

# LIFE, ONCE AGAIN!

## Chapter 3

### *Chapter 3*

“I’m a healer. We should play a round together some time.”

“Sure.”

As they kept talking, eventually came the time for the second class. The Korean teacher that walked in had a bit of a square jaw with long wavy hair. He looked a bit peculiar, to be honest.

“Nice to meet you. I’m Park Moonjung, and I’ll be teaching you kids literature for the next year. I know none of you will bother remembering my name anyway, so just call me literature teach.”

The man leaned over the podium as he scanned the classroom. Unlike with his homeroom teacher, Maru couldn’t help but grin when he saw this teacher. He must’ve had many good memories with this person.

“You’re a bit disappointed, aren’t you? Since there are no girls here.”

“.....”

No one answered. It was the first day, after all. And it wasn’t like Maru was a social type either. Plus, the teacher actually felt quite a bit younger than him, making him hesitant.

“Guys, come on. We can’t become friends if you don’t talk. Tell me, you guys are disappointed because there are no girls in your class, right?”

“Yes.”

A few of the kids responded with a smile.

“I do feel for you a little. Spending your youth in a classroom that smells like sweat for a year... What a waste. Why did you guys choose electrical engineering to begin with? Should have gone to art or design. Those are pretty much half boys and half girls. Ah, drawing has more girls now, actually.”

“Really?”

“No girls at all in ELEN?”

More of the students were talking now.

“Of course not. Unfortunately. Told ya, the only thing waiting for you in the near future aren't flowers. It's just sweat.”

“Wow...”

“That's why you kids need to be especially careful in choosing your clubs. If you end up going into sports, you aren't going to have a chance at seeing women at all for all three years.”

Right then, one of the more playful looking kids raised their hand.

“So what are the clubs with the most girls in them?”

“Good question! People need to know how to ask questions like these if they want to live an easy life. Applaud him, guys.”

Clap clap clap.

The teacher had a thing for making class seem recreational. Maru clapped enthusiastically as well.

“Clubs with girls... First of all, there's the manga club. They're the people that sell drawings and cosplay during festivals. They have a few girls there. There's also the origami club. And then the movie review club. I'm probably going to be the advisor for that club this year. Always gets quite a number of

girls. Especially since it's a club where you just go to theaters to watch movies. The drawing club's nice, too."

"Which one would you recommend?"

"Hm, don't know. We got a lot of girls this year, so pretty much any club would do. Even mech got 5 girls! Of course, elen has 0."

With that,

"Ah, we've been cursed."

"Just men?"

More kids opened their mouths one by one. Maru tried searching through his memories one more time. He was fairly sure there was a girl in his class when he was going to school.

He couldn't remember anything about her, but there was definitely a girl.

'So not everything stays the same.'

It didn't seem like a perfect rollback. Perhaps several other things changed other than the fact that the year was 2003.

'Most things stayed the same, but a few minor things seems to have changed.'

After some more casual talk with the teacher, the kids began to introduce themselves one by one. The teacher asked the students for their name, goals for the year, and things they wanted to say to the class.

"I'm..."

"Hey guys..."

"This is embarrassing..."

Maru waited as he observed a set of familiar and unfamiliar faces in the class.

“Anyhow, let’s have a good time together for the next year.”

Dojin finished his introduction.

“Lastly... Oh, Maru! That’s a pure Korean word, isn’t it? I like it.”

As expected of the Korean teacher, he seemed to know the meaning of his name. Maru answered with a ‘yes’ and stood up. He was around 175cm tall. It was considerably tall for the kids in his class. Of course, Maru was well aware that he wouldn’t grow much more after this.

“Mm, my name’s Maru Han. I’d like to live fairly quietly for my first year. Let’s get along.”

“Quiet, huh. Nice. Alright, you can sit now.”

Maru finished his introduction in a simple fashion. The teacher moved onto talking about his first love that no one asked about and wrapped up the class nicely. The kids seemed a lot more fond of him than the homeroom teacher. Everyone was having fun. Well, save the few that was muttering stuff like ‘guy talks too much’ under their breaths.

“He seems like a fun guy.”

“Agreed.”

The first period ended relatively safely. Maru took a look at the other kids during break time. Was it because he had the eyes of an adult? The kids around him all looked young and cute. Even the ones that were trying to look tough.

‘Girls, though, huh.’

Maru recalled to the time when he proposed to her in the past. He gave her the ring saying that he’d propose to her again even in the next life. His wife laughed about it whenever she looked back at it.

'Well, I guess I'm fine with dating her.'

He was living a new life. Might as well have a fun time while he was at it. Though, there would be a few hurdles to pass in the future.

"Ah, entrance exams and the military..."

Entrance exams were fine. He was fine with studying for them. Compared to everything else in life, studying was quite easy for him. But the military...

"Ah... Sergeant Kim, that son of a bitch."

Dojin flinched when he heard Maru curse under his breath.

"Eh? Ah? Did you say that to me?"

"No, I just remembered something."

"Oh, I see."

Dojin smiled awkwardly.

'It's still several years away, so let's think about it then.'

Re-enlistment. His hair rose up in fright when he thought of it, but he couldn't do anything about it. Unless the country reunited again, at the very least. The third class passed, and soon the fourth class followed suit. The two new teachers started their classes fairly normally. The only weird one was the Korean teacher, really.

"Now it's lunch, cleanup, and home!"

Dojin shouted in joy. School finished at 2pm since it was only the first day.

"Where do we eat?"

"You see that gymnasium under construction over there? It's right under there."

Maru remembered himself running there almost daily when Dojin told him this.

“You know a lot about the school already, don’t you?”

“I looked around during break time.”

What a guy. He started walking towards the cafeteria with Dojin. The school was shaped like a capital ‘L’. One side was the main building with all the classes, and the other side had all the labs. The cafeteria was next to the lab building. It was quite loud with all the new construction happening upstairs.

“We can’t even use that thing even if it completes.”

“No way.”

“I’m telling ya, the only exercise we’re going to get is from cleaning it.”

“How the hell would you know that?”

“Call it really good instinct.”

Maru looked up at the unfinished gymnasium with a grin. The principal used quite a bit of money building it, but he ended up blocking it off after it completed. They only really used it for festivals. As a matter of fact, the only reason for students to visit it was to clean it up.

Maru remembered his friends complaining about having to clean up a place they didn’t even use all the time. Fond memories.

He left the gymnasium behind him and went down to the cafeteria. Thankfully, the lines weren’t very long today. The menu today was fried fish, doenjang soup, and spicy braised tofu.

“Poop soup.”

“What soup?”

“Oh, I meant doenjang soup.”

Maru looked for other kids in his class.

“Over there.”

Since most of them at least knew each other's faces, they were all gathered around one table. The same went for other classes. No one really knew each other, though, so lunch was fairly quiet. Maru knew very well that this wouldn't last, of course. High schoolers were very loud creatures.

“Blegh.”

Dojin frowned after his first sip of the soup. He didn't seem to like it. Maru wasn't much of a picky eater, so he was able to eat it well.

‘Then again, I found military food pretty tasty as well.’

Maru walked out after lunch to notice a few seniors running around the field. On one side they were playing soccer, and on the other, basketball. With kids from different classes getting mixed up everywhere, the field looked incredibly chaotic to him.

“Hoo boy, it's a lot worse than middle school.”

Dojin clicked his tongue in surprise as he watched. Maru felt otherwise.

‘It's the military.’

A bunch of kids with short hair were running around with all their strength. If you just took the occasional girl out of the equation, it really looked like the military.

‘Ah, right. That's why we called this place the barracks.’

It was a really fitting nickname. Maru stepped back into the classroom. The sunlight was streaming in through the windows along with the cold air of march. The kids near the windows were already fast asleep. The lot of them were still awkward around each other, but that'd change in a week. Most would form friend groups with each other save for a few outsiders.

'We had a few here, too.'

He couldn't remember all too well, but there were a few outsiders in the class. Though they managed to form their own group in the end.

"I guess they were similar to bread shuttle in a way. Though the term didn't really exist yet."

"What?"

Dojin perked up with a curious look.

"Just talking to myself."

"Why do you keep talking to yourself? Talk to me too, bro."

"Just go back to sleep. You look sleepy."

"True that, I am sleepy."

Dojin slumped back down on his desk.

\* \* \*

"Don't be late. We're going to start cleaning out designated areas starting tomorrow, so remember that. Just go back home and study, you hear? I'd hate to see your sorry faces in some weird place outside school. The end."

The teacher exit the room after smacking the board lightly with his board. The kids stood up tiredly from their seats.

"Where do you live?"

"Guwol-dong."

"That's pretty far. Do you bus here?"

"Bike."

"Don't you feel cold?"



“Yeah, but it’s cheaper for sure.”

“Fair enough.”

“See you tomorrow.”

Maru waved as he left the classroom. The first day went by well. He thought he might make a few mistakes due to his memory, but that never actually happened. Everything felt nostalgic though. Maru changed direction on his way home and went into one of the smaller streets. He was heading to the little PC bang near school.

“This place never changed.”

He spent quite a bit of money over the three years in high school. His entire friend group would assemble in the PC bang after school whenever one of them said ‘go?’. He played Starcraft, Warcraft, and Lineage harder than he ever studied.

“I wonder if I’d play games in this life.”

Maru turned away from the PC bang as he thought to himself.

A new life.

A fun life.

What would a fun life entail? Maru couldn’t quite remember what he’d done for 45 years. He lived for his family after he married, but before that he did things without much of a purpose. He passed the college entrance exams with a decent enough score, so he went straight to college. And after failing his first exam there, he was sent straight to the military. He eventually graduated afterwards, and decided to work all sorts of jobs afterwards.

Jobs.

Maru slowed down a bit. He could see a cloud floating right above him. It resembled a wet tissue paper, moving about in the sky as the winds willed it to. Maru thought his life resembled the cloud a fair bit.

“I didn’t think I lived a bad life... But I didn’t really live a good one either, huh.”

Work before dreams. Things he had to do came before things he wanted to do. He never took risks, and he never looked far off into the future either.

Tsk.

Maru clicked his tongue without even realizing it. He did do fun things. He did experience happy things. But there was nothing that could sum up his life in one word. Well, he did have one.

So-so.

If anything, his life was just so-so.

“How do I want to live?”

That question came at Maru now harder than it ever did in the past 45 years.

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Maru stepped into the house with a heavy face.

“How was school? Not weird or anything?”

Mom asked him a question after a small pause. She seemed to be a bit worried, what with him having gone to an engineering school and all.

“I’m fine.”

“What about the other kids?”

“They’re chill.”

“Chill?”

“They’re all people. It isn’t like a prison with criminals in it or anything. Don’t worry about it. I’m not going to do anything weird, they aren’t doing anything weird.”

“S-sure.”

Mom turned away from him with a bit of a surprised look. She must’ve been so surprised with her son being direct all of the sudden. Then again, he never was that direct till he went to the military.