

*All At
Once
Were
Nothing*

*ACT III,
Scene 2*

Liz Lydic

Whatever. The guy was a decent actor but I knew he was just passing through.

"No, he values this experience," Alice had insisted. She'd had that pincushion on her wrist, of course, and brushed back her shaggy bangs. "He said he's been looking for an artistic home."

The others had nodded, and I'd agreed to give Kris a chance. And so he was cast as Fezziwig in our annual retelling of *A Christmas Carol*. And from that moment on, the Midnight Players enjoyed three seasons of sell-out performances at its 110-year old building in the downtown area of our Wisconsin paradise.

"I told you," I said over Sabina's tears, the day after Kris' last show. "He wasn't here to stay."

"No!" she said. "He changed! He betrayed us!"

Lionel, barely distinguishable from each patronly role he played, tilted his head to the side and lowered his voice. "Dear Sabina, you mustn't say that. We are a cherished group. He wanted something that we didn't want."

"That's just it," began Vern. He was using a drill on the back of Seat 4 in Row F, the one that always squeaked. "We weren't out for fame, we just—"

"Well, don't blame the kid for making his dream come true." Sonny dabbed at his eyes. As the resident director, he was defensive of his protegee having been offered an ensemble role in a regional tour of *Wicked*, but now he was left holding a mighty sad bag.

"We are never recovering from this," I said. "Just keeping it real." I was removing the tabs on my stage manager bible from our recently-closed musical, *Annie*. Kris had played Rooster. He brought the house down.

The group, surprisingly, did not counter me. There was silence for a beat.

Finally, Lionel spoke. "We weren't good just because of Kris."

"Right," said Sabina. "We weren't good because of Kris. But we were popular because of him. What's the point of being good if you have no audience?"

"Does a tree that falls—" started Vern.

Suzanne interrupted. "We could try to find another good leading man." Her articulation was as regal as every mother, queen, and political wife she portrayed onstage.



Sonny shook his head, and his jowls shook. I looked away. "No, it's not a recipe. If leading men were for plucking, why did we wait so long before plucking Kris? That's sarcasm."

Alice sniffled, but she wasn't crying, just trying to re-situate her glasses from the tip of her nose as she unpinned actor name tags from trousers and blouses.

"Could we work around his touring schedule? Maybe redo our season dates for when he's not filming?" Vern stuck a screw in his mouth.

"I thought about that," Sonny said, as I tsked. "It's too risky. He's going to get other offers—"

"Yep! Because he's an incredible actor and we're a bunch of local turds!" Sabina was crying again.

We all nodded slowly then, in agreement; then, in acceptance.

