

# LIFE, ONCE AGAIN!

## Prologue

### *Prologue*

Beep beep beep!

A bus darted down the road, its horn blaring frantically. First swerving left, then hard to the right... Whoever drove it had clearly lost control of the vehicle. The speed it accumulated threatened to flip it over at any time. The other drivers on the road frantically stopped their cars to avoid it.

The bus crossed several lanes in the road before forcing its way up onto the empty sidewalk.

Bang!

The bus came to an abrupt halt as it slammed into an electric pole, which promptly fell down onto the vehicle. The people nearby got out of their cars and started gathering around the now wrecked bus. The doors of the bus opened, with the passengers inside spilling out with a panicked look.

“Someone call 119!” A shout came amidst the escapees.

“The driver’s dying!”

October 3rd, 2031.

A bus driver by the name of Han Maru passed away. He was 45 on the day of his death.

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What were your regrets in life?

It was the first thing on Maru's mind as he opened his eyes. He heard the sound of waves crashing against the beach near him. A cool breeze washed over his face as he sat up to look around.

Where was he?

"You're awake. I was just about to wake you up." A voice of a woman came up from behind him, confusing him even more.

"This is..." Maru trailed off.

Thankfully, the woman seemed to know exactly what he was confused about.

"You'll know where you are in a second. Just think."

Maru understood his situation as soon as he heard the woman in the white shirt. He found himself being quite amazed by his realization, but immediately ended up looking a bit bitter.

"So I died." Maru confirmed.

The woman simply affirmed his suspicions. "Yes, you did."

"Are you an angel?" Maru asked with a curious look.

The woman smiled wryly at the question. "Sort of. Some call me an angel, others, the grim reaper. Titles aren't very important though. What I'm about to say now is."

The woman started walking forward with fairly wide steps. Maru paced himself a little bit faster than usual to try and keep up. After around a minute of walking, they came across the sole parasol in the entire beach.

The woman motioned onto the chair underneath. "Please, sit."

And so Maru did. The woman continued after sitting down on a chair herself.

"Mr. Han, you died precisely on October 3rd, 11:23:14. Do you remember how you died?" Surprisingly enough, Maru could remember it.

“Yes,” he responded.

Maru recalled the event almost as if it were a distant memory. He was driving the bus to its final stop. Just then, something came flying down the road, making a beeline towards him. It broke through the front window, slamming into his chest before falling down next to his seat. If he remembered correctly, it was something that resembled a hammerhead.

He felt his breathing weakening rapidly, followed by gradual loss of his motor control.

Maru stepped on the brakes and swerved onto the empty sidewalk-- he had to keep the passengers safe. At the time, making a stop at the sidewalk seemed like the best course of action. And then... nothing. He found himself at this place the next time he woke up. This led to one question in his mind.

“Were the passengers... safe?” He asked.

“Thanks to you, yes. Everyone survived. If you had given up half way you would’ve run right into a truck and killed everyone.” The woman responded.

That made Maru feel a little bit better. “That’s... good.”

Not by much, though. He may have saved others, but he was still dead. Who would take care of his wife and daughter now? That was when he remembered his life insurance.

“500 million won should be able to support my child somewhat until she grows up, right?”

The woman smiled at his question. “You must be thinking about your family.”

“Yes. My daughter’s just about to enter high school. I was never able to do anything for her because of my pay, but with that money...” Maru wiped a tear from his eye.

“Mr. Han.” the woman asked.

“Yes?” He responded.

“Would you like to live your life again?” Maru became speechless for a second.

“What?”

At that moment, an old lady in white traditional attire walked out from behind the woman. Maru knew this lady very well. She was his neighbor. The one who made a living out of picking up paper waste, Mrs. Yoo Bokja.

“Mother.” That was what Maru called the lady.

She wasn’t his real mother of course. He just started calling her that as they started talking with each other.

“Mrs. Yoo decided to give her chance to you, Mr. Han.” the woman said.

“Chance? What chance?” The woman was only managing to confuse him more by the second.

“The chance to live once more.” The woman said.

That explanation didn’t really help much, unfortunately. The old lady walked over to gently grip Maru’s hands.

“I lived fairly happily thanks to you. I’m grateful for the fact that you cared for me more than my children.” Maru looked down at the lady’s wrinkled hands. He used to help her out whenever he saw her carry around that cart by herself during wintertime. He didn’t do it because he expected anything back. He just wanted to see the lady smile every once in a while.

“You’re saying I can live my life again in your stead, mother?” He asked. The woman affirmed instead from the side.

“Yes,” she said.

Maru shook his head firmly in refusal. "You shouldn't, mother. I don't deserve..."

The old lady cut him off in the middle of his sentence. "I'm not interested in living my life again. It was horrible. I don't want to experience war again. I don't want to live a life where I have to run away all the time again. This is much better for me. All my friends are with me up in heaven as well."

The lady smiled gently before continuing. "You're different though, Maru. You're still young. I couldn't bear to see you go just like that." The lady gripped Maru's hand a little tighter. "Consider this a gift for talking with me all the time."

"Mother..." Maru didn't know what to say.

"Please accept this chance for me."

With that, the lady faded away from view. Maru just turned to look at the woman in a daze.

"There are a few restrictions, of course," she explained. "Your memories won't be complete, so you can't win lotteries with your memories."

"Can I really begin again?"

The woman nodded in confirmation. Maru started to ponder. What would it be like... To live his life all over again? A question popped up in his head as he thought to himself.

"Um..." "You can meet your current wife." she answered the question for him. "The choice to meet her again is up to you of course, Mr. Han. Ah, you'll also get a few abilities going in."

"Abilities?" What sort of abilities? Abilities that appear in comic books? Or abilities in the sense that he could cook better than others? The woman didn't seem to want to answer his question this time, though.

“Consider it a gift for making many people happy. It’s also something from Mrs. Yoo who just went back up to heaven.”

At this point, Maru started wondering just who Mrs. Yoo was for the first time. What kind of a lady was she up in heaven that let her give him so many things? Again, the woman seemed to have read his thoughts.

“She’s someone who spread around unspeakable amount of kindness to the world as she lived. That’s why I offered her to live again. Though, that gift has now been given to you.”

The woman extended her hand towards him. There was a small pill sitting in her palm.

“If you eat this, you’ll be able to go back to your teenage years.”

“By that...”

“First year of high school.” she answered.

Maru couldn’t remember much of high school. Just a few friends he still kept in contact with maybe? After around two decades, most of his memories from that time had become faint.

“You’ll be able to know a bit more when you wake up.”

Maru received the pill. The woman was smiling towards him.

“Please don’t be so giving in this life. It’s good that you tried to make others happy, but you sacrificed so much doing it.”

Maru smiled faintly. “I don’t think about other people *that* much.”

He looked at the pill one last time. He wasn’t so sure if he really wanted to go back to his time in high school. Suddenly, a wrinkled hand appeared from somewhere and pushed the pill into his mouth. When Maru looked back in surprise, the visage of the old lady smiling greeted him.

“Please have fun this time.”

With that, Maru lost his consciousness again.

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Oftentimes, many people think to themselves, “if only I could go back to that time...” By the time they recover from all of their entrance exams, they have to start worrying about getting a job. Once they find a job and settle down a little bit, they have to deal with pressure from their bosses. When they finally move up the rungs a little to catch their breaths, their kids are right about to go to college.

If they knew it would be this hard... Why didn't they take the time to have fun back then? Why didn't they try harder back then? Why did they make that decision back then? Every day, millions, maybe even tens of millions of people look back on their past with some regret.

And... Han Maru realized that such a dream has become a reality for him. He could hear the computer humming silently behind him. The monitor was off, but the fans of the main tower were still working hard. He noticed a little list smacked onto the wall next to him. Resolutions he made as he graduated middle school, was it?

“Phew.” He sat up as he massaged his temples with his thumbs. He could feel the heat of the electric blanket gather straight onto his butt.

Maru let out a small laugh. This small room. These messy clothes all around him. That pile of comic books in the corner, and that old book from the library that he never actually got around to reading. That half eaten bag of chips from last night next to his computer. His new bag sitting right next to his bedside, and...

Maru tried fumbling around a bit under his pillow. There it was. His phone. It was a habit that never went away even until the moment of his death. After

stepping on his phone the first thing in the morning, he built the habit of leaving his phone next to or below his pillow whenever he went to sleep.

“First year of high school, was it?” he mumbled to himself.

Maru slid open the unfamiliar phone in his hand. Right. This was what phones looked like around this time. But in a little while...

“What was it, again?”

He remembered that phones changed in design, but he couldn't quite remember how it changed.

“So it's like this, huh.” Maru realized.

Maru recalled the words of the woman from a while back. About how his memories would be incomplete. He couldn't recall most things from his life back when he was 45. As a matter of fact, he could remember more about the food he ate yesterday more clearly.

“Pooper, Bigfoot, Dicklord, Salmon, Bigeye...”

He could remember the nicknames of his middle school friends as clear as day. The only thing he could remember from when he was 45 was... The fact that his bus's number was 32. He couldn't remember the name of the company though.

Maybe this was why he didn't feel so confused when he woke up? His previous life's memory didn't conflict with his current one very much. It felt like he just woke up after a very long dream. A dream he couldn't recall so well after waking up.

There were a few things he could remember for sure though. The fact that he had a daughter who would get a minor seizure every time she smelled his foot, and the fact that he had a wife that was kind enough to love him. He could remember his family.



Maru looked up at the ceiling.

“So I really am... back.”

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## LIFE, ONCE AGAIN!

### Chapter 1

#### *Chapter 1*

Lee Sunji, Maru’s mother, woke up as she turned off the alarm from her phone. Her husband was away on the night shift. She folded her sheets and walked out into the kitchen with a stretch. Today was the day when Maru and Bada would start school again. Maru, in a new school, and Bada, in a new classroom. She thought of her two sleeping children as she took the pre-soaked rice from the night before and put it on the rice cooker. Right then, Maru walked out of his room without any signs of fatigue.

“You’re awake, mother?” he said.

“...What?” Why was he sounding so polite all of the sudden? Sunji stared at him for a second in surprise.

“Ah, you’re up.” Maru immediately spoke a lot more casually as he turned in nervousness.

“Of course I am. I have to make breakfast. Why are *you* up so early?” she asked.

“I think I just got... nervous,” he confessed. Sunji wondered what happened to the boy for him to try to be so polite. Was he trying to change how he spoke since he was now a high schooler? She was as humored as she was prideful.

“Go wash up, it’ll be awhile before the food finishes.”

“Yes, I mean, sure.”

Sunji wore a curious look as her son entered the bathroom.

\* \* \*

“How awkward.” Maru muttered to himself quietly. His memories were mostly gone, but he did still remember a few things. It felt a little strange to talk with his mother with such a casual tone. Though... when did he decide to treat her more respectfully again?

“I think around the time when I first got my check, huh.” He found himself speaking more politely to his parents when he realized how difficult it was to actually live in a society.

“Mother. Mom. Father. Dad.” Maru found himself growing accustomed to speaking like this faster than he had thought. Alright, perfect.

He washed his face and hair. He found himself smiling when he realized it took more than 20 seconds for the water to heat up. It was stuff like this that really made him realize he was back in the past. Maru walked out of the bathroom to discover his mom making some soup. He could understand now why moms were able to wake up so early to cook breakfast all the time.

They simply wanted their children to have a good day. No more, no less.

“Need help?” looking at her cook all the food made him want to help out a little.

“I’m good. You know stuff like this won’t actually make me give you a larger allowance, right?”

“How’d you know?”

“Because I’m your mom,” she answered in an obvious tone.

Maru opened the fridge trying to hold in his laughter. He could see dad’s beer and mom’s plum and raspberry extracts inside. He forgot how much he

missed seeing this. His mom looked at him with a surprised face when he started mixing some of the syrup with water to drink.

“I thought you hated stuff like this,” she said.

“Did I?” he asked back.

“You always ask for soda instead whenever I made you one.” Oh, right. He did. He used to hate how it made warm water taste weirdly sweet and sour. He decided to make up a quick excuse to cover it up.

“My tastes probably changed.” Maru silently exclaimed in joy as he took another sip of the drink. He couldn’t really explain it, but this syrup stuff was really good for men, he felt.

“Oh dear, look at the time already. Go wake Bada up.” mom asked. It was already 7:00am. About time to start getting ready for school.

“Sure.”

“Don’t kick her again,” she warned.

“I know, I know.” Maru waved her off casually as he entered his sister’s room. The girl was curled up in her blankets like a caterpillar.

‘Come to think of it, we never talked after that point.’ he thought.

His sister went through a divorce once in the future. It was a common occurrence back then, but he’d never imagined his own sister to go through it. He used to meet up with his sister every once in a while and watch movies together back in college, but they stopped talking after his sister started living on her own. He’d just maybe see her face at family gatherings? He didn’t have a bad relationship with her, but it wasn’t great either. Just... average, he supposed.

She just completely disappeared after her divorce, though. She would call the family whenever a family gathering happened. The last he heard about his

sister was when his mother told him about how she was meeting a new man. Maru hesitated for a second when he thought about what he would call his sister. His 45-year old self would just refer to her as 'you' most of the time.

'But the me of now...' For the Maru of the freshman year of high school... he could only recall a single name.

"Fatty." he said as he kicked the girl's foot lightly. He immediately felt bad about doing it, but he couldn't change his habits so easily right away. That's right. This was the Maru of high school.

"Ah... What the hell?" Bada glared at Maru with a half-opened eyes before burying her head back into the pillow. Maru thought about kicking her again, but decided to just lean over to her face instead.

"Wake up, it's morning."

"Ah, damn it."

Maru took a close look at his sister's face. So this was what she looked like. He couldn't remember his sister's future face very well. Maru poked the girl's forehead. He couldn't resist. She just looked cute.

"Ah, damn it! Now you're poking me, too?!" Bada stood up as she shouted angrily. Maru escaped before the girl got any louder. Her bad temper was the only thing that stayed constant throughout that girl's life.

'Ah, that must be it. That was the reason behind her divorce, wasn't it?' He thought as he ran away.

Maru sat down on the table as Bada walked out with a sour look.

"Ah, mom, he keeps hitting me," she complained.

"Wake up on time, then."

Mom retorted with ease. Bada, knowing that she couldn't beat mom in an argument, just headed to the bathroom with a pout.

"You kicked her again, didn't you?" she asked.

"Nope," of course, he denied it. It didn't really work though.

"Why can't you be more friendly with her? You used to walk around everywhere with her hand in yours back in the day." "I did?" Maru tried looking back in his memories. Did that really happen? He could somewhat remember himself walking around town with his sister's hand in his. They used to go to arcades and go into the mountains together.

'Right... and then I ended up losing her once.' Maru ended up smiling when he remembered the memory.

"What is it?" Mom asked.

"It's nothing. I just remembered something old." he paused for a second as if he was still thinking about it. "You know, when I lost Bada."

"Ah, then." she seemed to remember as well. "You cried a lot back then, since you couldn't find her at all."

"I did?"

"Of course you did. Anyway, here, have some food before you go. You got your bag, right?"

Maru nodded in affirmation.

"Don't get on your teacher's bad side. Alright? Make some new friends, too. You only get your real friends in high school."

"I know, I know. I'm not a kid you know."

"Of course you are. Don't hang out with weirdos, ok?"

Maru nodded with a smile. She was right.

Right now, he was just a kid.

\* \* \*

“I’ll be back.”

“Be careful of cars!”

Mom’s goodbyes never really changed. Be careful of cars. She started saying it after Maru’s grandfather passed from a car accident.

Maru opened the door and stepped out. The cold air of the morning whipped across his face. It was March. Getting a little warmer, but still closer to winter than spring. Maru walked down to the first floor and unlocked his bike from the stand.

“Haven’t seen this baby in a while.”

A casual bike armed with a simple shift. Maru hopped onto the bike and started pedalling. The air between his fingers felt frigid. But even this made him want to shout in joy.

“I’m... really back,” he muttered. An image of Mrs. Yu flashed over his vision for a split second.

‘Thank you for giving me this chance.’ he prayed in thanks.

Maru stopped at a crossing for a second to take out his MP3. It’s been a long while since he’s seen one. He plugged the earphones into the jack and started listening. Most were songs from singers in the early 2000s.

“This is good stuff.” he found himself muttering. At least, it was far better than those so-called k-pop songs with english mixed all over the place. He much rather preferred listening to songs he could actually understand. Maru stepped on the pedal as he sang along to some of the lyrics.

“The love I have for you~”

After around 30 minutes of pedalling... He could see the school coming into view.

‘That still looks the same. Then again, it would be strange if it didn’t, huh?’

A rectangular complex made with brownish bricks. Right in front of the building was a small podium meant for the principal. The field in front of the podium was a little larger than your average school’s. There was even a basketball court in the right corner of the school. And for whatever reason, they even had a little pavilion next to it as well. Around there was also a small water fountain. Maru would often get water from there during a game.

Maru walked over to the main entrance. He found more and more students around him in their personal clothes. He, too, was in casual wear as well. There was a time back when he would be jealous of all the uniforms the other kids would wear. He quickly realized how much better casual wear was as he grew up though.

As he neared the entrance, he started feeling a strange sense of nostalgia and fear creep up from inside him. He could see a familiar face standing in front of him.

‘The disciplinary teacher.’ The bald terror was standing in front of the door with a scissor in hand. Maru found himself clicking his tongue in disapproval. He had bad memories of getting his hair cut by those scissors.

The horrible thing about them was the fact that they were dull, so your hair wouldn’t get cut off, they’d just get pulled off.

“Come on, faster! Hey, you! What’s that on your hair?” One of the boys got caught by the teacher. The boy didn’t seem like a first year. He waddled over nervously in front of the teacher.

“Hah, wax? Trying to look cool on your first day?” the teacher glared.

“I’m sorry.” the kid mumbled.

“Three laps around the field and come back to me. Got it?”

“Yessir.”

“I’m going light on you since it’s the first day, alright? Go.”

“Yessir.”

The boy threw down his bag and started running. Maru passed by the teacher as he observed the scene.

‘Our mental age is similar but I still feel weirdly intimidated by the dude,’ he found. He really did feel like a freshman.

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After locking up his bike, Maru walked up to the second floor where his class was. He walked into class 2 for electrical engineering with a sense of nostalgia. The real him had never come here in the past, but Maru was fairly familiar with this classroom. The quiet atmosphere with the cold air... The other kids in the classroom were looking around nervously with their hands in their pockets. Right now, there were a total of 7 kids in the class.

Maru scanned the room quickly before going back to his own thing. Though... that ‘thing’ only really consisted of reading manga and listening to music, really. He decided to sit in the middle of the class. He’s always sat around here in high school. It was a spot the teachers always missed, and he could get to the store during lunch faster.

‘Come to think of it, I never studied during school.’

Woosung Engineering High School. This was the school Maru decided to go back in the past.

‘Middle school was spent lazily as well.’



Study a bit, play a bit. One of those students that never really made big mistakes.

That was pretty much who Maru was. One of those kids who weren't dumb, but not smart enough to get themselves into a decent school. He had gone to middle school with the dream of getting into a good high school, but changed his mind to face reality by the end of it.

'I can remember all this really clearly. Are my memories changing?' Maru recalled the time when he was speaking with his middle school advisor. He could remember it well. His 45 year old self was getting more and more faint as time passed. Instead, he would slowly become himself in 2003. He could feel himself actively changing as time went on.

"So I really am starting over." he realized. Even so, Maru tried his best to remember his wife and daughter. Since the woman had told him he could remember a few key things, he didn't worry about it too much. As he thought a bit about the past and the future... He could hear a few kids talking next to him.

"Did he check you too?" one of them said.

"Check? Oh, you mean having to take my shirt off?"

"Ah, so you got it too."

"I was pretty scared, to be honest. The guy next to me had a tattoo on him."

"What happened to that guy?"

"The teacher told him to get it removed."

"Damn though, engineering schools really are something else, huh. I feel like they're treating us like criminals."

"Just because we aren't as good at studying as the other kids..."

“Seriously.”

“You smoke, by the way?”

“Me? Hell yeah.”

“God damn. Let’s be friends. You got one on you right now?”

“On the first day? Hell no. I’ll think about bringing some tomorrow.”

“Fair play.”

Maru grinned as he listened to their conversation. He recalled seeing something similar to this in his memory surprisingly well. One of the kids brought a pack of cigarettes to class on the second day and ended up getting hit by the teacher’s chalk. That must’ve been him.