

LIFE, ONCE AGAIN!

Chapter 2

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Maru couldn't help but look at the kids a little fondly. They looked cute, talking about exchanging cigarettes almost as if they were dealing drugs. He had smoked around this time because of a friend, but he never really grew to like smoking and instead becoming one of those kids who stopped others from doing it. One by one, more kids started flooding into the classroom.

A tall guy, a short guy... A big guy, a small guy... Ones with glasses, ones without... Handsome ones and ugly ones. Each and every one of them had their own flair. And out of these people, Maru was able to spot a few familiar faces.

'You bastards just don't change, do you?' he could see the faces of his old friends match up with their younger counterparts. The lot of them all managed to grow beer bellies after they married, but he could still make out their younger selves from their faces. He couldn't even remember their names or personalities, but meeting 'old friends' nevertheless made him feel good. Even now, his old memories were disappearing.

Perhaps God wanted him to live a life free of his past. Maru put his earphones back on, imagining that they'd be friends again in the future. They were all unfamiliar with each other so far. A few of them were pairing up to talk with each other, but the vast majority didn't.

Maybe it was because this was an engineering school? He did remember feeling a little pressured by most of the kids when he came here. The lot of them looked like thugs most of the time. He quickly realized that they weren't such bad people when he talked with them though.

'Ah, hold on a minute. There was a really annoying guy here as well, wasn't there?' he couldn't remember much about it, unfortunately. One by one, the seats were filling up. The last one to enter the class was someone who looked like he weighed easily over 90kg. The other kids stared at the boy nervously. Maru somewhat remembered the boy at the back of his head. Probably not a bad person.

Creak, clack. The old door opened with a start, and in walked a person who looked to be in his early 40s with a cue stick in hand. Maru found himself frowning automatically. He had plenty of bad memories with that person.

"Now now now. Get that earphone stuff out of ears. Hey, someone wake that guy up. You over there. Open the window. Why the hell are you boys keeping it all shut? Get some fresh air in this place. Remember to fold the curtains too." he shouted.

The students got to work one by one when he pointed at them with the stick.

Cold air started flowing in, making the kids near the windows shiver with an annoyed look plastered over their faces.

"Nice to meet you. I'm Kim Chungsik, your damned homeroom teacher. I teach digital theory in this school. I'm forty two, married, and have a son in middle school right now. What I like is silence. What I hate is a disobedient student. The end. No one has any questions, right?"

No one spoke. Maru stayed still, too. He was well aware that getting involved with that person would be troublesome.

"I don't care if you came here because of your delinquency or if you wanted to be an engineer. I just want two things from all of you. First, listen to your teacher. Second, follow the rules. There are a lot of people here wanting to do big things in the future, so don't ruin it for them, alright?"

The teacher banged the podium with his stick, causing the students to flinch a little.

“Listen to your teacher when he talks, yeah?” He snarled. “Yessir.”

“Good. Respond like that whenever I ask you things from now on. I hate seeing people hesitate.”

“Yessir.”

“Now then, grab your stuff and stand up!”

The students took their jackets and bags and stood up.

Krrr. Some of the chairs made an obnoxious noise as the kids pushed it in.

“Don’t drag the chairs on the ground.” the teacher commented with a frown. The students pushed it in a little more gently.

“Now, I’ll call out attendance, so sit down accordingly. Number 1, Park Woochan.”

A student stepped forward with his bag and sat on the far side of the first row.

“Park Woochan.” the teacher said again.

“Yes?”

“Stand up.”

When Woochan stood up with a confused look, the teacher stabbed his shoulder lightly with his cue stick.

“I told you to respond.”

“Ah, yessir.”

“Don’t make me say this twice. You’ll get to know more about your teachers as you go to this school. Your seniors often call me a son of a bitch. I’m

actually quite fond of that nickname. Why do I like it? Because I can really act like a rabid dog. So watch yourselves if you don't want to get hurt."

Woochan bit his lips as he nodded.

Ah, right. The teacher was like that. Maru found himself clicking his tongue in disapproval. In the future, such behavior was banned by law, but not right now. He remembered seeing plenty of kids getting beat up by the teachers. Though... he had no idea if that was because he was in an engineering school.

"Next up, number 2." the teacher continued.

The students began to take their assigned seats. Watching them move along one by one reminded Maru of his time in the military. Ah! He remembered one more thing. He and his friends used to call this place the military. He could remember the memories fondly. Well, actually, maybe they weren't so fond...

"Number 40, Han Maru."

"Yessir."

"Maru? As in the floor or something?"

"It's a pure Korean word meaning sky."

"Izzat so? Anyway, go sit at the back."

Maru sat at the end of the fourth row. The class door opened as the teacher was looking over the classroom. It looked like another teacher had come to talk to him. The man pointed his stick at the class with a warning gaze.

"I'll be back soon, so be quiet. You won't have any fun on your first day of school if I hear you talking outside, I promise."

The kids all sighed in collective annoyance as soon as the teacher got out.

"Wow."

“Holy shit.”

“Dude, we got caught by a real old bastard, didn’t we.”

The kids all became one in shittalking the teacher. Maru almost found it entertaining. If not for the fact that he himself had been called ‘an old bastard’ a few times in the past.

“God damn it! I wanted a female teacher, too!” a boy next to him said. Maru turned to look. The boy’s name was Han Dojin. With him having the same last name, the two of them were sitting right next to each other. Number 39, and number 40.

“Well, female male, potato potato. Same thing.” Maru said as he put his bag down next to his desk.

“You don’t know jack, do you? Female teachers hit lighter. Didn’t you see that cue stick the teacher was holding? That shit’s going to hurt, man.” Dojin shuddered in horror with an exaggerated look. Truly, he was a fitting character for the class clown. Funnily enough, the boy’s face felt familiar to Maru. Perhaps they were friends in the future.

“Dojin, was it?” Maru confirmed.

“Yeah. Maru, right? Weird name.”

“I like it. It’s one of those names you don’t forget.”

“True that. What ya listening to, by the way?” Dojin asked, pointing at Maru’s MP3.

“Just some pop.” Maru answered.

“Lemme listen.”

The boy extended his hand towards Maru, who smiled a little and handed it over.

“Oh, this song’s good.”

Dojin started moving to the beat of the music. Right then, the door opened and the teacher walked in.

“Hey.” The man’s cue stick pointed towards Dojin. Unfortunately, the boy was unable to hear the teacher. Maru slapped Dojin’s shoulder. The boy pulled the earphones out frantically upon opening his eyes. But the teacher had already noticed.

“What did I say about MP3s again?” the teacher said.

“.....” Dojin just opened his lips in surprise without saying anything.

“Give it to me, you bastard.”

“Um, I’m sorry, sir. I won’t do it again.”

“Look at you, talking back now?”

The teacher just started poking at Dojin’s shoulder with his stick. Dojin’s shoulder got pushed back, and the boy’s face scrunched up into a frown as well. He turned to look at Maru. Maru just nodded in understanding and gestured towards the teacher.

“H-here.”

“Bring me a letter from your parents if you want this back, alright?”

The teacher returned to the podium.

“Sorry.” Dojin turned to Maru with an apologetic look.

“I’m good.”

“I’ll get it back for you, I promise.”

“Just stay still. He’ll give it back in a while.”

Maru wasn't feeling too rushed. He might physically be a high schooler, but he had the mentality of a regular old father from South Korea. His memories might have disappeared, but his experience hasn't gone anywhere. That is, he wasn't so petty to get angry over one small thing.

"Just look forward. We don't want the teacher noticing us again."

Dojin nodded in response. Right then.

[I was a little worried because of his appearance. He seems like a good guy though. Thank goodness.]

Maru saw something strange floating above Dojin's head.

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'Why's he looking at me like that?'

Dojin was feeling a little anxious over Maru's gaze. As a matter of fact, having his classmate stare at him like that was only making him feel sorrier.

'Is he mad about having it be taken away?' Maru turned away. But the boy's face was a little weird. Maru started rubbing his eyes as if he had seen something.

'Did something get in his eyes?' he wondered. Dojin was a little confused. Well, whatever. He needed to look back at the teacher. He didn't want to get scolded over his lack of attention.

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'What the heck is that?'

Maru, for a second, saw 'that' above Dojin's face. He blinked a few times thinking that he was just imagining things. But it just didn't go away.

'A word bubble?'

A pink bubble was floating above Dojin's head. Almost like he was in a comic book. He was reminded of something the woman had said. Something about getting a few abilities.

'Could that be... Inner thoughts?' he wondered. Since Maru had already experienced something out of this world, he was not so ignorant to pass something like that off as a mere hallucination. He would have passed the word bubble off as a figment of his imagination back in the day, but things were different now. Maru looked at Dojin again. But the word bubble wasn't there anymore.

'Does it have some sort of a requirement?'

The bubble disappeared in an instant. If it really did allow him to read minds...

"We're only doing morning classes today, so don't you dare fall asleep. Let's have a decent one year together, you hear?" the teacher said.

"Yess." The replies from the class were getting a little lazier now.

The teacher exited the classroom clicking his tongue. Of course, he took the MP3 with him.

"I'm really sorry. I was just going to listen to it for a second." Dojin immediately gave his apologies.

He seemed to be fairly sensitive to stuff like this. He was a guy who knew to be sorry. That made Maru pretty happy, honestly. He hadn't seen many people like that in his 45 years.

Compared to all the others he had to deal with in the past, Dojin was a saint.

"Don't worry about it. He'll give it back in a few days." Maru said.

"Right? He should give it back, right?"

“If he doesn’t, I might as well just buy another one. It isn’t too expensive anyway.”

“Eh? It isn’t? I thought that was a new model. The ones that are like 250 thousand won?”

“Ah.” Maru ended up smiling a little in surprise. He was a high schooler right now. Plus, MP3s were currently the ‘new hot thing’, making them quite expensive. That MP3 just now was something his parents had gotten him as a graduation gift.

“It’s fine, I’ll get it back.” Maru quickly changed his stance.

“Ah, yeah. Is your family rich, by the way?”

“I was just showing off a bit. I’m gonna die if I don’t get it back.”

“Right? Ah crap, I’m so sorry.”

“You don’t have to be so sorry between friends, you know.”

Friends. Maru felt good just saying it. He hadn’t said the word in a very long time. Right, friends from high school were real friends. The type of friends you could meet at any time and call at any time, for no reason at all.

“Friend? Yeah! We’re friends!” Dojin bumped into Maru lightly with a big grin on his face.

With his friendliness... The boy could probably end up being friends with everyone in the class in just a week.

“Are we actually going to have class today, though?” Dojin asked with a concerned look.

“Probably.”

“We’re an engineering school, so we probably won’t go too hard, right?”

The two of them talked for a bit while waiting for the Korean teacher. Their conversation naturally moved onto video games, and the two realized they actually played the same MMO together. The spout turned up a notch when they had a definite topic to talk about.