

LIFE, ONCE AGAIN!

Chapter 5

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Whenever Dojin asked for a show from each one of them, the kids would respond with a random dance or an impression. The group around Dojin started laughing. Maru found himself smiling as well when he saw the others laugh as well.

Sure these kids were a bit behind in terms of grades and studying, but to most adults, these kids might seem like a problem in society. But so what? Grades didn't reflect a person's personality. Though... it wasn't like he was saying all kids with bad grades were good people.

"Hey, give me one too." said one of the kids at the back of the class. Dojin ignored the boy with a smirk.

"Come on, man. Don't be so stingy." the boy whined.

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"Shut the hell up. Go buy your own." Dojin sounded unusually angry. The boy on the other side just responded with a shrug.

"Pft. Trying to look cool? You could've just said no."

"Looking cool my ass."

Sparks almost seemed to be flying between those two's glares. But the tension didn't last long. The atmosphere calmed as the other kids walked into the class. Maru took a look at the kid at the back.

The boy's name was Kang Dowook. He used to sit at the front, but after a few days he stole someone else's seat and moved to the back. The victim, of

course... had to sit in the front. Dowook took a seat from one of the more 'meh' looking kids in the class.

You know the one. Almost every class has one. Guys who aren't that good at studying, but not that good at socializing either. Within the archetype of those only capable of responding.

Maru looked over the class one more time. If no one became friends with that guy in the front... He would definitely end up becoming the 'butler' of all the bullies in the class.

'Oh, I remember.'

The official butler of the class. That must've been the guy. In his memories, he could remember a kid that everyone in the class used to leave their work to. They always 'asked' him to do it, but it was nothing more than a thinly veiled threat. Maru observed passively. He couldn't even remember that boy's name or face, only of his annoyance of the situation back then. Not that he did anything about it though.

It was a personal problem, after all. At least, that's what he thought at the time. He could remember people talking about the guy during a few of the reunions where rumors that he got into a big company surfaced.

"Hey, doesn't Minji have a really nice body?" one of the boys in the class said.

"Ah crap, I almost caught the boss yesterday too." another one of the kids shouted from the other side of the class.

"Wanna play basketball after class?"

"What's on the lunch menu today?"

The classroom was increasing in volume, but the boy at the front was just staring forward quietly. He wasn't listening to music or reading either. His occasional glances to the class indicated his desire to join the conversation.

'I have to act now,' Maru thought to himself.

He needed to make his move while the other kids were still unfamiliar with the boy. If the boy were to be marked as a "class idiot"... then no one would even want to hang out with him. Lest the same happens to them.

"You know any other places to grind? The skeleton compound no. 8 is garbage. Has too many people as well," one of the boys complained.

"I told you, there's literally no better place."

The lone boy in the front chewed his lips for a second, almost as if he wanted to say something. But... in the end, he lowered his head with a deep sigh.

Maru sighed from the back at his seat as well.

"What's up?" Dojin asked, head up from his comic book.

"Hey, Dojin." Maru said.

"Yeah?"

"Us guys need to help each other out, right?"

"The hell are you talking about?"

Dojin looked at Maru with a confused expression. Maru grinned back and stood up from his seat, as he made his way over to the first row.

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Park Daemyung wanted to live brightly as his name suggests, but that was never the case since his time in elementary school.

"Hah! You look pretty funny, don't you?" one of the kids said to him back then.

Daemyung's entire life changed from that one sentence. He could still remember it clearly. He stopped talking as much after hearing that from a friend back in third grade.

Why was he so sensitive to about that? After a point, everyone in the class had started pointing out his goofy looks, he remembered. People stopped calling him by his real name. That was when he accepted his ugly appearance. He kept his head low for the rest of elementary school until he entered middle school. Spent middle school without talking much as well. He was bullied then, too.

Daemyung hated his face. His cheeks were puffy like a frog's, and his eyes and forehead were abnormally small. He started talking less and less, but the bullying only got worse and worse. Daemyung went home immediately after his middle school graduation. He didn't want to hear the joy in his peers' voices.

'I can't keep living like this,' he thought. From then on, Daemyung was set on changing himself. That's why he decided to go to an engineering school instead of a normal one. Perhaps his personality would follow the change in environment.

'And... I wouldn't have to meet the kids from middle school if I went to an engineering school,' that was his intention at the very least. His mother wasn't vocal about his choice. That was her way of telling him she knew of what was happening to him at school.

And then... the first day of school. He wanted to hang out with the kids with a strong greeting, but nothing of the sort occurred.

'S-scary.'

The engineering school kids were something else. The boy next to him brought a pack of cigarettes on the second day. One of the other ones was excitedly talking about where to buy alcohol. Everything felt unfamiliar and scary to him. Almost as if he would be punched if he spoke a word.

And then there was this as well.

“Hey, let’s switch seats,” one of the more aggressive looking kids asked him to change seats with Daemyung. The boy took his bag and quietly moved up to the front without saying a thing.

“What a freaking coward,” he could hear behind him.

Right there, Daemyung felt his middle school nightmare reappear. No, he felt something even worse this time: the contemptuous gaze of the delinquent’s friends upon his back.

Why did he decide to come to an engineering school again? He should have just stuck to normal schools. Maybe he could have become friends with normal kids if he went there?

“Bahahaha!”

“Ugh, you bitch. Please? Just 500 won?”

“Fuck off.”

People were swearing all around him. Just hearing those words made a chill run down his spine, especially since he never swore.

‘I have to spend three years like before again?’ he thought.

3 years of bullying in elementary school, 3 years of bullying in middle school. Did he have to live his life as a victim all the way through high school as well?

“You know any other places to grind? The skeleton compound no. 8 is garbage. Has too many people as well.” one of the boys complained.

“I told you, there’s literally no better place.”

He heard a few kids start talking about video games behind him. They were talking about a game he played. He also did know a better place to grind. If he opened his mouth now... could he make friends with them?

He didn't end up talking to them. He was afraid of being treated coldly after approaching them. Plus, the kids looked like delinquents. They would surely ignore him if he tried to talk to them.

'Yeah, maybe later...' he excused himself with a thought.

Daemyung knew very well that there would be no 'later'. But there was no way for him to overcome 6 years of bullying so quickly. It's impossible, he found himself thinking. He could feel all the energy inside him stream out. Just like last time...

"Hey." he heard someone behind him. Someone calling out to his friend? In any case, it couldn't be him.

"Ah, Daemyung, was it?"

"Eh, ah?"

Someone said his name? No one's said his name since... Daemyung turned back in surprise. There was a pretty tall kid standing behind him. Han Maru, was it? He remembered because of the strange name.

'This kid looks like a delinquent, too...' Daemyung couldn't help but start worrying.

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[This kid looks like a delinquent, too...]

Yet another word bubble. Maru couldn't help but laugh a bit in surprise when he saw the bubble. Just what about him made himself look like a delinquent?

"Park Daemyung, right?" he asked.

"Ah, yeah."

"You play World Crash?"

World Crash was the name of the game the other kids were talking about. And of course, Maru was familiar with this game as well. Why wouldn't he be? Games were practically the only thing he did with his time instead of studying. He didn't play this particular game much, though.

"Yeah, I do." Daemyung answered.

"What's your level?"

"Me? 23."

Oh boy. World Crash launched just 3 days ago. Level 23 already? Just how much did this guy play?

"Hey," Maru called out to the three kids talking nearby. "You guys play World Crash too?"

"Oh, of course. We were just talking about that," one of them answered.

"What's your level?"

"15."

"What about you guys?" Maru asked the two others.

"I'm 16."

"14 here."

They all had lower levels than Daemyung. Alright, Maru's set the boy up for a very nice play here. All Daemyung needed to do now was open his mouth.

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Daemyung felt his entire body freeze up. The group of three was looking at him now.

'Could it be...' He looked up to Maru, who motioned towards the three with his head. This guy... was he helping him? Why? There was no reason for this boy to help him.

'Ah, he must be making fun of me.' Things instantly became clear for him. How depressing. They'd pretend to be his friends again before throwing him away. He's experienced this several times in the past.

'Of course it would be like that.' Daemyung glanced at Maru, who was still motioning him towards the group.

'You... stop acting like a nice guy.'

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[You... stop acting like a nice guy.]

Maru saw the word bubble as soon as his eyes met with the boy. So that's what the dude was thinking now, with that depressed face of his. Maru didn't feel any annoyance from the reaction, he just felt sorry. Just how much was Daemyung burnt in the past for him to respond to him in this manner?

The boy would surely live antisocially if left like this. Maru wouldn't interfere if that's what he wanted, but... if that wasn't the case?

"Hey," he called out.

"W-what?"

"Are you doing this because you're comfortable being alone?"

He leaned forward so that others wouldn't be able to hear. Daemyung frowned angrily in response.

"A-are you making fun of me?" he said. He sounded clearly offended by the statement.

Maru turned to look behind him. The three kids were still looking at them.

“I didn’t barge in for nothing here, right?”

“What?”

“I thought you wanted to talk with them? Sorry if I misunderstood.”

“.....”

“If you were just focusing on studying... Sorry about that.”

Daemyung’s eyes were shaking a little. Maru already knew from the beginning that the boy just wanted to be friends with people.

“But... if not, why don’t you start talking with them for once?”

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Daemyung looked away from Maru. Maru was right. He knew that Maru was talking because he just wanted to be nice, also that he was just lashing out because he decided to misunderstand the other boy’s intentions on purpose.

The group of boys next to him would lose interest soon if he just continued sitting there like that.

‘Is it fine if I talk to them? They won’t treat me weirdly again, would they? Is it really fine?’ All sorts of worries came up the more he thought. And he’s worked so hard to try to change himself.

‘Crap.’ it was almost like he’s forgotten how to talk. He could feel an awkward air start to surround him. Oh god, they’re going to make fun of him again...

“Are you trying to prepare for PT (personal training)? Why so worried? They’re all just kids. Just talk about video games. Stop thinking about how you’re going to act, just do it.” It was Maru. He had no idea what PT meant, but he understood everything else.

Those words gave Daemyung courage.

“Skeleton compound no. 8 is good, but there are better places.” he decided to continue off from where the conversation was before.

“Really?” The reaction was immediate.

“You play World Crash too?”

“What’s your level?”

Oh right, this was what conversations were like. There was no need to think. Daemyung instantly found himself becoming more comfortable.