

LIFE, ONCE AGAIN!

Chapter 4

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Maru lay down on the bed to look up at the ceiling for a second. He couldn't stop thinking about how he was going to live his future.

'Should I try going to a really good university? Become an elite? No, there's no way I'm actually that smart. I know studying isn't actually that hard, but trying hard in it doesn't exactly sound like a good move.'

Maru took out a math textbook from one of the shelves. Looking at the little graphs and equations in it made him choke a little bit. Same went for the English textbook, as well.

"Ugh, studying. *I'm fine, thank you.*"

Maru threw the two textbooks out of sight. He did want to try hard studying and go to a decent university, but taking that first step was pretty hard for him.

"If only I knew some lottery numbers... Or companies that made it big in the market..."

He could still remember what companies made it big in the future in his head. But he realized that this information would disappear slowly in the future. Maybe the heavens didn't want him getting confused over missing chunks of his memory?

"Should I write it down?" he wondered.

But as soon as he raised himself up to do it,

"You can't do that."

Someone spoke to him from behind. A beautiful woman in a tight-fitting two-piece dress had appeared in the room.

“Uh...”

“You spent the day without any problems. I think you adapted very well considering the situation.”

“Ah, yes.”

“But I can’t let you try to remember events in the future. That’s a violation of the contract.”

The floating woman slowly started to descend down onto the floor. Maru was mindful to lower his voice a little. It would be troublesome if mom walked in after hearing them.

The woman responded almost as if she had read his mind.

“Don’t worry. This place has been sealed off by me. I’m here to explain a few things to you today.”

“What kind of things?”

“Just confirming things that you should already know of. You will indeed forget most of your memories in the near future. That is, it’ll fall down into your subconsciousness. You’ll remember a few things here and there in the form of nostalgia. Deja vu, that is. Most people actually experience deja vu because they have previously experienced that exact thing in the future.”

“Are there many people living their lives again like me?”

“Of course. But not many actually realize that they’ve come back to the past. You’ve had that thought, haven’t you? ‘I could have done so much better if I went back to my younger days.’ Funny thing is, that’s the exact moment when you really have come back from the future. You just can’t remember it,” she continued with a smile, “In any case, most of your memories should be gone by the time you go to sleep today. You’ll still realize you came from the future though, so don’t worry too much about that.”

Maru raised his hand to cut her off.

“Do you have a question, Mr. Han?”

“I saw a few word bubbles earlier in the day.”

“Aha, so you have.”

“Can I really read other people’s minds?”

“Yes. It’s another gift for you from Ms. Yu.”

“A gift...”

“Of course, you’ll have to figure out how to use it yourself. That’s what makes life fun, isn’t it? You have a few more abilities to uncover yourself as well. Though you might never come across them in your life.”

“I have other abilities? Kind of like Superm-”

“Nothing that makes you like a superhero, I’m afraid. But there are abilities that would make you even more amazing than that. I can’t get very specific, of course. I can only say your abilities are related to people.”

“People?”

“Yes.”

Abilities related to people... How were such powers supposed to be more powerful than being superhuman? If the word bubbles he saw a few hours ago really let him read minds, it definitely was a better ability than being simply superhuman. To be able to look into minds whenever you want... There weren’t many abilities better than that.

‘It’s a total cheat.’

He was getting fairly excited. Life would be more enjoyable if he used this ability well.

But it also made him a bit worried. The word bubble kind of came out of nowhere earlier in the day. Things could get bad for him if it cropped up in unexpected places. He knew this from his previous 45 years of experience. He shouldn't bite off more than he could chew.

"Looks like you figured it out. That's right. The abilities could help you in life, but it could make things very complicated for you as well. Not everyone gets a happy ending after going back in time."

"What a worrying thought."

"Everything's up to how you decide to do things. How you decide to live, and how you decide to use your abilities. Of course, it's not like you can use your powers unlimitedly. You'll realize it fairly quickly, but just remember that nothing is free in life."

Nothing is free. The sentence came to him quite strongly.

Maru nodded. He's realized again and again that he's returned to the starting point. That made this first step all the more important for him.

"We won't be meeting again, not unless something bad happens."

"Is that so."

"In any case, I hope you live a fun life."

The woman started to fade away. By the time she's almost disappeared,

"I hope you make the right decision."

The woman whispered to him in a barely audible voice.

Maru stared up at the ceiling for several minutes after the woman disappeared. Mom called him out from the living room to eat dinner. He could smell delicious soup outside. Doenjang soup that smelled far better than the ones in school.

“Smells good,” he said, walking out of his door.

“Did your taste buds change overnight? I thought you didn’t like this stuff.”

“I’m a high schooler now. I’m all grown up.”

“Oh, is that so, sir? You’re all grown up?” Mom asked in a teasey tone.

Maru just decided to sit down and start eating. It tasted familiar. Homely. Like something that just made him smile.

“Oh, you’re here, Bada? Here, have some food.” mom said, as she watched Bada enter from the front door.

“I’m good. It’s just doenjang soup again, isn’t it? I also had some tteokbokki with friends on the way back.”

“You can’t just eat something like that as a meal.”

“Ugh, mom, rice cakes are carbs too, don’t you know that?”

“...Sigh.”

Mom put down the bowl of rice she had been filling. Maru understood that feeling completely. Parents always wanted to see their kids eat well.

“Han Bada.” Maru called out.

“What?”

“Eat.”

Maru pulled out a chair next to him, earning him a glare from his little sister. He pointed to the chair.

“Eat. At least just one bite.”

Bada was a little surprised by her brother being so forceful. She sat down at the table with a little pout.

“You never eat since you wanted bread all the time too.”

She didn't stop complaining until the end. Maru just found that cute, if he were being honest. Why did he stop talking with her again? Why did he stop caring for her again?

'I just didn't really care for her, huh.'

After all, he did hear about her divorce a full month after the actual event. Of course, at the time he did feel a little bit annoyed at her. Why wouldn't she even tell family about that kind of stuff? Then again, he just didn't give her a chance to rely on her back then. Some of the things he hadn't noticed in high school, he picked up on now. Experience was an amazing thing.

"I'll be eating here every day from now on too, so you should eat a little bit."

"....."

Bada glared at him from the side, but he just decided to ignore it. The girl really just ate a single bite before leaving.

"You're finally acting like a big brother, huh?" Mom asked.

"It's nothing."

"I guess you really did grow a bit after going to high school?"

Mom stared at him with a playful grin. What kind of a face would she make if she realized there was a 45 year old man inside? He didn't want to get dragged off to the psych ward for asking the question, so he just didn't bother.

"Thank you for the meal. I'll do the dishes."

"I'm good. Just go study. Didn't you say you wanted to be the snake's head or something?"

Snake's head. The word made him grin. He was reminded of the conversation he had with his mother. Instead of going to a good school to be the tail end of a dragon, he'd rather go to the engineering school to be the head of a snake.

'It was a great excuse.'

In reality, he just didn't want to study. For sure, all his memories from before high school were becoming clearer now. On the other hand, his memories of the future were getting fainter and fainter. He wondered how much things would have changed for him tomorrow morning as he walked into his room. Maru sat down on his table and turned on the computer with his toe. Habits were a scary thing.

"I should play some games while I'm at it."

Though he had no idea how good he would be. Maru started playing, fully expecting to lose every single round.

* * *

A week passed. School life went by without any problems. Maru was keeping good on his promise about leading a safe school life. Maru got off his bike as he arrived to school. Today, too, there was the disciplinary teacher keeping his eyes out like a hawk over the front gate.

"Just go cut your hair already. Before I just shave all of it off."

Today, he was holding a shaver in his hand instead of his usual scissors. There was a kid back in the day whose side of the hair was shaved on the side because he refused to get a haircut. The boy ended up having to go to a barber shop to get it completely shaved afterwards. Maru, on the other hand was able to pass by without any problems. For some reason, he was just more comfortable with a buzz cut anyway. He would have tried his best to get it a little bit longer if he was young, but long hair was just annoying to him now.

Why did he care so much about hair again? He couldn't even remember.

Maru went to the small bike lot next to the parking lot. He couldn't help but notice one of the bikes there. It was a rare road bike. It looked expensive even to Maru.

'Maybe it belongs to a teacher?'

Maru changed his shoes and walked into the class. 3D-das really was great for indoor shoes. Never change, 3D-das.

A few of the kids waved at him when he stepped inside. He's made friends with a few of them in a week. Maru took a look over the class. It was already split into several groups. A few groups formed by social kids merged together to form a bigger group in the class.

"You're here?"

Dojin raised his head from the desk to greet Maru. There was some drool on his mouth from napping on the desk.

"Wipe away your saliva."

"Ah, yeah."

Dojin wiped it off with his sleeves. Maru's made good friends with the boy over the past week. It was surprisingly easy, since the boy was already very social to begin with. The boy put on an apologetic face pretty much immediately.

"By the way, your MP3..."

"Don't worry about it."

"Ah, I'm really sorry dude."

"Stop saying it before the word gets stuck to your mouth, dude. I can just listen to music on my phone."

"Hah, I really didn't think that guy would be that much of an asshole."

Dojin went into the teacher's office every day for a week to try and get that MP3 back. Despite how scary that teacher was, he worked up the courage to keep talking to the man. Maru had watched all of this from the side. Dojin really was a good guy.

"I'll just buy you one if I can't get it back!" He said.

Maru just waved him off. It wasn't anything that important anyway. He didn't want to ruin his friendship with Dojin with something so small. Actually, he was glad he was able to discern Dojin's character with just an MP3.

"Here, Maru, try this."

Dojin threw him a cookie from his bag. The boy seemed to have tons in his bag. He even seemed oddly proud of the fact that they took up the space for textbooks in his bag.

"You want candy too?"

"It's fine. How are you getting those snacks all the time though?"

"Our family runs a supermarket. Don't worry about it, we have plenty."

Dojin's family ran a market right next to the school. Apparently, they had another market somewhere else as well?

"Yo Dojin, me too!"

"One here for your big bro as well."

A few of Dojin's friends reached out for candy as well.