

Once Again 15

Chapter 15

Dowook stared at Maru. The dude was going to sleep with earphones on. Just what was up with him? He wasn't picking a fight or anything, offering some sensible advice instead.. But why?

"Fuck."

He was only becoming more confused the more he thought about it. Dowook chewed on his pencil in annoyance. Not that it brought him any sort of relief.

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The classes for their day were over. For the first time, the kids were allowed access to the Electrical Engineering labs in the school. First time in this life, at the very least. Maru has definitely been here in the past. Not that he could remember it. It was a place where they soldered equipment together.

"That smelled really bad. By the way, I heard that soldering apparently kills your semen?" Dojin noted as they walked out.

"Really?" Daemyung frowned. Dojin cracked a dumb joke and laughed by himself.

It was a familiar joke. Maru felt pretty sure he's heard it in his previous life. He momentarily froze as he turned the corner to a different corridor with his two friends. Joonghyuk was walking towards them from the other side.

"Hello, senior."

"Ah, back from soldering?"

The three nodded. Joonghyuk informed them of a random soldering advice before going back on his way. Maru decided to follow behind Joonghyuk after sending his friends off first. Dojin was a little confused, but didn't question it.

"Senior," Maru called out.

"Oh, Maru. You're still here?"

"I have something to tell you."

"Really?"

Joonghyuk brought Maru to the deli down on the first floor along with him. He bought hot chocolate from the vending machine for the both of them.

"Here, drink."

"Thank you."

They sat on the bench next to the deli. Students were running past them towards the deli from their respective classes. The foyer quickly filled with the chatter of the students. Maru could hear the occasional yells from a teacher as well.

“So? What is it?” Joonghyuk asked after the crowd thinned a little.

Maru put his cup of hot chocolate on his lap. He told Joonghyuk about his discovery from the previous day.

“So the cigarette burns were from the kids from your class?”

“Yes.”

Joonghyuk sighed as he scratched his nose in irritation. A moment of silence passed. All the kids were gone now, too. Joonghyuk gestured to go outside. Maru complied.

They could hear a few more kids outside. Maru could make out that some of the sounds were from the soccer players next to the basketball court.

“Did you tell anyone?”

“No.”

“So it’s just you and me who knows about this?”

“Yes.”

“Let’s keep it this way, then.”

“Alright.”

Maru wasn’t surprised. That was pretty much the response he was expecting. Joonghyuk seemed to find the compliance surprising, though.

“You aren’t saying anything about it?”

“I mean, this is the right thing to do.”

“Oh, is that so?”

“You told us, didn’t you? We have a bad rep. It’s better to keep quiet for such a small problem. No need to hurt the club for it.”

At least, that’s what Maru thought. He seemed to be right, thankfully, seeing from Joonghyuk’s nod. Their eyes met for a second, which prompted a word bubble to appear.

[He’s thoughtful.]

Bah, of course I am. I’ve lived decades longer than you after all.

“And Yoonjung...”

“Never thought about telling the president from the start.”

“Oh, really?”

“Felt like she’d charge into the class or something.”

“Yeah. She’d do that.”

Joonghyuk crumpled the cup in his hand. He shook his head firmly when Maru offered to throw it away.

"I didn't recruit more members to get myself a servant," he threw the cup away, "and stop being so stiff all the time. It's getting on my nerves a little bit."

"Alright."

"Do you have any siblings?"

"A younger sister."

"Really?"

"Why?"

"You look responsible. You act the part as well."

That was a surprise. Maru hadn't expected that at all. The guy made a pretty firm judgement about him from just a few days of interaction?

"You'll help the club quite a bit, I think."

"No way."

"I'm not joking. Group mentality is the most important thing about an acting club. The club needs foundation. Especially as a club that requires various types of people."

Joonghyuk appeared to be thinking about something, noted from his expression visibly turning sour.

"Um, senior?"

"Yeah?"

"Can I ask you something?"

"Go on."

"How did Yoonjung become a president?"

Joonghyuk laughed at that. Almost as if he remembered something he forgot about.

"She wanted to do it."

"...That's it?"

"You'll see what that means in the near future. She's a weird kid."

He seemed entertained just thinking about her. Then again, Yoonjung really was quite the character.

"Can I ask you something else?"

"Is it about the third years?"

A soccer ball flew up high in the sky with a bang. Maru could hear the kids shouting in excitement from across the field. Joonghyuk was looking up at the school building bitterly when they heard a voice calling them out from the windows.

“Yo, Maru! Ah, senior?”

It was from the second floor. Dojin and Daemyung were looking down at them from the class.

“They’re waiting for you.”

“Ah, yes.”

“We’ll talk about the third years next time. You should go.”

Joonghyuk walked back inside with a wave.

“Thank you for the hot chocolate!”

“Sure.”

Maru turned back after taking the last sip from his cup.

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There are certain things in life that causes realization to dawn upon a person out of nowhere. Stuff that just shakes the person’s entire worldview to a certain degree.

This was the case for Dowook. He used to smoke, crack dumb jokes, and go to the PC bang every day. He’d go home and eat before falling asleep. The next day he’d go back to school and the process would rinse and repeat.

But all of that has changed because of one little thing.

“Let’s go.”

“Ah, yeah.”

Dowook watched as Daemyung and Dojin walked away from the windows. His eyes met with Daemyung for a second. The other boy flinched away from reflex.

‘Fucking annoying.’

It was getting on his nerves. He used to not care about looks from people like Daemyung. There was no reason for him to pay attention to losers. But...

[Turns out that skinny bitch had a friend though, huh?]

[Retard.]

He lost his friends in a single day. They all chose to stick with the beanie. Childish bastards.

But in that case... What about him? Was he childish too? The thought just popped up in his head out of nowhere. He tried to ignore it, but the question refused to go away.

Are you any different from them?

Dowook felt a foreign emotion rise up from his chest. Embarrassment. He was embarrassed. He couldn't raise his head from the table as soon as he sat down. He couldn't stop thinking of the times he would laugh when he hit someone. Flashbacks of the times he took money from other kids in middle school resurfaced. Those events were starting to feel incredibly embarrassing.

No, it was more than embarrassment. It felt pathetic. Why did he even put in the effort to annoy people again? This morning, he asked one of the loser kids if he could copy their homework. That much was fine. The question of 'How are you different from the other punks?' lingered around in his head, but he ignored it.

But when the English teacher picked up that stick, he started thinking again. Before, he would have just laughed at the thought of the loser kid being beaten to a pulp. But not this time. The doubts he faced were bothering him too much.

So he ended up lying. Not to avoid responsibility, but to take it instead. It didn't change anything, of course. Not even after school ended.

Well, one thing was different. His legs still hurt.

He felt like thinking about the question more would just make him explode. Why was this even happening to him?

"Fuck!"

Even feeling irked about it felt childish. So what? It was his burden to live with, he guessed. Fuck. He decided he'd feel a little bit better after getting out. He'd go back home, catch up on some sleep, and he'd walk out feeling all better. Friends? He could just make new ones. Not like they were the only smokers here. But in the end, he looked back at his class. He knew. He knew that what was really childish wasn't the question. It was him.

"Fucking hell, it's all his fault. "

Maru's image floated up in his head. If it wasn't for him, Dowook's life wouldn't have changed at all.

In the end, he walked out of the classroom scratching his head. It felt like coming to school tomorrow would be really scary for him.