

LIFE, ONCE AGAIN!

Chapter 12

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The first play Maru has ever experienced was a comedy about a troubled family. He bought the ticket during his college years, and sat down with his friends at a small theater.

The plot appeared complicated when he was watching it, but it turned out to be rather simple. The alcoholic father wasn't actually an alcoholic, and the mother who always shouted was actually a big coward. The son who always swore in the house was actually a gentle soul who volunteered, and the daughter who always said she hated her family actually loved her family. The play ended with the family all coming to a mutual understanding with each other.

Being able to see each and every expression, breathing, and beads of sweat from all the actors came as a pretty big shock to Maru at the time. After that day, Maru's watched plays pretty frequently. The reason why he decided to be a road manager to begin with was because he liked plays.

"Plays, huh," he said, looking down at his desk.

There was a time when he wanted to become an actor. For a very short while, he's admired actors on the stage very much. They looked like they were content with their lives. To Maru, who was struggling to find jobs at the time, they couldn't have looked cooler.

Of course, he gave up upon realization the lives they led off the stage.

"Hey, you," Dojin said.

It was right before the start of the 4th class. The class before lunch.

“You look really absent minded sometimes.”

“It’s not that I look absent minded. I AM absent minded. I’m sleepy.”

“No, tell me for real now. Did you...”

[Masturbate all night?]

A word bubble popped up above Dojin’s head, making Maru smile a little in surprise.

“The hell are you laughing for?”

“Because I masturbated. Why do you ask?”

“What?”

Dojin frowned in confusion.

“By the way, did you get the message?” Maru changed the topic. Thank goodness Dojin wasn’t the inquisitive type.

“About us getting together after school?”

“Yeah.”

“Course I did. Why are we getting together, though?”

“Who knows.”

Maru thought about it some more during the class, but he didn’t really get an answer. Eventually, the class ended, and the announcement for first years to go to the cafeteria played. They were running down the corridors as if a war broke out.

“Damn, look at them run,” Dojin said. He and Maru were the only ones left in class.

Eating slowly became a habit for them. There was one more person, actually. Daemyung slowly crept up to join them.

“Ah, I’m kind of scared,” Daemyung said, unexpectedly.

“What for?” Dojin asked.

“I’m worried about what the seniors might do.”

“You worry too much.”

“But you saw before, didn’t you? That pipe.”

“That was pretty scary.”

“Do you think they’d really hit us?”

“No way.”

Maru butted into the conversation.

“Joonghyuk might hit us for real, though.”

“That doesn’t sound surprising.”

Dojin and Daemyung nodded in agreement.

“Ah, I asked a third year about the acting club a few days ago, right?” Dojin said, motioning the other two closer. “Apparently something happened last winter. That’s why all the third years and most of the second years left.”

“Really? What kind of an accident? Did they fight...?”

“I don’t know the specifics. The senior didn’t know much about it either.”

“Accident, huh.”

Maru thought of a few of the possibilities. First, there was some trouble caused by two students dating. But this school didn’t care much about romance. Even the teachers mentioned students dating each other every once in a while. Dating was fine as long as it didn’t affect grades. Even Yoonjung was fine with it, unless if there was trouble with dating in the club. Then... a fight? Maybe. Or an incident might have happened.

“Should we ask?”

“When it’s time.”

“Might be better not to...”

The three of them said as they looked out the window.

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“You’re all here.”

The club didn’t meet in the club room on the fourth floor, but in the auditorium on the fifth. There were costumes and props strewn all over the place.

‘The club room would become incredibly cramped if the props all went into the room,’ Maru realized. The club room wasn’t as big as he thought it was. With those props back in there... it might not even be able to fit all 12 of them?

“You can tell why we called you here, right? Ta-da!”

Yoonjung pointed at the costumes with an excited look, to which Geunseok responded with a question.

“Are we moving all of these to the club room?”

“Yes, but we’re going to have to sort them out first. They piled up since we never threw away any of the props. They’re all precious, but we’ll have to get rid of stuff we don’t need.” Yoonjung spoke in a sad voice. She wanted to keep all of them.

“How do we need to sort them?” Maru asked.

“Mmm, well, if you feel like you need it, put it on the left. If you feel like you won’t, put it on the right.”

“.....”

“.....”

There was a short moment of silence. Man, Yoonjung. You aren't very motivated about this at all, are you? Probably got forced to do it by someone else. And that someone else probably was...

"Just sort it according to how damaged it is. If clothes have big patches on them, put it on the right. For props, put it on the right if it's too damaged to use. Got it?" Joonghyuk said.

Knew it, had to be that guy.

"Of course old things would get damaged. But they all have memories, if we throw them away..." Yoonjung stepped forward only to be ignored by Joonghyuk.

He felt vastly different compared to his anxious self from when he introduced the club. This was probably what he was usually like. Well...

"Hey, hey! Let's not throw that away, please?"

Some of them looked the same no matter in what context. Especially Yoonjung, with her traditional dress in hand.

Joonghyuk was absolutely merciless, though. The dress flew away to the right. It was understandable. The thing was almost reduced to little scraps of fabric.

"Boo!" Yoonjung pouted right from the back.

Joonghyuk sighed in embarrassment before turning to the first years.

"Don't pay attention to the president. If you're not unsure, put it in the middle. We'll take care of those."

He was pretty efficient about it. The type of student that teachers would like.

"Now then! Let's finish this quickly and go home!"

The first years got to work. Maru and his friends decided to stick with the props for now. There were stuff from scissors, spoons, and even some mysterious iron sticks in the pile. Just massive amounts of iron that you could sell for quite a profit to the waste collectors.

“Oh lord, there’s a lot.” Dojin said.

Even Daemyung pulled out a fireplace scraper going ‘hey, I saw this at grandma’s place’. Just what kind of plays were they doing? There were phones and even various armbands as well. How old were these props? It kind of made sense that Yoonjung wouldn’t want to throw any of these props away. Even Maru could feel the memories in each of them.

Maru turned back. He could see Joonghyuk looking at the pile in the middle hesitantly. He was pretty reluctant, too, from the looks of it. He looked at a particular drawing for a while before putting it to the left.

“Oh, yeah!” Yoonjung jumped up in joy.

Cute. She looked so pure and innocent.

‘...Hey, Maru. You’re a high schooler too. Come on man.’

His perspective kept switching over to his forty five year old self. That wouldn’t do. He couldn’t look at these people with the perspective of an adult. He needed to be a high schooler just like them.

“Good work!”

“Here, get some food in yourselves.”

Minsung and Danmi walked into the room with a few choco pies and drinks. Taesik, the advising teacher, walked in as well.

“Work hard. Don’t stay too late though, alright? If it does take too long, just call me. I’ll tell security.”

The teacher disappeared promptly. It looked like he was the one who bought the snacks as well. Speaking of which, there was a question Maru had intended to ask. He turned to Danmi.

“I heard the teacher was the one who made the club?”

“Ah, yeah, that’s right. He gathered people to start the club in the beginning. He came up with the name ‘Blue Sky’ as well. He’s kind of like our super senior?”

“I see.”

“He’s a good person.”

Danmi offered him some more soda, which Maru received with a bow. After a short break of eating, the club got back to work.

“Uh... Senior.”

Someone raised their hands from the costume section. It was the chubby girl. She had a troubled look on her face. Kim Soyeon, was it? Yurim, the girl with the brown hair next to Soyeon, wore the same look on her face as well. Maru stood up to take a look. He could see the seniors make their way over, their faces turning similarly troubled.

“Who the hell did this?!” Yoonjung ended up shouting.

Maru could visibly see a vein pop up on her forehead. He made the way over as well along with the other first years.

There was a line of costumes on the floor. All pretty clean. Wait, there was a small black spot in every one of them. Maru lowered his head a bit to look closer at it.

“It’s cigarettes.” Dojin said. The club turned to him with a questioning look.

“Here, here, and here. Dojin must be right. I think someone burned a hole with cigarettes in each one of them.”

Joonghyuk took one of the costumes and smelled it carefully.

“I can smell it. It’s pretty faint, though.”

The second years only looked more distraught by this. Maru thought of the date for a second. It was... Monday. He’s heard that the seniors moved all this on Friday.

“Were the costumes like this on Friday, by any chance?” he asked.

“Of course not. They were all fine. These two dresses were in pristine condition since they were so expensive.”

“So it happened some time from Saturday till now.”

“Can’t be,” Joonghyuk shook his head. “We locked the doors of the auditorium right after Saturday. I unlocked it myself just now.”

“So it happened from Friday to Saturday.”

“That’s right.”

“There’s no way teachers would smoke here.”

“So it has to be students. Probably third years.”

Right then, Maru got a small flashback. He remembered seeing Dowook and his friends walk out together with cigarettes in hand. Were they talking about the auditorium at the time? Joonghyuk seemed to have noticed a change in Maru’s complexion.

“Do you know something?”

Maru shook his head. He didn’t want to point fingers just yet.

“No, I was just thinking about who might’ve done something like this.”

“Hah... Don't tell others about this just yet, ok? The acting club's reputation has already taken a hit from the past. This would hurt us more than it would help if we told others about this. So... just keep it a secret for now.”

Joonghyuk organized the situation pretty fast. Why wasn't this guy the president again?

“We'll put the costumes with the holes over here. We can just fix them. Let's get back to work, guys. We have to finish this.”

“Yes!”

The auditorium was filled with sounds of props being moved again.