

LIFE, ONCE AGAIN!

Chapter 13

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“That was too much, wasn’t it?”

Daemyung looked pretty hurt, too. Almost as if his own stuff was damaged.

“Do you know anything, Maru?” Dojin asked.

“Me? Not yet.”

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“Not yet?”

Maru just waved him away. Kang Dowook... The boy was suspicious for sure. Couldn’t judge a person just based on their looks though. Maru’s seen too many people whose lives were ruined because of their looks in the past.

The classes ended at 5 o’clock, but it was well past 6 now. Their class was completely empty, save for a few teachers who swung by every once in a while.

“I noticed a few third years staying after school to keep studying till night.”

“They aren’t all playing around. I heard they were trying to get jobs or go to college?” Daemyung responded, looking at the ceiling.

He could see a few classes still open when they came out of the auditorium. Probably a gathering of students studying for college entrance exams.

“Here I thought everyone would be playing in an engineering school,” Dojin said.

“Third years probably feel different. I mean, I want to go to college too.”

“Where do you want to go?”

“Somewhere in Seoul for now.”

“Damn, you good at studying?”

Maru opened the class door as he overheard the two talk with each other. Electrical Engineering, class B. He could see the field outside through the window. There was someone playing basketball way over in the corner.

“Let’s go.”

Maru picked up his bag and walked out, his two friends in tow. The three split up in front of the restaurant near school.

Maru stopped for a second during his walk. He changed his destination to go to the left side of the school. Eventually, he came up in front of a playground next to school. One that’s almost been abandoned after years of no use.

He could see several red dots floating in the air. Cigarettes. From the delinquents around town. Some of them were smoking in groups, and others were smoking by themselves. Occasionally teachers came by, but the kids were never caught. Even Maru had memories of smoking here in the past. He threw it away pretty much immediately, though. Tasted awful to his tongue.

Maru parked his bike and walked up. Most of the kids were wearing casual clothes. Students from his school, no doubt. Some kids were wearing school uniforms, but those were all girls. Presumably from the Dongsung Global School. That school was pretty close with Maru’s, so they visited each others in festivals quite a bit. The delinquents probably made friends with each other then.

He looked around to find Dowook. Ah, there he was. In the corner with his class friends. There was an unfamiliar face there as well. Probably from a

different school? Whatever. He just wanted to talk with Dowook for now. Maru walked over to where Dowook was.

“Dowook.”

“...What?”

The boy seemed to be surprised by Maru. He passed his cigarette to his friend.

“I had something I wanted to ask you.”

“Ask me?”

“Yeah.”

“What is it?”

“You smoked in the auditorium last Saturday, right?”

“Saturday? Why?”

Dowook was looking at Maru with a smirk. So he did smoke.

‘Was I always this calm? I feel like I can read their expressions better too,’ Maru realized.

He was pretty impatient in his previous life. Especially whenever he saw injustice. He was the type of person that tried to help others as much as he could. That’s why he was always in trouble with his boss and never had employees who truly wanted to talk with him. That was why he decided to become a bus driver in the first place.

Even then, he wasn’t *this* brave in his past life. He wouldn’t walk into a den full of delinquents without any sense of fear.

‘Probably has something to do with age.’

Let’s just ignore that for now.

“Did you see clothes and stuff when you were smoking there?”

“No, why are you asking me this? Are you going to snitch?”

“Do you really think I’m here to do that? Seriously?”

Dowook spit on the ground before walking up to Maru.

“Fucking hell, you’re really getting on my nerves.” “That sounds like a personal problem, bud. Just tell me. Did you see the stuff on the fifth floor when you were smoking?”

“Yeah. I did. So what?”

Dowook’s face was getting closer. The smell of cigs was... man, was it strong.

“Just asking out of curiosity....”

Maru looked straight back at Dowook’s eyes. The boy wasn’t flinching at all.

“Did you burn holes in the clothes there?”

That was all he needed to say. Dowook blinked in confusion for a second, and.

[The hell is this guy saying? What holes?]

A word bubble floated above his head. That confirms it. Dowook didn’t have anything to do with the clothes. Joonghyuk might be right, it was probably done by the third years.

“What kind of a stupid-” Dowook muttered. Maru decided to cut him off there.

“Sorry for taking your time. Keep smoking. Don’t smoke too much though, or you’ll suffer for it.”

“W-what?”

“See ya tomorrow.”

At least Dowook wasn't the type to damage other people's property. Then again, most delinquents at around this age only wanted to look cool. Though... there were some real degenerates out there, too. Maru walked back to his bicycle outside.

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Dowook glared at Maru from the back for a second before returning to his friends.

"What the hell did that guy come here for?" his friends asked.

"No idea. He just provoked me for no reason."

"What did he say?"

"Something about burning holes in the clothes or something?"

"Ah! What, that was it?"

One of his friends seemed to know something about it. The guy had a beanie on to fuel the appeal, but that just made the dude look like some sort of a street merchant in the slums.

"What, you know something about it?"

"You got out after just one cig, right? Saying you needed to use the restroom."

"Sure."

"We were gonna go out as well, and then we noticed the costumes in the corner. We looked around a little, and then..."

He looked at his friend with a grin. The group of four collectively started laughing. Dowook was able to get what happened pretty easily from there on.

"So you burned holes in it?"

"Ey, it wouldn't look good without em."

“For sure.”

His friends took another pull from the cigarettes before shouting towards Maru.

“Hey! Han Maru! We did that!”

He could see Maru turn back to look at them. Dowook looked at his friends confusedly. Why the hell was this dumbass saying this stuff right now? His friend smiled back at him awkwardly.

“What? It’s fun, isn’t it?”

“Fun my ass. Christ, you fucking idiot.”

“...What the fuck? Why would you call me a fucking idiot for that? What, you scared?”

Scared? Dowook threw his cigarette down on the ground. He felt like shit. He’s hung out with these people for around a week now... The only reason why he talked with them to begin with was because of the free cigarettes. Because he’d look stupid if he wasn’t in a group.

“What the hell did you say?”

“What, wouldn’t you be mad if you got called a fucking idiot?”

The guy in the beanie was getting noticeably mad now. The three others who were laughing along looked between the two before crawling over to the beanie dude.

“Hah, seriously.”

Dowook suppressed his anger some more. He didn’t want to start a fight here. He’s decided that from the start. He would study his ass off and go to a good college. That was his goal for high school.

“You fucking scared?” beanie smiled at him.

It was really getting hard for Dowook to stifle his anger now.

“Hey, hey, guys, let’s stop here.”

“Calm down, Dowook.”

“Yeah, Dowook, what are you getting mad for? Hey, why don’t we just go to the PC Bang?”

The three of them calmed the beanie dude down. All the while using subtle language to put down Dowook a bit. The beanie guy split on the ground saying ‘I’m not mad, that guy’s just overreacting’. Wow. That was it. Dowook’s vision tunneled right onto that beanie dude’s chin. If he just punched right there, the guy would be down. Yeah, just one hit. He remembered that the beanie dude’s family was pretty rich, but whatever. Beating his stupid ass came first. But right as he pulled back his shoulders to punch...

“You guys did this?”

A voice came from behind him. It was Maru. How did he not notice the dude walking towards them till now? The other guys were all aware of it, though.

“I thought it was trash. Right guys?” The beanie guy said. His friends smiled twistedly with him.

“Why’d you do it? To someone else’s stuff?”

“Because I thought it was trash. What, are you deaf?”

The beanie stepped forward. Dowook tried to step forward as well, but Maru grabbed onto his shoulder.

“Is that so.” Maru said.

Dowook tried to escape Maru’s grasp, but it was more firm than he first thought. Maru dragged Dowook all the way back to his bike. At this point,

Dowook wasn't able to even say anything. This was absolutely ridiculous to him.

"So you didn't know." Maru asked.

"What?"

"That they burned holes in the costume."

"Does it matter?"

"It matters. In any case, you didn't do it."

"Hey!"

Dowook shouted at Maru. The guy was ignoring him way too much. But just as he was about to shout at the dude, he got cut off.

"You should try to make better friends. High school friends last forever, you know? Good job on being patient back there, by the way. I saw your shoulder twitch several times. I probably would've punched him if I were in your shoes as well."

"Fucking no, just liste-"

"You were very mature back there. People who are patient in fights are the real adults. I'll see you tomorrow. It's cold out, so be careful on the way back."

Dowook stared at Maru for a second as the other boy biked away.

"Hah."

He couldn't even say anything. What kind of a guy...

"Fucking!"

He kicked a pebble right in front of him and walked out. He was just going to go home. No point in going back to his 'friends' right now. And...

"Why the hell doesn't that guy listen..."

Ah! So annoying!

The wind was cold, but he was feeling like his insides were on fire. In the end, Dowook decided to buy some ice cream for himself at the supermarket.

* * *

Maru thought to himself a little after he came back home. How was he going to deal with this? He could tell the teacher, first off. Taesik would only punish the kids.

‘But I’m a high schooler.’

High schoolers had their own set of rules. It was no good getting the adults involved in this. Especially not as a first year. Plus.... Joonghyuk didn’t want to make a big deal out of this to begin with.

“The reputation of the club is bad... huh.”

If things get really bad, the acting club would take all the blame for it. Teachers were a pass for now. What should he do, then?

“Should I cover it up?”

There were a total of five articles of clothes. Some of them were dresses which were harder to fix, but they could be covered up by some fabric. What then? Should he ignore it? Or should he tell someone about it?

Ignoring it would just be far easier for him. But he didn’t really want to. Right then, he heard a knock on his room. Probably his sister. Ah, so it was. He could see her face peeking in from the door.

“Can I use the computer?”

Same request as always, too.

“Go for it.”

“...Really?”

“What, do I really need to repeat that for you? Just use it.”

“Don’t you play video games?”

“I don’t.”

Right then, his sister looked at him like she was looking at some alien creature.

“What, you don’t want to play?” Maru asked.

“I do!”

Maru walked out into the living room with a shake of his head.