asking for a chair.

"He's the head from now."

Head? Miso was pointing at Maru with a straight finger. Maru pointed at himself with a frown with the same though.

"Yes. You seem to understand things pretty well. I'll be directing my orders to him from now on."

She sat down on the chair with crossed legs. She put a hand under her chin and narrowed her eyes at the students. Almost as if she wanted to pick a fight. The other kids must've felt the same thing as well, seeing how they were looking at the floor nervously.

'Is she testing us?'

Yoonjung had no idea what was going on. She didn't want to lose, though. She looked straight ahead with as much confidence as she could muster. Miso's eyes stopped right on hers for a second. Yoonjung swallowed. It felt really scary having to maintain eye contact with the woman.

Miso leaned forward. Almost as if she was getting ready to lunge. Yoonjung closed her eyes in shock.

And...

'Eh?'

Nothing happened. By the time she opened her eyes, Miso had already moved onto someone else.

"Tsk," Miso clicked.

What was going on? What was the woman trying to do? Why was she staring so much?

"Some of you are alright, at least. Others are totally a lost cause, though."

Miso stood up.

"Everyone, get up!"

Her voice seemed even louder than Taesik's. Loud enough to make Yoonjung to feel like her heart was shaking inside her. The club members got off their seats hurriedly. Miso looked at each one of them before continuing.

"We're going to begin our introductions now."

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Daemyung was the one who got called up first. He looked nervous. Daemyung walked up to the chair Miso had been sitting on.

'Self introductions?'

Maru glanced at Miso for a second. She had been glaring all of them for a second earlier. Including him, of course. He remembered seeing a word bubble pop up when she looked at him.

[This one's alright. He knows how to take it.]

It seemed to be some sort of a test of hers. Daemyung was probably called out first because he got the worst score. It was understandable. Miso's eyes had been more intimidating than even the worst customers he's had to deal with. There was no way Daemyung managed to take that glare.

"Get up."

"Excuse me?"

"Get up on the chair. Don't make me repeat myself. You have ears, don't you? Learn to listen."

"Ah, yes ma'am."

He was completely overwhelmed. Daemyung probably couldn't think of anything right now. His head must just be a blank slate. The boy stepped up on the chair with an empty expression. His eyes were shaky, unable to find a place to settle on. It was bad enough to make even Maru feel a little nervous.

"What's your name?"

"P-Park Daemyung."

"Y-yes."

"Breathe deeply."

"Yes?"

Miso smiled almost as if she had been ridiculed. She took out a pen from her pants, and stabbed Daemyung's side with it. Very deeply, too.

"Ugh."

Daemyung stepped off of the chair with a groan.

"Did I say you could come down?"

"E-excuse me?"

"Did I say that you could come down?"

"N-no."

Miso gestured towards the chair. Daemyung climbed back up with a pale face. He was fiddling with his fingers constantly which seemed to give Miso more annoyance.

“Fingers.”

“Y-yes!”

Daemyung froze up completely. Maru was reminded of the military when he looked at Miso. This was pretty picture-perfect example of what usually happens in a military. Things would only get more painful for Daemyung if he kept making mistakes. What he needed to do was relax, and just endure. Maru tried to convey the message as best as he could with his eyes. Daemyung couldn't be able to see it though. His vision was probably tunnelling really hard.

“Now then, chin up, chest straight,” Miso said, poking Daemyung with a pen. The poor guy would flinch every time the pen approached him.

“You'll be giving your self introduction now. It's simple. You look towards where my pen is pointing, and you talk. Talk as if you need to make yourself heard to an imaginary person waaay behind you. Talk as loudly as you can. Understood?”

“Y-yes!”

“Now then, think about what you're going to say. You'll be talking for five minutes. The rest of you should think about what you want to say.”

5 minutes. She was serious, huh. It wasn't that long of a time for most people. But to Daemyung, this was probably going to be the longest 5 minutes of his life.

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‘5 minutes? 5? It's fine. I'm fine. It's going to be over quick.’

5 minutes sounded reasonable to Daemyung. His heart felt like it was going to explode when he was first on the chair, but he calmed down a little as Miso was talking to everyone else. He'll make this work, one way or the other. He prepared a little script in his head about his name, birthplace, likes and dislikes, all the standard stuff.

“Ready to introduce yourself, now?”

“Yes.”

“Then... Explain to them the story of Hansel and Gretel. Five minutes,” Miso demanded with a grin. The grin was almost devious.

Daemyung felt the script in his head just disappear right there. There was nothing. Just a blank in his head. He could feel the rest of the club staring at him. His heart was beating louder each second. His nervousness was returning to him really quickly.

“Ah... Um... So...”

“Ten seconds.”

“Yes?”

“Fifteen seconds passed.”

“S-so... Once upon a time there was Hansel and... uh... Gretel... Hansel was, no, Gretel was the brother, and uh... Gretel was the sister...”

“You said Gretel was the brother. She’s the sister too now?”

“No, so... Gretel was the sister. And, um... Gretel...”

He wanted to cry. He must look like a fool to the rest of the club, unable to even explain such a simple story to everyone! His mouth was becoming drier by the second. He had no idea what he was saying anymore. And after what felt like forever, Miso finally let him stop.

“Five minutes are up. Get down.”

No word of consolation, not even an annoyed look. She just ignored him completely. Daemyung crawled back to his spot, incapable of raising his head.