

Once Again 16

Chapter 16

New school, new class, new friends. The students were now beginning their third Saturday of the semester. The day when they could really familiarize themselves with their club.

The school was a massive proponent for club activities. Most likely because it significantly reduced the number of juvenile crimes after clubs were established. Of course, there were rumors that the school was ignoring certain crimes to begin with, but... having the clubs for sure did bring some improvement.

Every Saturday was a half day of school, with the other half being taken over by club activities. The last Saturday of every month would be completely dedicated to clubs as well. As a matter of fact, every Saturday of every even numbered month were completely dedicated to clubs.

The class was pretty loud. They were pretty excited after hearing that tonkatsu was being served for lunch. Five minutes were left before lunch began... The Korean teacher smiled mischievously.

“You guys want lunch, right?”

“Of course we do!”

“You were good today, so I’ll let you out a few minutes early. Don’t bother the other classes though, alright?”

The teacher was an expert at dealing with kids. Maru took a look at his watch. It was three minutes before class ended. The kids started sneaking out carefully. Almost as if they were in a spy film. It felt really nice. At least, to be able to have fun doing this kind of stuff again. But just as he was about to get out of the classroom, something caught his eye.

It was Dowook. The boy was sitting dumbly by himself. No one was asking to go with him. After last Saturday, Dowook became a quiet kid. His friends all left him. He stood up quietly with his hands in his pockets.

And then his eyes met with Maru’s.

“.....”

He walked out with the other kids without a word. Well, that was a surprise. Maru expected that Dowook would say something, at least.

“What’s up with that guy?” Dojin asked.

“What, you worried?”

“Of course I am. It’d be better if he was an asshole like before. It’s annoying watching him be depressed like that.”

Maru put his hand over Dojin’s shoulder and one over Daemyung as well.

“Stop it!”

Dojin shook his shoulder, but Maru didn’t let go.

“Let’s go.”

“Hah, yo Daemyung, you wanna just throw this guy away?”

“We could, yeah.”

They got along pretty well now. Maru responded by pulling the two of them towards him.

“Come on, man. We’re friends.”

“The hell, Maru? Why are you so strong?”

“Seriously.”

Dojin and Daemyung tried to escape but to no avail. Maru glanced at his own arms. He was clearly stronger than before. He remembered being strong for sure, but not to this extent. It didn’t feel like he got physically stronger, no. It just felt like he had better control of his strength. He could feel that his muscle sensitivity and reflexes were better than ever before.

‘It’s not on the level of an athlete, but it’s definitely up there.’

It probably had to do with one of the abilities he was given.

“Let’s go, we’re gonna be late.”

Maru started running. He was at the end of the corridor already. Early bird gets the worm, as they say. He was only a hundred meters out from the cafeteria.

“Run!”

“Dude! Maru! Dojin! Wait for me!”

Poor Daemyung. He was left behind. Maru and Dojin turned back to show the poor boy a sign of their unending friendship: a middle finger.

“We’ll see you later!”

“Bye bye!”

Friendships could go to hell if food was involved.

* * *

“Huff, huff. You guys are too much, seriously, huff.”

Daemyung appeared behind them, short of breath.

“Yo, we just ran ahead to save a spot for you, man. You should exercise more.”

“.....”

“You should play less games. No, no. Why don’t we start playing basketball from today?”

“I can’t play basketball though.”

“It’s okay, you’ll learn quick if you’re punched enough.”

“...?!”

Daemyung stared at Dojin dumbly, who responded with a grin. This was pretty nice. Daemyung was a popular kid in class now. After all, in a boy’s class, the only things to talk about were girls, soccer, and games. Daemyung happened to be an absolute master at the game that he played, so his popularity was inevitable.

The boy’s face didn’t have any of that timidity from the beginning anymore.

“Who the hell knows? We might need a chubby actor for the play,” Maru said, shoving another spoonful of rice into his mouth.

It was a Saturday, the day the club got together again. He was pretty excited on finding out what they were going to do today.

“I wonder if we’re finally going to choose our play?” Daemyung seemed excited too.

“Speaking of which, did you join the club to become an actor, Daemyung?” Dojin asked. The boy slowly extended his hand out towards Daemyung’s bottle of yakult.

“Yeah. I wanted to try it,” Daemyung responded with a slap on Dojin’s hand.

“I was thinking of becoming the lead, but gave up. That Geunseok dude’s definitely set to become the lead at this rate.”

“Honestly? Yeah.”

The two of them looked up with a jealous glint in their eyes.

Hong Geukseok. For sure, the guy was different from all the other kids. He came to this school solely to join the acting club. That took conviction. Conviction that Maru liked seeing.

“I went to the design class yesterday. There were so many girls. Like, more girls than guys for both classes.” Dojin continued.

“R-really?”

“Oho, Mr. Daemyung, you interested?”

“.....”

Daemyung blushed pretty quickly. Man, he kind of sucks at acting. Maru took a swig from his bottle of yakult. It was almost time for them to go to the club. They finished their greetings last week, so they’d spend this week working properly.

He stood up with the food tray with all the other kids. He could see some of the other kids getting up to leave the cafeteria as well.

Out of the corner of his eye, he caught Dowook eating by himself.

“.....”

Dojin clicked his tongue annoyedly.

“What, you starting to like him or something?” Maru asked.

“I have no idea.”

Dojin left to return his tray. Daemyung was looking at Dowook with a saddened expression.

“I don’t like that guy. He was pretty mean. But...”

“But?”

“I never wanted to see him like that.”

Maru knew very well what Dowook did to Daemyung. The boy took over Daemyung’s seat by force. Clearly intent on bullying the other boy in the future as well.

Suddenly, Dowook looked up to meet his eyes with Maru’s. Daemyung looked away, but Maru decided to hold his gaze. Dowook glared his way for a few more seconds before turning away first, looking back down on his tray like a scared animal. That was enough. Maru didn’t want to see any more of this.

“Let’s go.”

“Y-yeah.”

It would be better not to talk to him right now. Maru looked over Dowook one more time before going outside.

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Dowook didn’t have an appetite. He returned his half-eaten tray of food before heading out. It’s been four days since he started eating alone. He tried to think nothing of it at first, but it turned out to be harder than he thought.

He could feel other people make fun of him. Insult him. Dowook ran away to the deli. He was still hungry. But when he rounded the corner, he happened upon Changhu’s group. Their eyes met.

Changhu grinned at him mockingly. He just passed by without saying another word. Dowook was relieved. At least he wasn’t made fun of.

How did this happen?

He bought himself some bread and sat down to eat it in front of the deli, but he saw his classmates coming from the other side. He didn’t want to be seen eating in front of them, so he hid his bread behind his back.

Why, he had no idea. It was like his body was acting against his will. He sat down on a random bench he found and chewed on the bread. It was tasty. It was tasty, but....

“Hah, fuck.”

Why did he feel so lonely?

* * *

Maru discovered Dowook eating by himself from the second floor window.

'Man, he looks like a total outsider.'

An outsider since high school.... Some of the other kids in the class found Dowook as well, and clicked their tongues in disapproval. Some were even laughing.

"Fucking knew it, that childish fucker."

"Did he really think his middle school antics would work in high school?"

They all commented before returning to their original conversations. Dowook wasn't even worth talking about right now.

Maru tapped at the windowsill as he thought. Having a rhythmic beat to listen to helped him think. Dowook... The little carnivore forced into independence prematurely.

'You should really stop drop your act and let out your thoughts for a second, man. Is it really that embarrassing to live like a herbivore?'

Surely Dowook didn't want to live by himself for the rest of his three years here. Maru stepped away from the window. He wanted to help, sure. But Dowook wasn't willing to accept the help to begin with. The bell rang across the school, signalling him to head over to the club.

* * *

Daemyung was worried that people might hear the sound of his heart beating. All because of the girl standing next to him. She had playful eyes, full lips, and brown hair. Yurim had managed to hit all the bells in his mind.

"Hey Daemyung, can you move a little?"

"Y-yeah."

Daemyung took a look at Soyeon, who was sitting on Yurim's other side. She was pretty chubby, like the dolls that little girls played with. Honestly, she felt more like a little brother rather than an actual girl of his age. He spoke with Soyeon quite a bit already. Perhaps due to their similar physique? Yurim seemed completely uninterested in their conversations however.

'I can't even gather up the courage to talk to her, though.'

Daemyung gave Yurim another glance before looking to his left. Iseul was sitting there. She was talking with Taejoon, the handsome boy. He didn't dare try to join in on the conversation. He just wouldn't fit in if he did.

Iseul was almost terrifyingly pretty. Pretty enough to make people around her feel about themselves. Taejoon, too, looked handsome enough to be a child actor. Hanging out with those two would only give others the opportunity to make fun of him.

"Park Daemyung, was it?" Taejoon suddenly asked.

That was surprising. Daemyung didn't expect to be talked to like that. He didn't recall ever actually speaking to the other boy before. They had their greetings and cleaned the club room together, sure, but didn't actually end up doing much else.

"Y-yeah. Daemyung."

"Nice name. I like people with 'myung' in their names."

"I-is that so?"

Well, that was a really weird compliment. Myung is cool? Was he joking? Probably not. Taejoon looked completely serious.

'Ah, you idiot. Why do you keep assuming negative things when friends talk to you?'

He really needed to fix that habit. If it wasn't for Maru he would've become a complete loner because of this. Daemyung smiled, garnering attention from Iseul as well.

"Do you remember my name?" Iseul asked him.

Of course he did. He shook his head, though. It felt embarrassing to actually admit it.

"I'm Kim Iseul. In computers."

"Ah, yeah."

"You look cute."

"Eh?"

"Haha."

Well, that felt good to hear. A cute girl like her smiled at him. His chest felt like it was about to explode. Today felt like a good day.