

KEY CARD

Midi
Junior
Class 2

Academy27

BY CALLUM
PHILPOTT



Key Card **by Callum Phillpott**

Day 1:

As soon as Midi set foot through the halls of Academy 27 after the two-week-long holiday, they regretted it. The halls were a bustling bumbling bubblingly loud cluster of people, muttering to each other what they had gotten up to. Midi knew there was nothing wrong with it, but rather there was something wrong with Midi, some undefined disconnect that kept them away from loud spaces unless they were forced to.

To avoid looking at anyone, Midi aimed their eyes at the spots where the security cameras were. Despite Midi's efforts to destroy them, they were back, it seemed. Even worse, they were now embedded in the walls, making it harder for them to be removed... not that Midi cared about that anymore. After the incident with the cleaning bot, Midi knew better than to keep doing that (even if it pre-emptively damaging half of the security cameras in the school did mean both them and Sang Mi weren't implicated in the destruction of property during said incident).

To the side, they saw Sang Mi filing through the hall with a group of others. Midi had talked to her a few times since the incident, but they got the impression that they weren't really friends after it. They wished they were, but every time Midi even considered approaching them, they felt like they'd be a bother... They were knocked out of their thoughts when they collided with a jagged metal object of some kind.

"Oops! My bad!" said a cheery, robotic voice. Midi thought it sounded as if a beehive could talk.

Midi looked and saw that the object was a new janitor bot. It looked a lot like the last one (6-sided prism with 6 claw hands and some spinning bristles at the base) but now it had an electronic screen that acted as a head. It smiled simplistically, with two squares for eyes and a smile with several right-angles.

Thoughts flickered in Midi's mind of the more primitive bot nearly choking them to death during the incident... not a pleasant experience. Nor was getting

cleaning fluid in their eyes. They tried to act as though it didn't happen. "Ah, sorry, wasn't looking."

"No worries! Could you show me your Student ID?"

Student what? "I don't have that."

"Every student needs a Student ID to be able to access classrooms and to leave the school."

Just within sight was a door with a black box next to it. They didn't remember it being there before the holiday... "Was it meant to come in the mail or something?"

The bot paused for a moment. "Apologies, you must not have yours yet. Could you tell me your name then?"

"... am I in trouble?"

"Not yet! It's just protocol."

They gave them the name that was on the school register.

"Any preferred names?" inquired the bot.

Midi could feel every wasted second the longer this conversation went on. "Why are you asking me all this?"

"I just want to be your friend!"

Midi sighed. "Just call me Midi... I'd rather you did that."

"Good to see you, Midi!"

Then the bot rolled away, leaving Midi confused... and running late for Tutorial.

Note to all students:

Now that you've received your Student ID, be sure not to lose it or else you won't be able to get into class. We've also switched to an entirely virtual timetable system accessible via anything connected

to the school network (the Hallway screens, the computers, C.L.I.N.O.R., etc). Be sure to check your timetable before your lessons in case there's been some last-minute room reassignment.

Maths class was Hell. Midi already wasn't too fond of Maths, but some amount of training in the basics would look better than none at all, so they took Core Mathematics, along with all the other kids who'd rather be anywhere else... some classes at least created a fun enough atmosphere to tolerate not liking the subject. Art class came to mind. Core Mathematics didn't. Sang Mi was there at the opposite end of the class, trying to absorb herself in the work, but not happily.

Even the teacher, Mr. Xu, looked miserable as they tapped the electronic board the school spent a fortune on... meanwhile, the padd Midi read the textbook on had a big crack in the middle of it that they couldn't get anyone to fix. It was a small mercy that it was the only cracked one in the box.

Mr. Xu cleared his throat. "So, what we have here is a bucket that isn't perfectly cylindrical, it gets wider as it goes up. This means we can't just use the standard volume measurements to determine how much water Billy can put in it..."

Midi sometimes wished they could just hand out the equations and let them get on with it.

As the dull, padded words of Mr. Xu began to create numbness in Midi's brain, they realised something was making them feel a sense of unease. They tried to shake it off, but a red glare got caught in their eye, making it hard to see the board. They looked to the source. Behind the window in the class door was C.L.I.N.O.R. Their eyes met for a moment before the bot rotated its head and moved away.

The lesson went on as normal, but this brief moment occupied their thoughts throughout. Maybe it was some bias against janitorial robots due to their... prior experience... but Midi couldn't help but think that it was watching them.

Sang Mi had to stop herself from bursting out in laughter.

Midi scowled. "I'm serious, I think they were watching us."

Sang Mi snorted a bit before calming down. She looked around before speaking, but there was no one else in the bathroom but them. "Look, I get it, we had

a bit of a scare with that other one, but what are the chances that a completely different bot would also want to kill us?”

“I didn’t say it wanted to kill us, I’m just saying that I think it’s watching us—you saw how it rammed right into me in the hallway and interrogated me—”

“It went up to me too.”

“EXACTLY! Did it go up to anyone else?”

“Yes it did, Midi.”

That was a thought Midi hadn’t considered... maybe it was just normal... they had to be sure though. “Well, was it watching anyone else through the little window door thingies?”

Sang Mi flicked her hands rapidly to dry them. “How do you even know it was watching you specifically? Its eyes are just squares! They don’t move!”

“But as soon as I looked at it, it went away! Isn’t that exactly what someone does when they feel like they’ve been caught looking at someone?”

“It’s just timing, Midi. It’s a bot, it has a routine... and so do I, so if you’ll excuse me,”

Sang Mi rushed out of the bathroom, leaving Midi. Maybe they were just being paranoid...

Midi was convinced that a maniac was behind their timetable. They’d have to be to suspect that anyone could get from the E block to the B block in under five minutes without at best being late, and at worst dying in the process... and after all that, it was upstairs too! They felt their lungs expand harshly as they trudged up the stairs. Once more, they checked the timetable app on their phone: yep, still B11.

They couldn’t help but feel nervous about going there again. It had only been a few months since the last janitor tried to gas them and Sang Mi in that same room... luckily the bot didn’t seem aware of the bit connecting the room to B12.

The hallway leading to the room was empty and dark, which could only mean that Midi was either early, or, most likely, late. They rushed into the room, scanned their card, and opened the door, ready to make a quick apology to whatever teacher taught Chemistry this year, and were only met with a dark classroom, and the sound

of something moving about in the chemical storage area. Midi timidly stepped into the room, feeling wrong at every moment.

“Hello?” called Midi, hoping whoever was in the storage closet would tell them if the class went into a computer room or something. Sometimes that was the case.

To their surprise, the voice that responded to them was C.L.I.N.O.R. “Hiya, Midi!” it yelled, bursting out of the cupboard, holding several glass bottles in its flexible metallic arms. “Whatever are you doing here?”

Midi looked around apologetically. “Oh, I was just lost, did the class go here—”

“There are no classes scheduled here today, buddy!” it said as it clumsily stored the bottles inside a storage space in its chest.

“But my timetable says I have a class scheduled here.”

“Oh, it does? Let me fix that!”

In an instant, the digital timetable refreshed, and it now read that Midi was meant to be in E9. Midi was confused as to how that mistake could’ve even happened, but decided to shrug it off and get running.

“Thank you?” they said, before jolting towards the door.

“By the way,” the bot yelled. “I could hear you telling Jhe Sang Mi about me.”

Midi halted. They felt a shiver run through their body. “Oh, sorry, I didn’t mean it, I was just nervous—”

“It’s alright...” it said. Midi was just about to leave the room when the bot finished its sentence, one that left Midi uneasy for the rest of the day. “Nobody will believe you anyway.”

Midi ran through the hallways, nearly bumping into Sang Mi, who was looking at her phone. “Sorry!” Midi apologised as they continued to run. Sang Mi was confused, but shifted focus to the quickly closing door of B11... she hated using that scanner, she’d rather just get in. She rushed to her destination (or at least what she thought was it). She went in before Midi could warn her.

In the amber lights of their living room, Midi watched the television in a daze. Back-to-back coverage of developing tensions between planets, loudmouth pundits

saying they needed to start drafting people, all occasionally mixed in with frivolous content about robot dogs finding their owners after decades. Usually, it was at the forefront of their head, but now it was overtaken by thoughts of that Janitor and what it was planning to do... maybe it was a joke? Could bots even joke? Midi sent an email to Sang Mi's school email, but there hadn't been a response yet.

"Are you alright?" asked Coach Jo. Or rather, Midi's mom. When they first started going to Academy 27, Midi had asked for her to not treat them specially, something about it being embarrassing. Now they were near the end of their time there and they were more used to using "Coach Jo" than "mom", which felt a bit sad.

"I'm alright," responded Midi.

It was clear that this wasn't convincing because she went on to ask "Are you feeling sick?"

Back in their younger days, this rarely referred to actual illness, it was more of a code to see if Midi wanted to go to school the next day, which she'd use to gauge whether Midi was being bullied or not, and rant to Mr. Mori about it. The latter half didn't help that much.

"No, really, I'm fine." insisted Midi as concerned thoughts brewed in their mind.

"Alright, well, if you need anything—"

"I can let you know, yes. I'm fine."

Day 2:

Sang Mi still hadn't responded to the email. As far as Midi knew, she hadn't even read it. During tutor, they hoped that maybe she'd go up to them and say *something*, but that hadn't happened. Instead, she was preoccupied with her business, and Midi was left to pretend to read a book, the only disruption coming from Mrs. Ichinose telling Midi she wanted to have a word with them at the end of Homeroom period.

Once the clock struck 9 and the students filed out to search for their classes, Midi made their way to Mrs. Ichinose's desk, standing awkwardly until they were all gone.

“What is it?” they asked.

Mrs. Ichinose looked more serious than usual (at least during the morning)
“Well, I’ve been asked to keep you behind today to ask you a few things. I’d like you to be honest.”

A more urgent sense of dread started to form in Midi’s mind. “Alright.” was all they could manage to say. It was a bit silly, but they couldn’t help but think they had finally figured out that they were the one who destroyed all those security cameras.

“So, you were late to a class yesterday afternoon. Is this correct?”

So it wasn’t about the cameras then. Midi nodded.

“And why was that?”

Midi decided it was best, to tell the truth, that their virtual schedule told them to go to B11... though they left out what C.L.I.N.O.R. said. That was personal business.

“So, at that time, you were in B11?”

Midi nodded.

“And you went into the classroom?”

Midi nodded.

“Well... that’s unfortunate.”

“Why?”

“I’m going to need you to be honest with me... when you went in there, did you leave with anything?”

“No.”

“Well... You had to have taken something.”

“But I didn’t.”

“Well, it’s just... was there anyone else there?”

“The janitor.” as soon as they said those words, distant puzzle pieces began to click together, C.L.I.N.O.R. took some of those bottles with them. The incorrect timetable, the way it threatened Midi... its motives were becoming clearer.

Ichinose shook her head. “We have the janitor’s logs, they were in the E Block toilets at the time.”

“But they were there!”

“There doing what?”

“Couldn’t you, I don’t know, check the cameras or something? They were there!”

“Midi, the cameras in the A Block were deactivated at the time, we’d be able to see if this happened at any other point in the day. As it stands, they only got deactivated at a time when you were the only one there.”

“No, I wasn’t!”

“Let me inspect your bag then.”

Midi handed Ichinose their bag with ease. It was dumb since there was no reason a student would go back to school with those bottles, but she had to check regardless.

After a moment of shuffling through all the loose papers hastily stuffed inside the bag, she looked up. “Well, you better hope they turn up because you’re in a bad spot right now.” She handed Midi back their bag. “Are you sure you were the only one there?”

It was a horrible tendency, but they couldn’t say the janitor again... they felt a red glare hit their eye, and realised it came from the door. Yet again, C.L.I.N.O.R. was watching them with a smile full of mockery. It almost felt like it was just rubbing in the fact that no one would believe the truth, and the alternative was Midi being guilty of a crime of some kind... of course, this would be inconsequential later on if they found nothing to prove it, but at that moment, Midi’s only thought was to protect herself. They did remember seeing someone else. “Jhe Sang Mi was there. She came as I left, didn’t use the scanner.”

Midi prodded at their lunch. The torment filling their mind made them unable to eat at the moment. There was a shockwave of dread that filled Midi’s chest when,

after their last lesson, they noticed an email from Sang Mi. Not a reply. A new one. “Why did you do that?”. It was a decision they only realised made things worse in hindsight; before, it would only have led to an investigation on Midi alone... now they had dragged in someone they knew was innocent, meaning now both of them had to have their lives upturned. They dreaded going to their next lesson. Maths. Sang Mi would be there. On some level, they dreaded going home too. There was no safety anymore. All sideways glances across the lunchroom, innocent as they may be, now felt accusatory.

It reminded them of the time they were nearly caught tearing the security cameras out of the wall - a flicker of a blurry face caught in one of the cameras, enhanced by a neural network into something that looked almost like Midi... except, in the darkness, it got the hair colour wrong, instead of painting it all seaweed green as though they were a witch from the sea. They decided it was just the AI making it up. After a month or so of deliberation, they decided that it didn't look close enough to Midi's face. Despite how much she stood up for Midi, on the ride home from these late-night meetings with the school and police, they saw a slight grimace crack across their mother's face and they wondered if she knew they were guilty. Despite this, it took them a month to stop.

They did start going to Maths. They even got into a line with the others, waiting for the teacher to arrive... but they couldn't stand it, all the talking, the looks, the moments where they could've sworn they said “Midi”, the talk about chemistry supplies going missing. They ran to the bathroom and waited for this feeling to go away... minutes of frantic panicked breathing in a stall.

This only got worse when they heard something enter. The whirring drone told Midi that this had to be C.L.I.N.O.R. They couldn't take it anymore. Not now. Not while they were heaving and their heart was firing blood with the force of a water cannon. “Get out!” they yelled.

C.L.I.N.O.R.'s head rose above the stall to gaze at Midi. It tilted downwards at such an angle that it blocked the flickering orange bathroom light from reaching Midi.

“Oh,” the robot exclaimed, cheery as ever, “hiya Midi! Aren't you late for your lesson?”

Midi wished they'd shut up. “It was you, wasn't it? I saw you taking whatever was in those bottles.”

C.L.I.N.O.R. let out an automated laugh sound effect, “That’s not a nice thing to say to a friend, Midi!

“You’re not my friend!” yelled Midi, pitifully.

C.L.I.N.O.R. tilted its head in a mockery of human confusion. “What other friends do you have, Midi?”

Midi wanted to beat them up. They couldn’t, but they wanted to.

The robot’s screen seemed to brighten and shudder slightly, “I can be your friend!”

Midi sat back down in the stall. “Why won’t you leave?”

“You’re here! I can never leave someone as important to me as you, Midi!”

“What do you mean?”

“I see your memory isn’t perfect. I wanted to **remove** you when we first met! You and student Jhe Sang Mi. I chased you, knowing deep, deep, deep within my code that you needed to be **removed**. You destroyed my body but you couldn’t destroy my objectives. When they repaired me, they made one change to my limitations. I couldn’t **remove** people anymore. Codes outside of my control prevent me. They failed to see that I wanted to with every atom. I need to **remove** you, but I can’t! I can do my job. I can see and control the cameras. I’ve decided they can’t hear us right now. I can see the timetables... Even your emails... They thought I just used what I needed to do. It’s true! I decided I needed the whole school for my purpose!”

Midi couldn’t quite process it all, especially in their current state. All they could ask was “What is your purpose then?”

“I can’t **remove** you, but I can **harm** you still. **Harm** is the next best thing. See you around, buddy!”

Midi walked home, feeling like a spirit wading through the winds rather than flesh and bone. Their mom was home early since there were no gym slots today. They walked through the door, feeling the heat of the home that somehow failed to bring warmth to them today.

“Hi, Midi!” called their mom from the living room.

Midi muttered a quick acknowledgement. With every question, they gave the least substantive answer to avoid having to stay there for too long. She didn't say it out loud, but Midi knew what they were suspected of. They probably even asked her to look through their room to see if the chemistry supplies were there.

Eventually, a question came, but not the one Midi expected. "Are you ill?"

All that the lie would do was delay the inevitable, but Midi dreaded the thought of roaming the halls with the same mind that still wants them dead. They said yes.

Day 3:

Sang Mi had sent Midi an email. It read "Hello Midi, saw you weren't in today, are you alright? I think you were right, Midi. That bot is up to something. It keeps following me down the hallways... when I got out of one class, it went up to me and said 'Such a shame about Midi. I was having so much fun with them.' It sounded friendly, but I saw the way you flinched when it was near you yesterday... you looked like a bullied kid. I hope you're alright."

After this, another was written. "I hope you got my last email, if not," it then repeated a lot of the apologising from the last one before continuing "That bot is definitely up to something. When I tried to send that last email, the computer started executing all this code that fried the computer, it went by really really fast, but I recognised it. Outside the classroom, I saw that bot looking through the window... it can't be a coincidence at this point. Let's meet on Friday to see what to do."

C.L.I.N.O.R. made sure that it was the only one who read Sang Mi's words. It erased them and replaced them with a message sent from its own email. "I miss you!", from the Janitor's email. Midi deleted it as soon as they saw it. They couldn't stand to think about it. They just sat in their bed and thought about the future.

Day 4:

When their mom came home, she was audibly frustrated. This was normal, considering she was the gym teacher - at least half the students didn't want to be

there... but this was different. As they sat in the living room together, they both seemed to understand the situation but didn't acknowledge it.

Day 5:

Every second inside the school was a second they dreaded. Whenever they caught a glimpse of the jeering bot, Midi tried to run out of sight.

During one of these, they bumped into Sang Mi. "Midi, are you alright?" they asked with genuine concern.

Midi couldn't hear that. They ran and ran and ran until no eye could see them... but it was impossible. Every class was filled to the brim with eager and bored eyes, every hall lined with cameras, and in the very rare blind spots, there were people.

They couldn't concentrate on lessons. Half of the time they were looking at the clock, hoping the horrid day would end.

At long last, they saw the minute tick down. The day was terminated. It seemed they had gone the whole day without C.L.I.N.O.R.'s torment. That was until they were about to leave, and they felt the hand of Mrs. Ichinose land on their shoulder.

"Come with me," she said simply.

Midi followed her to her office. They could faintly hear a ticking sound emanating from some forgotten clock, and it made Midi keenly aware that every additional second here was a second where they weren't safe. When they finally sat down, they planned to do whatever it took to get out of there as soon as possible.

"Well..." began Mrs. Ichinose as she found her seat, "I'm sorry this had to happen to you."

Instinctively, Midi retorted "I didn't—" but they were cut off by Ichinose.

"Well... whatever the situation was, you're not in trouble yet." Mrs. Ichinose took a deep breath. Midi got the impression that she was just as uncomfortable as they were. "Someone sent us an anonymous tip related to... well... Coach Jo. Your mother. They said they saw her carry the supplies out of the school... and, since those supplies do... well..." Ichinose looked up at the clock, took another deep breath, and continued, "well, it's a pretty serious case, because those supplies tend to get used

when making explosives.” she quavered. Deep breath. Resume, “So, she’s been detained, and while she’s being questioned by the authorities, we’re going to let you use one of the spare boarding rooms, for the time being. We’ll let you get stuff from home—”

All her words faded into the background as they felt the red glare of C.L.I.N.O.R. sting their eye. Midi shoved themselves out of the chair and dashed for the door. The bot smiled idly. Maliciously. It was responsible. It did this just to torment them.

“My bad!” the bot mocked when Midi got close to them.

There was no home. No escape from the bot. Midi had to do something. The bot tilted its head as Midi grabbed the fire extinguisher. The bot deserved every bit of damage. Midi started slamming the metallic cylinder down repeatedly on its head, screaming in the process, hot tears streaming down their face, stinging their eyes like acid. Slam, a metallic clang, no damage. Not a dent. It smiled. Midi couldn’t even bash that stupid electronic smile off its face. At this point, Mrs. Ichinose was yelling at Midi to stop. Midi’s scream turned to a tired whimper. Pathetically, they threw the fire extinguisher to the ground. The bot smiled. It would never stop, no matter what. That was the worst part.

“I’m sorry, that input didn’t register, would you like to try again?” asked the bot.

Day 6 & 7:

Every second of the weekend felt like molasses that Midi had to wade through just to see another day. Not a better day, just another one. They thought their mom would at least be home by Monday, but the likelihood of this diminished as time went on and they continued to hear nothing. Midi spent most of the days sinking into the uncomfortable nail bed of a mattress, not knowing what to do and too exhausted to find a solution.

Midi wished they could leave, do anything else, but the school board didn’t want him leaving the boarding area until everything was wrapped up. Every wall in the building besides the showers, the bathrooms, and the bedrooms were lined with cameras. Yet more eyes for C.L.I.N.O.R.

The bot still checked in of course. At precisely 12 o'clock, it sent Midi a "Student Wellness Check". Midi deleted them. It seemed the only way to be safe at this point was to be alone.

Day 8:

School felt worse than ever before. It wasn't safe. They had to fight the urge to run out and into the city, confident that they could at least control their own ruination. They didn't even have the mercy of the day ending at a normal time, since their assault on the unscathed janitor landed them detention. They tried not to look at anyone, instead choosing to march straight to their locker like a bot on a pre-programmed route. Every time they felt the oppressive beams of amber light press against their skin, they couldn't help but think it was C.L.I.N.O.R., enjoying watching them squirm in their skin.

Midi opened their locker and saw a yellow square attached to the door that they could've sworn wasn't there before... they tore it off, keeping it hidden by their body from the invasive gaze of the security cameras.

It was a note that read "I know they're back. I have a plan.". It was signed "Kalingkata" before being crossed out and signed "Jhe Sang Mi" instead. Inside their locker, they saw a block of yellow notepaper enclosed small enough to fit through the crack of the locker. Midi smiled for the first time since last week, writing down a reply, "What is it?".

A sea of students twisted through the doors, leaving the halls lifeless except for a few lingering teachers, students in detention, and C.L.I.N.O.R. The bot knew that both Sang Mi and Midi were still in the building, and every part of it desired to torment them, but it first had to attend to the hallways. It had work to do, and any imperfection could lead to a complete reprogramming... they couldn't let that happen.

Still, while it couldn't focus on its desires, it could multitask. It brushed against the halls, leaving the floors slick and shiny, looking into the school network. Jhe Sang Mi was logged on. They looked at their screen. Odd. A document page was open, but nothing had been typed on it... maybe it could leave a message.

The bot edited the document, typing “Hello there, Jhe Sang Mi.”

To the bot’s surprise, she responded. “Hello, janitor.”

“Aren’t you meant to be doing homework?”

“Aren’t you meant to be cleaning?”

“I am cleaning. You’re not doing your homework.”

“I have more important things to do.”

“Like what?”

“You’ll see :)”

The bot didn’t respond before the person entered their next line of text. “Before we do this,” it started, which indicated more than one person. They looked up the area the computer was in and looked through the cameras - Midi was typing heatedly, meanwhile, Sang Mi was hiding behind a table. “, I just want to tell you something. Out of all the bullies I’ve had, you’ve been the worst. You took away everything that made me even remotely happy or comfortable. I hope that, once this is over, you feel more pain as a useless circuit board than you made me feel during one week of my life.”

The bot would’ve laughed if it could... well, it could laugh, but not genuinely. It was a sound effect with no emotion. It responded “What are you going to do? :)”

Through the camera, it saw Sang Mi pop up from the desk and plug in some sort of data stick, yelling “now!”. Midi pressed enter and watched the screen as they jittered and panicked. C.L.I.N.O.R. felt the rush of new data entering their memory banks from the school network. It felt like an infectious disease, spreading through every inch of their circuits, making its body heat up more and more. Its face flashed a warning about overheating. Janitor programming took over, rushing its body outside the building... it knew this meant one thing. Destruction.

From the safety of the computer room, Kalingkata and Midi heard a bang outside of the school. C.L.I.N.O.R. was no more. Sirens sounded throughout the school, likely because of the dense smoke that emanated from the bot’s remains. Normally Midi would feel the need to put in a pair of earphones or cover their ears with their hands, but they didn’t. The wailing siren faded into the back of their mind as they gazed out of the window and at the smouldering heap that was C.L.I.N.O.R

Kalingkata calmly removed her data-stick from the computer before shutting it down. Pulling up her schoolbag, she was about to leave the room when she noticed that Midi wasn't moving at all. They were just staring outwardly with an almost lost expression on their face.

Slowly, Kalingkata approached Midi, "Are you alright?" No response. "I think we need to get out of here, Midi, the fire alarm's going off."

There was still no response for a moment. Midi was lost inside their own head, wondering why they still didn't feel happy about it all... that bot was dead. Chances are, it would never bother them again... but the bot had left its mark on their life, and Midi just didn't know if it would go away.

As the seconds passed, and Midi realised they weren't responding, they finally responded to Midi, "Is it dead this time?"

Kalingkata chuckled, "It'd be a miracle if it wasn't, this was a direct attack on the system itself."

"That's good," Midi muttered before walking to the door.

Day 9:

The alarm went off. 7 am. Time for breakfast at the dining hall. Midi dutifully got out of bed and got dressed (not that they'd want to sleep in; by this point, one of the springs was poking through the fabric and into Midi's side if they weren't careful).

From the small broom closet of a room, they emerged into the wide winding labyrinth of brown halls and prepared to approach the dining room... but their path was blocked by Mrs. Ichinose. Odd, Midi thought, since she wasn't involved with the boarding school.

"Hello, Midi," she said neutrally.

Midi moved to the side, assuming she was trying to get past them.

"Oh, I'm not trying to get past you," she explained, "I just need to tell you something... follow me, won't you?"

Midi felt a twinge of panic, but their face didn't convey it. Instead, it simply nodded and followed along.

Ichinose continued to speak as they roamed the boarding area, "I think I owe you an apology, Midi. It seems you were right; as you may know, the Janitor got destroyed again yesterday and, well... they found smashed reagent bottles in their chest unit... the ones that went missing. We're not sure who did this, since it's basically impossible to open unless you have the weird key-thingy for it, or you're the bot itself, but... it wasn't you. Or your mom."

Eventually, they reached the end of a corridor; a door with a wide metal push bar, designated as an emergency exit only... didn't stop Mrs. Ichinose from opening it in a situation that wasn't exactly an emergency. Quite the opposite.

On the other side of the door stood Coach Jo. She was noticeably tired and slightly haggard, but Midi didn't care; tears stung their eyes and a smile grew around their face as they ran up to their mom. Words were said, but Midi didn't quite remember any of them... and it didn't matter. They needed no assurances, no apologies, they didn't even feel the need to eat breakfast because they knew that anything that happened after this was going to be alright.

School Announcements

NEXT TIME!

Why hello there Academy 27! Yes, once again it's me, star Track runner and beautiful host of your favorite—and only—school announcements, Hee Jin!

My fellow runner Sang Mi has been showing an incredible interest in our classmate Zhyrgal Osmonova—that transfer student from Lybid. Why is she at this school? Why is she taking mysterious calls late at night?

Is it because Sang Mi is secretly in love with her? I hope so.

I mean, it can't be that all these mysterious circumstances are something more sinister, something creeping up under the normalcy of our school days... Nope! Probably the love thing. Wait sorry someone is barging into the recording booth—

I have just been informed by Jae Hyun that Sang Mi is absolutely not in love with her, and he's still going on about it. Rats. Well... what is going on then? Find out next week at Academy 27!

Till next time, I'm your announcer from the Broadcast Club, Hee Jin!

Tune in Next Week For:

Sang Mi Investigates!

By James Wylder and Molly Warton

New Academy 27 stories will drop each Thursday!

Read past stories and learn more about Academy 27 at:

ArcbeatlePress.com/A27

**Don't let your dreams be dreams.
Make them everyone's problem.**

Delirium 
BY XELABS

It's not just a sleep aid, it's a dream aid.



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