

LIFE, ONCE AGAIN!

Chapter 10

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“See you tomorrow.”

After parting with her friends, Bada bought herself a snack in front of the house and hid it in her bag.

‘Not this time,’ she thought. Her older brother had a keen sense for whenever a person was eating snacks. He used to be so nice back when she was in elementary school. Afterwards, he’s become incredibly strange since she entered middle school though. Especially after that computer in the living room went into his room. They fought over it almost daily.

As a matter of fact, they had such a big fight right before the start of school that she just didn’t even go to his room as a result. Fine! I won’t use the computer, you greedy idiot! But...

‘I want to decorate my Cyland profile...’

The one who got the short end of the stick was Bada. Looking at her friends decorate their avatars so elegantly made her want to do it, too. Especially at times when her friends were showing off their profile. It felt like she could do it better. That was why she got the snacks to begin with. Maybe she could use the computer with this as a bribe?

The first thing she did after coming back home was to knock on Maru’s door.

“Big brother.”

Normally, she would just refer to him with a ‘hey’. The door opened. She had expected him to be on the computer as always, but surprisingly enough he

was looking at a few books on the floor. They weren't even comic books, either.

"What's up?" Maru asked.

"No, well... Can I use the computer?"

Just as she was about to hand him the bribe,

"Use it."

"What?"

Just like that? Bada looked up at Maru with a confused look.

"Use it."

"Really?"

"What, you think I'd joke about something like this? Did you have dinner, by the way?"

"Not yet."

"Have some food first. Mom made kimchi jjigae (stew?)."

"But mom isn't here?"

"Ah, she's visiting the neighbors. Give me a second."

Bada turned around as Maru left the room to keep the snack hidden behind her back. Maru walked into the kitchen. Soon, Bada could hear dishes clanking against each other and the stove being turned on. She peeked over to see what was going on.

"You're making me dinner?"

"You're not going to eat otherwise. You can have that bag of chips after your meal. Rice won't be as tasty if you have chips beforehand."

Maru was setting the table with rice, soup, and a few side dishes for her. What was up with him? This never happened. Han Maru was the type of person to steal all your food if given the chance. Bada sat down on the table with a confused look.

“Put the dishes in the sink after you finish. I’ll do the dishes.”

Maru headed to the living room and turned the TV on. Was he really letting her use the computer? Well then, she had no time to waste, did she? Bada devoured the food in front of her as quickly as possible. She couldn’t have her older brother changing his mind in the meantime. When she finished up, she noticed Maru getting up to do the dishes.

‘What the heck...’ looking at him being nice was just bizarre.

Bada scanned her brother with narrowed eyes. Did he break something of hers? She stepped into her room to check. Nope, nothing. What was wrong with him? When she stepped out, Maru handed her a plate of cut apples.

“Here, dessert.”

“Ah, ok.”

“Don’t play for too long. Do your homework as well.”

“...Ok.”

This was so weird. Why was Maru acting like a dad all of the sudden? His pose as he watched the TV, all the way to how he was just looking at the news... Maru seemed more like dad than dad himself.

‘What the hell?’

It’d be way less weird if he just told her ‘nope, computer’s mine, fatty’ like usual. Bada went into Maru’s room with a strange sense of discomfort.

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“Maru’s being weird,” Bada commented.

“What do you mean?”

“He gave me dinner, got me dessert, and he let me use the computer.”

Bada was talking to her mother after she returned home. It was really strange today. Her brother had to be up to something. There was no way he’d do stuff like ‘that’ otherwise.

“He’s just matured. Why don’t you do the same for a change?”

“Liar. He did something, didn’t he? Tell me.”

“Of course not.”

Mom took out 10,000 won bill from the wallet. Bada’s frown instantly turned into a smile when she saw the money.

“Allowance?”

“Yup, allowance.”

“What’s up, mom? You told me to wait when I asked for some yesterday.”

Bada shook her mom’s hand with joy. She could take sticker photos with her friends using this money. Her old photos were starting to peel off from the back of her phone, so it was high time she needed to update them.

“Maru told me to give it to you.” “Eh? Him?”

“Yup.”

Bada thought to herself as she stared down at the money in her hand.

Did this guy finally go insane?

* * *

(note, I don’t think they do it any more but back then, students had to go to school every second saturday)

Saturday. Today was the day they'd get to choose their clubs. The class was getting rowdy with all the students trying to make their last minute decisions.

"Yo, the board game club is the best. Tons of girls."

"Hah, girls? Why look at girls when you can have fun? Let's go to the program research club. They just game in PC bangs."

"I gave up on the dance club. Good lord they practice so much. I don't know about that club, man."

The kids were trading information to find the 'best' club.

"Today's menu is fish katsu with fish soup. Hah... So much fish," Dojin sighed.

"I'll take it if you don't want it."

"Buzz off. You want some peanut candy?"

"Sure."

Like always, Maru started his day of school with a candy from Dojin. Even Daemyung from the front of the class moved back to talk with them.

"Yo, Daemyung. You want candy too?"

"Oh, sure, thanks."

Daemyung received the candy with a smile. The two seemed a bit closer now. As it turned out, Daemyung was the type of person to smile a lot. He was still pretty sensitive to a lot of things, but time would fix all of that.

'Good thing I decided to talk to him back then.' Maru thought to himself.

It was a small act of kindness. It wasn't that hard. Thanks to that little gesture, though, Daemyung found his laughter again.

"Yooo, Daemyung! Come check out what I got in the game last night!"

One of the kids entered the class with a shout. Half the kids in class were talking about World Crash.

“I got it too.”

“I got nothing. Lots of exp though. Its respawn timer was just perfect, so I just skipped dinner and hunted all night.”

“Hey Daemyung, can I ask you about a different exp farm?”

Daemyung told the other kids that he'd talk to them during lunch. Whenever the kids talked about video games, Daemyung was always at the center. His awkward self on the first day was nowhere to be seen. This was what Daemyung was like from the start.

‘Good thing I talked to him,’ Maru thought.

Maru didn't think of himself as a person who was going to do anything amazing. He just wanted to have a leisurely school life, then fight his way up the ladder of society, find his wife again, and become a normal father. Having some fun in the process was just an added bonus.

[Please have fun this time.]

He could remember the voice of the old lady in his head.

‘Fun doesn't necessitate a risky adventure.’

He just wanted a life that was a tiny bit more leisurely than before. That much was enough. Any more than that would be greedy, and greed is a factor in one's downfall. He put on earphones and closed his eyes. Listening to music until the start of class didn't seem like a bad idea.

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Kang Dowook glanced at the guys talking in front of him.

'Annoying...' he found himself thinking. The guy he'd been planning on toying with has found himself a friend group to be with.

It was Park Daemyung. The kid was a total servant in the making but he's turned pretty social now.

'God damn it.'

He needed to find someone else to do his homework now that his original target's changed. His eyes met with Dojin's as he was scanning the classroom.

"The hell are you looking at?" Dojin taunted.

Hah, that's funny. That guy really doesn't know how to stay under the radar.

"What? I can't glance at things with my own eyes?"

"Look somewhere else. I don't like being stared at by people like you." "Hah, look at you, trying to act cool."

"Stare elsewhere. No, I'll just look away for you."

Dojin turned away with a click of his tongue. Dowook wanted to slap the idiot's head, but he decided to be the bigger man. He didn't want to fight over something like this. Plus, with all the insane teachers at this school... Fighting definitely wasn't worth it.

There was a story he's heard from a senior. One of the ELEN kids and the MECH kids got in a fight once, but after they were completely silent after being dragged off to the auditorium. Apparently the teacher had beat both of them to a pulp with a PVC pipe. That pretty much turned Dowook away from fighting for good.

'Even the homeroom teacher doesn't seem normal at all.'

He didn't come to an engineering school to push his life into the dumpster. He was planning on going to college. He tried to straighten himself up a little and started studying a little bit. He had no plans of causing any big trouble until he graduated.

'I need a servant for that, though.'

He couldn't just study for 3 straight years though. That was insane! He needed a 'bestie' to help him get by.

"Yo, Dowook, want to smoke a cig?"

Dowook raised his head. Ah, people who were kind of like him. One of them pulled out a Korean brand of cigarettes just enough for him to see it.

"Ah... damn it, you have no taste at all," he found himself muttering.

"Fuck off. You want one or not?"

"Of course I do. Where are we going, though?"

"One of the seniors told me that the auditorium on the fifth floor is open today. We can smoke from the window there."

"Oh, sounds nice."

"Leggo. You got a lighter on you?"

"Course I do."

Dowook stood up with the other kids. The fish katsu was a heavy meal for his stomach anyway. Having a smoke would make him feel better.

But right as he walked past the door, the pack of cigs fell from Dowook's hands. It bounced off the floor and landed right next to the guy listening to music. The guy reached down and grabbed the pack. Dowook remembered him. Maru. One of the guys he's never talked to, but was annoying regardless.

The dude felt like one of 'those' kids. You know, the type that tried to look like a goody two-shoes in front of the teachers. But.

"Why would you do something that's bad for your health?" was about the only thing that came out of his mouth when he returned it. He closed his eyes again to focus on the music again afterwards. Well, that was surprising. Dowook thought for sure that the guy was going to snitch. Then maybe...

"You want to smoke too?" he tried asking.

"Sorry, I've quit smoking for a long time."

"...What?"

"It's nothing. You guys should stop too though. You'll regret it, I swear. Especially with your daughter... Hmph! It's nothing."

Daughter? What daughter? What the hell was this guy saying?

"Dude, let's go. We don't want class to start before we smoke."

His friends were hurrying him from the back. Dowook looked at the clock. Ah, 15 minutes before 1 o'clock.

"Let's go," he said.

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"God, I hate even looking at the guy," Dojin complained.

Maru looked at him quietly. From an outsider's perspective, Dojin and Dowook looked like they'd get along very well. They both looked like delinquents. Dojin already explained about his delinquency in middle school. But at one point, his actions started to embarrass him. He's regretted it quite a bit.

"Is that so, Mr. Retired Delinquent?"

"Dude, buzz off. I've been off that train for a while now. I'm a good guy."

“Why’d you get off, by the way?”

“Me? Because it was embarrassing.”

“No, I mean, why did you think it was embarrassing?”

“Ah, there was a guy I used to bully. Hey, I’m friends with that guy now, so quit staring at me like that. Anyway, he’s told me during the second grade of middle school... that what I was doing was really immature. He was the type that kept his cool even as he was getting bullied. That’s when I started thinking: what if I was in that guy’s position? I wouldn’t even be as half as confident as him. I stopped right on that day. My actions started to feel childish since then.”

“Sounds like a great guy.”

“He really was. And the thing is, the dude was amazingly good at studying. Damn it, I should’ve studied when he told me to. I just spent my time smoking cigarettes trying to look cool while... Damn it, this is so embarrassing.”

Dojin finished his story with a smile. Friends often influenced each other greatly. Maru took a look at Daemyung. High school was a time when kids finally entered that border between maturity and immaturity. In that sense, friends were more important than family during this time. A single word from a friend could change your entire life. Daemyung smiled back at him. Ah, this was good.

‘Living life again... Maybe it’s not just me living once again, it’s us living once again.’

A good person. Thinking of that word made him smile.

“The hell you smiling for?” he heard Dojin say.