

Once Again 17

Chapter 17

'Man, Daemyung, you look like you're about to explode,' Maru found himself thinking.

The boy probably didn't know why Iseul was laughing right now, yet his face was redder than a ripe tomato. Well, he seemed to be fine with it, at the very least. Taejoon and Iseul weren't mean enough to make fun of Daemyung to his face either. Maru noticed another kid in the corner quietly reading a book by himself.

It was Geunseok.

Maru was observing Geunseok carefully since a while ago. Because of how silent the boy was. He noticed that the book in the boy's hand had something to do with acting. Such focus. Geunseok's eyes never left the page regardless of the ongoing conversations around him.

He had a wide forehead, big eyes, and a pretty shapely nose. He still had a youthful appearance, but there was definitely handsome aspect mixed in.

Maru turned to look over some of the other club members. Soyeon, who was sitting to the left of Geunseok, she was chubby but not ugly. Kind of cute? She looked good in her short hair. She was in the same major as Geunseok and Yurim. Design. Soyeon kept glancing at Geunseok every once in awhile. How adorable.

Yurim, on the other hand, was on her phone during this entire time. She didn't seem to be doing much on it, really. There wasn't a lot you can do on a phone around this time. Maybe send a text, or play a few games? Her hair was a very dark brown, but it was natural. Otherwise the teachers would have said something about it.

'Then again, this school only really cares about hair length.'

Boys couldn't get hair long enough to cover their ears, and girls couldn't get hair past their shoulders. Despite the rule, students tried their utmost to keep up with trends. Yurim was one such girl. Her hair was curled right above her shoulder, a length that teachers were barely fine with. Maru turned to look at Daemyung for a second.

"The seniors aren't coming," the boy commented.

"Yeah."

"You feeling hot?"

"Not really."

"God, it feels so warm in here."

Daemyung glanced at Yurim as he spoke. Maru wondered for a second what the boy's face would be like if their eyes were to meet. It would be an interesting sight for sure, but he decided not to do anything about it.

He'd feel bad seeing Daemyung's face turn red as a beet again.

The boy was talking with the attractive people in the club right now and they were getting along. Dojin was mixed in the group as well. Come to think of it, Dojin was pretty handsome as a person as well. Just... his usual expressions at class didn't allow for any appeal to his face was all.

Not as handsome as Taejoon, of course. Taejoon looked good enough to be in a TV advertisement right then and there. If Geunseok looked like a handsome, serious guy, Taejoon looked like one of those lighthearted, fun guys. He was probably really popular in class.

Maru noticed Iseul laughing in the group. She and Taejoon seemed to be close together despite being in different majors. They most likely knew each other from middle school. Iseul reminded him of Yoonjung, actually.

No, scratch that. She was like a quieter version of Yoonjung. Then again, anyone would look quiet compared to Yoonjung. Iseul, too, had very long hair that barely dangled above her shoulders. She looked like a popular kid, too.

His eyes met with Iseul's. Maru turned away with a shrug.

'This is pretty fun.'

He had no idea how fun it was to observe people. They all looked so different depending on where their eyes, nose and mouth were.

That wasn't all, of course. Everything from how their eyes moved, the way they looked at people, and the way their smiled. It made him realize once again how important body language was at conveying emotions. Even now, he could roughly tell how everyone was feeling even without talking to them. Daemyung's emotions were as plain as day, whereas Yurim was the most difficult to figure out.

"Um, hey, guys," Taejoon asked, getting the attention of the room, "Did anyone come here to become a stage manager?"

Finally, a constructive question.

"I want to try acting a little bit, though. Even if I end up becoming a side character."

"Even being an extra is fine, in my opinion."

Daemyung and Dojin responded respectively.

"Same here."

"I want to be a side character. An important one. Or a main, even."

Yurim responded curtly, and Soyeon carefully confessed her big plans to everyone.

"The most impactful character. Doesn't matter who it is."

Geunseok got straight to the point, earning some claps from Taejoon. His expression didn't change at all though, which reminded Maru of a Moai statue for a split second. They looked similar, actually.

"I want to be an impactful character too, then!" Iseul copied Geunseok, who glared at her a little bit.

"Yeah, sure, go for it. What about you, Maru?" Taejoon asked.

Maru thought for a second. Thankfully, it didn't take long.

"Staff," he answered.

"Really?"

"I mean, you'll need at least one person taking care of the stage stuff while everyone else acts. I'll come out as an extra every once in a while for fun."

"You don't want to be a main character?"

"Not really. I'm having enough fun already."

He really was. Just being able to think and talk with different kids at the same time was very enjoyable to him. Living a fun life didn't mean he had to be in the spotlight all the time. Maru wanted to be the person who could enjoy the little things in life, one who isn't bogged down by reality chasing big dreams.

'Maybe this is escapism.'

Well, whatever. If there was anything his 45 years of life had taught him, it was that he needed to live a safe life. He remembered the piece of metal that went through the bus window and impaled his chest right then. The feeling of having all the blood drained out of your body. He felt dizzy enough to puke only seconds after the impact, he remembered.

"What's up?" Taejoon asked in a worried tone. Maru just waved him away saying 'I bit my tongue.'

"And here I thought."

The conversation ended. It was a nice little bonding moment for them. Right then, the club room door opened. The advisor walked in with all the seniors, holding bowls upon bowls of food.

"We weren't caught, did we?" Taesik, the advisor, asked.

"Yes, I think we're fine," one of the seniors responded, allowing Taesik to let out a sigh of relief.

"You didn't wait long, did you?"

"No, sir."

"Well then, let's eat first. I know lunchtime passed, but you all are still growing."

"Whoa. Did you buy all this, sir?" Dojin asked, earning a nod from Taesik.

"Thank you for the meal."

The club members closed the door and quickly started eating. The nervous air of the room was pretty fun for Maru. Taesik kept glancing at the club door. It was probably bad for them to eat delivery food in the school building.

"Um, teach, I think the vice principal saw us earlier. What do we do?" Yoonjung asked, worry imbued in her voice.

"Don't worry about it and just eat. It's our first meal together."

That was when the students really dug into their food. Maru was reminded of the military for a second. Of that time right after sports day when the troop hosted a massive barbeque for everyone.

“Eat, Maru. We need to clean this up.”

“Yessir.”

Maru answered, taking in a mouthful of noodles.

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“You weren’t caught, were you?”

“Teach, who do you think I am? I’ve done this more than enough times.” Minsung said proudly.

“Phew, we finished eating, so let’s head to the fifth floor now.” Taesik said, standing up from his seat.

“The club room’s small, so most of the time we’ll be using the auditorium to practice. Even the stage feels small though.” “The auditorium feels small? Really?” Dojin asked.

The auditorium accounted for the largest place in the main building. What would 12 people need to do to make that place feel small? The group followed the advisor all the way up to the fifth floor. Maru noticed that the props there were all covered by a tarp. Probably to prevent equipment damage like last time.

Maru glanced at Joonghyuk, who gestured at him to stay quiet.

“I know you’ve been here before, but I’ll introduce it again. This is the auditorium, where you’ll be spending your time practicing for most of the year. You can run and shout here if you’d like. Of course, not during class time, but during festival season...”

Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha!

Taesik shouted like a cannon into the auditorium. His voice was loud enough to make the entire place ring, making the first years step back a little in surprise. Maru was surprised too, actually. He didn’t think a voice that loud could come out of someone who was just 160cm.

“You can shout this loudly if you want.”

“Oh my gosh, you have such a loud voice, teacher.”

“If you practice, you can become like this.”

Taesik coughed a few times before continuing.

“Now then, I’ll take off after I say everything else. First of all, you know getting a teacher for you costs money, right?”

The first years’ faces stiffened, save for Maru and Geunseok. Maru knew nothing was free, and Geunseok probably knew something about this from the beginning.

“It costs 30,000 won per person.”

“Ah...”

Someone let out. Taesik smiled,

“...But it’s been paid for. We got plenty of funding, so don’t worry about it.”

30,000 won. It wasn’t a small fee for a student. Plus, no parent would be happy to hear that they needed to pay that much money for something other than studying. Especially if their child was going to an engineering school already.

“So make sure that you learn enough to perform an amazing play, alright?”

“Yessir!”

There was no hesitation in their answers. Right then, Maru realized that the second years didn’t look so well.

‘Hold on, there’s no way the club got good funding after their reputation took such a big hit. They have very few club members, too.’

Well, that was strange. The second years’ faces probably had something to do with it too.

Taesik had been good to them. He was kind, he cared for the club, and he didn’t hesitate to give them food. In that case....

Maru scratched his cheeks. Is Taesik using his own money? That wouldn’t be right.

Hm.

Maru decided to keep watching for now. He didn’t want to say anything.