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I DECIDED TO LIVE AS ME

*How to Stop Comparing
Yourself to Others So You
Can Learn to Love Yourself*

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Translated by Anton Hur



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PREFACE

It's been five years since the first Korean publication of *I Decided to Live as Me*. One of the questions I've received most is "What made you write this book?" Well, I used to have a kind of checklist for life: go to college, get a good job, get married, buy an apartment, have children, and become an adult of refined taste with a comfortable lifestyle. To live like everybody else, in other words, or like everybody was watching.

But oddly enough (for reasons I understand all too well now), this never came to fruition. Without being able to check off the first few boxes, I couldn't move on to the later ones. My failure to complete my life's checklist made me feel so ashamed of myself.

What had I done wrong? Should I have listened to the world more, concentrated more, forced myself to work harder? Or should I have been a different kind of person altogether?

But as I kept questioning myself, I suddenly had a thought: *What if that's not it?*

The moment I thought, *What if it's not my fault?*, I began to notice the problems in our society. The moment I thought, *What if my ideal life isn't*

the only answer?, I began searching for other answers. The moment I thought, *What if the majority is wrong?*, I gained the courage to live the writer's life.

This book started with the idea *What if that's not it?* and with all the questions and answers that followed.

From that one question I learned many answers and found the strength to let go of the lies surrounding my life and accept myself for who I was. It was such a liberating experience that I wanted to share it with readers.

Still, I hope this book doesn't make you feel as if I'm trying to force something on you. All I ask is that you question things like I started to do, and take a step away from our societal conventions and try to find your own answers.

On the days I'd work on the book, I'd walk home in the evening with a feeling of lightness, a feeling so refreshing that I still think about it from time to time.

I hope this book helps you achieve that feeling. Five years on, I am still cheering for all of you on your life's journey. Good luck, everyone, and keep on living well.

Kim Suhyun

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PART ONE

Checklist for a Life
That Respects Who You Are



Medicine, law, business, engineering—these are noble
pursuits, and necessary to sustain life.
But poetry, beauty, romance, love—these are what
we stay alive for.

—**DEAD POETS SOCIETY**



✓ DO NOT BE POLITE TO THOSE WHO ARE NOT POLITE TO YOU

Right out of college I did an internship. That first boss I had, in my first job ever, treated me like . . . a servant? She bullied me, basically. Asking me to move by four inches the monitor that was right in front of her, cursing me out for the smallest mistake. It was my first corporate job, and with an offer of full-time employment on the line, I was torn over whether to stay or go. Every day on that job hammered home the fact that *Homo internus* was the lowest being on the corporate food chain.

Several years after I finished the internship, I was lying in bed when I was suddenly consumed with rage by that memory.

It was less her behavior that I couldn't stand and more the fact that I just put up with it. It wasn't like she was all-powerful, but I didn't say a word to her in my defense, and that just encouraged her to act worse.

This isn't the same thing, but it is said that those tortured for their involvement in South Korea's democracy movement are hurt most not by the physical pain they suffered but by their degrading attempts to assuage their torturers.

This may not be our fault, but the truly fatal blow to our dignity isn't the mistreatment we endure but how humiliatingly we respond to it.

To those who are not kind to you, who do not respect you—don't bother being polite to them in return. Even in demeaning situations, you can at least hold on to some of your dignity.

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**EVEN IF WE CAN'T CHANGE THE SITUATION,
WE NEED TO PUSH BACK A LITTLE TO PROTECT
OUR DIGNITY FROM THE WORST KIND OF PEOPLE.**

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What gives bullies strength isn't their position, but the helpless politeness of the bullied.





DON'T GO OUT OF YOUR WAY TO BE MISERABLE

When I first entered the new world that was Instagram, my feed randomly showed me a woman whose breasts were so large that they practically covered her torso. Her posts oozed luxury. She was pretty, thin, expensively dressed, and always traveling. But what came as a shock wasn't her lavish lifestyle but her number of followers.

Why were so many people obsessed with her? Looking through her photos made me feel sad about the tasty convenience-store kimbab I had that morning and the cute, spangled bag I "scored" for only 8,900 won.

Social media makes it too easy to snoop on others and their perfect lives.

But is such voyeurism truly free? In his book *Shake It Off! Build Emotional Strength for Daily Happiness*, Rafael Santandreu argues that snooping on others' lives and comparing them to our own is the easiest way to make ourselves miserable.