

Yes, It's Me. The Obsessive Side Top

##011 - Read Yes, It's Me. The Obsessive Side Top #011

#011

In the lecture hall, even though I was late, I couldn't stop watching the back of Sun Woo's head. My mind churned with fragmented phrases, desperately searching for the right words to say. Despite mentally rehearsing, I couldn't settle on anything. I had never made such a drunken spectacle before, and I silently cursed Ha Jin's low alcohol tolerance.

After the lecture ended, I hurried to the department room. When I arrived, Sun Woo was already there, and I nervously swallowed.

"Oh, hey, Sun Woo."

He didn't react noticeably to my appearance. For a moment, I wondered if the events from the weekend had been nothing more than my imagination. Sun Woo's completely normal expression made me hesitant about bringing it up. Apologies danced on the tip of my tongue: Sorry for being drunk? Sorry for kissing you? Sorry for falling asleep while kissing? Everything I remembered just led to more apologies.

While I stood there awkwardly, Sun Woo reached out, not to greet me but to grab the overly sweet chocolate milk I was holding, a drink I didn't usually touch.

"Do I think of you now whenever I see this?" I confessed.

Now, whenever I see chocolate milk, Sun Woo comes to mind. Even though it's too sweet for my taste, I always end up buying it, only to hand it to him when we meet. Sun Woo eyed the chocolate milk before placing the envelope he was holding onto the table.

Holding the drink, he casually mentioned, "Seems like you're pretty weak with alcohol from what I saw."

"Ah, yeah. Pretty weak, huh? Wasn't it just one can of beer? I woke up in my room... Did you move me there? Must have been heavy."

"Not really," he replied.

The moment of apology was nearing. I was poised to say sorry if he even uttered the "K" in "kiss," but he said nothing more about it. Instead, he looked at me with a hint of concern.

"You shouldn't drink anywhere else," he advised.

I was genuinely touched by his worry. Who would have thought I'd hear Sun Woo express concern for me? I nodded in agreement, and Sun Woo's expression softened into a natural smile.

"I thought you'd be good at drinking," he remarked.

Me too! I bet all the readers thought so too. Damn writer. Why make the character an alcohol lightweight? Sure, Ha Jin can pull off all kinds of trashy behavior, but he can't handle alcohol? What a ridiculous setup.

Feeling somewhat relieved, I decided to push my luck. "Want to have lunch together?"

"Sure," Sun Woo agreed.

Am I losing my mind? Things were going so well with Sun Woo that I half-jokingly considered buying a lottery ticket.

"I'll treat today," he offered.

I shook my head. "Why? Let me pay. You've helped me so much."

"I've only been taking from you until now," he replied, still fidgeting with the chocolate milk. Finally, I gave in, feeling that this opportunity was too precious to let slip.

Ha Jin, are you watching? See? I'll do all the things you couldn't do.

"Is there anything you want to eat?" Sun Woo asked.

I grinned. "You."

He looked stunned, and I quickly added, "I like everything I eat with you."

Even without alcohol, it felt like Ha Jin's mischievous spirit was still controlling me. Sun Woo's expression froze momentarily, but then he relaxed. Worried about making things awkward, I called out in an overly cute voice.

"Sun Woo, will you let me choose what I want to eat today?"

Sun Woo stared at me, looking a bit dazed. Embarrassed by how cutesy I was acting, I grabbed his arm.

"Let's go," I said.

Leaving our things scattered in the department room, we headed to the soft tofu restaurant near the school. On our way, Sun Woo suddenly stopped and pulled me back.

“You want to eat this?” he asked.

Of course, I did! It was one of my favorite spots, even if the restaurant had once been shut down for hygiene issues. What did that matter to students? The food was so delicious that we couldn’t resist coming back. Sure enough, when we entered, every eye turned toward me. Used to the attention, I ignored the stares and sat down to order.

The spicy soft tofu stew arrived quickly, filling the air with a mouthwatering aroma. As the rice, stew, and side dishes were arranged on a large metal tray, my mouth watered like one of Pavlov’s dogs.

“Can you eat this?” Sun Woo asked, his question catching me off guard.

Why does he think I can’t eat this?

When I didn’t answer his strange question, Sun Woo’s gaze shifted to the bubbling soft tofu stew in front of me.

“Won’t it be too spicy?” he asked.

Of course it’s spicy, protagonist. That’s why people love it.

“That’s the whole point of eating it,” I replied.

“But you can’t handle spicy food well.”

“Why?” I stared at him, puzzled by his words. Me, not able to eat spicy food? Sun Woo’s expression remained unchanged.

“Just... from what I’ve seen, you never eat anything spicy.”

It wasn’t because I didn’t want to; I just couldn’t get it. Even my aunt avoided making spicy food, probably thinking about my health.

But wow, has Sun Woo really been watching me closely? To notice something like that? Hmm, it would be troublesome if he falls for me.

I just smiled and picked up my spoon. “How can I be Korean if I can’t eat spicy food?”

Boldly, I took a spoonful of the soft tofu stew and put it in my mouth. Almost immediately, I dropped the spoon.

Crazy, Ha Jin. Seriously. Even in this life, I can’t handle spicy food? Wow, that’s really something.

My tongue was burning, but I couldn't show weakness. I stuffed my mouth with rice, trying to act normal. Sun Woo, however, noticed. Without a word, he got up and brought me a cup of water from the self-service station.

"Drink," he said, handing it to me.

The cold and haughty Sun Woo from the webtoon turned out to be quite caring in reality. I drank the water he offered in one gulp. The spiciness subsided a bit after eating rice and drinking the water.

Why are there so many things forbidden to me? Looking back, it feels like being a trash person is the only thing I'm allowed to be. And that's not something anyone should have to permit.

If I can't eat spicy food, so many of the good restaurants near school are off-limits. Is this like one of those "give up spicy food forever for 1 billion won" deals? I never even agreed to that, so why was it forced upon me?

In the end, I couldn't touch the stew again. I focused on the stir-fried fish cake and rice, steering clear of the shishito peppers, worried they might be spicy too. If I couldn't handle the stew, the peppers were definitely off the table.

Seeing me nibble only on rice and fish cake, Sun Woo paused, looking concerned.

"Should I order a different stew for you?" he offered.

"It's okay," I insisted. "They put green chilies in the other stews too."

"I can ask them to leave them out."

"No, it's fine. This is manageable." My image was already bad enough; I couldn't become the difficult customer making special requests.

When Sun Woo paid after we finished eating, it felt strange. Sun Woo, who wouldn't have given Ha Jin the time of day before, let alone paid for anything, was now buying meals. His kindness was beginning to exceed all expectations. The more I got to know him, the nicer he seemed.

After he finished paying, I bowed politely to the owner, expressing our appreciation for the meal, and we left. I couldn't bring myself to say that I'd come back. Knowing the taste and having to give up such delicious spicy stew almost brought tears to my eyes.

"Want to get coffee?" Sun Woo's question startled me. What was he suggesting now?

"Coffee?" I echoed, surprised.

"You like having coffee after meals, right?" he said.

That's right. I had mentioned that once, after eating blood sausage soup. I felt a surge of warmth at Sun Woo's attentiveness, remembering something so offhand.

"Then let me buy the coffee," I offered.

"No need. I'll buy it," he replied.

"Do you have a favorite coffee brand?" he asked.

"No, anywhere is fine. Let's go there." I pointed to a relatively inexpensive coffee shop nearby. Sun Woo, unfamiliar with coffee, followed without any objections to my suggestion.

"What coffee do you want?" he asked.

"White chocola... I mean, iced americano." I caught myself before ordering something fancy.

Sun Woo ordered one iced americano for me and a hot vanilla latte for himself. It felt odd for him to choose a hot drink on such a warm day.

"Aren't you hot?" I asked. "You should get it iced."

"It's a habit. I only drink hot coffee," he explained.

Since Sun Woo remembered my preferences, I tucked this detail about him away in my memory: Sun Woo drinks hot coffee.

When he handed me the iced americano, I immediately took a big sip. The spiciness from the stew still lingered, and I hoped the coffee would help. The bland taste of the iced americano, however, wasn't as satisfying as I'd hoped. Maybe Ha Jin really was destined to drink espresso, like in the webtoon.

Seeing my disappointed expression, Sun Woo smiled slightly. "You're really picky with food," he remarked.

"Huh?" I asked, taken aback, and looked at Sun Woo's smiling face in disbelief.

"How did you even manage to eat the blood sausage soup?" he continued. "It shows all over your face. You didn't like it, did you?"

"No, it was delicious," I protested. "How could anything you buy for me not taste good?" Defiantly, I took another long sip from the cup.

Sun Woo smiled at my behavior, a genuine smile that made my heart race, and then walked ahead. Still processing everything, I stared at his back, replaying his smile in my mind. This is crazy. Sun Woo actually smiled at Ha Jin.

#012

While walking into school, a familiar delinquent approached from the opposite direction. It was the guy who had harassed Sun Woo in the library. Young-chan was his name, I think. I only remembered it because it sounded like “military detention.” His expression suggested he had something to say to me.

“Sun Woo, go ahead inside,” I said. “I’ll catch up after talking a bit.”

Sun Woo gave me a brief glance before heading inside, and I walked toward Young-chan, who approached with a strangely cheerful demeanor.

“Ha Jin. How can we contact you?” Young-chan began. “Your phone doesn’t work, and you don’t come to gatherings anymore. We can only see you at school.”

“I don’t have a phone,” I replied.

“Still?” he asked, sounding exasperated. “Everyone’s going crazy because they can’t reach you.”

Young-chan was trying to bring up something delicate, gauging my blank reaction as he continued.

“Did you break up with I-na?” he asked.

“I-na?” I echoed.

“At Chang Ki’s birthday party on the cruise, I-na got drunk and made a scene, crying. So everyone figured something must’ve happened. And since we couldn’t reach you either, we guessed... you broke up with I-na, right?”

“Probably,” I said.

Ah, so her name was I-na, not Hana. She seems to have quite the personality. It must’ve been infuriating to be ghosted while in a relationship. Back then, I thought it was just a casual fling, but hearing this made me feel a bit sorry for her. Internally, I sent a belated apology to I-na.

Meanwhile, Young-chan moved on to his main point. “Then... do you want to try what you mentioned before? When you said you were interested, wow, it was no joke. Seems you’re really famous in that circle too. I think we could call some good people.”

“Try what?” I asked.

Cleaning up Ha Jin’s mess felt like walking a dog while holding a bag of poop. It was probably something bizarre. Still, I needed to know what kind of trouble Ha Jin had stirred up, so I waited for his answer.

“You said you wanted to taste men.”

‘What?’

What did I just hear? Taste what? This wasn’t like sampling flavors at an ice cream shop—what was he even talking about? I stared at Young-chan, my mind frozen. He flinched and let out an awkward laugh.

“Well, you were curious about it back then. So...”

“What was I curious about?” I demanded, pressing Young-chan as disbelief flooded through me.

Was this why Ha Jin had acted that way toward Sun Woo—because he was interested in that? At my question, Young-chan looked indignant.

“That time at the bar, when we were all talking, you brought it up. Asked what men taste like. Said it might be nice to try it once. You seemed genuinely curious.”

Have you lost your mind, Ha Jin?

“That was just a joke,” I said, trying to sound nonchalant.

“Ah, I see. Those guys will be disappointed. They really wanted to talk with you, even just once. Well, let’s hang out sometime soon then.”

When I responded seriously, Young-chan said goodbye awkwardly and left. Alone again, I found myself walking away, genuinely wondering, Is Ha Jin really insane?

And then I saw him. Sun Woo stood there, quietly watching me.

Seeing him still there after I had told him to go ahead, I internally screamed. Shit... Did he hear that just now? He must have.

The timing couldn’t have been worse. I tried my best to keep a casual expression.

“Sun Woo, you didn’t go ahead?” I asked, attempting to sound relaxed.

It would’ve been easier if Sun Woo had just asked about the awful conversation or looked at me strangely. Instead, he started walking without saying a word, leaving me

with an unsettling feeling. Even though it wasn't my mess to clean up, I found myself trailing behind him, feeling awkward—like a student following a teacher to the faculty office after causing trouble.

We arrived at the department room, and Sun Woo still hadn't spoken. The silence was oppressive, so I made a desperate attempt at conversation.

"Sun Woo, the meal was good. It seemed tastier because you bought it," I said.

"You couldn't even eat it because it was too spicy," he replied.

"Th-that's true? Well, I enjoyed the coffee," I stammered.

"You barely drank any coffee. It's still there," he pointed out.

With each word, the conversation grew more awkward. Sun Woo was watching me with an unreadable expression. If only I could read his mind, I might have been able to say something appropriate. Frustrated, I found myself nervously chewing on my lips. Sun Woo's gaze lingered on me, watching my every move in the uncomfortable silence.

"Sun Woo, did you hear what Young-chan said earlier?" I finally asked.

Sun Woo nodded. Of course... I'd been hoping he hadn't, but of course, my life couldn't be that easy.

"That was a joke," I said, making excuses. Sun Woo listened intently, his expression serious. Then he calmly looked at me and asked, "Do you remember what happened after drinking yesterday?"

"Ah, huh? No!" My voice cracked as I hastily answered.

I did remember. I remembered so vividly that it was almost haunting. But after hearing that talk about wanting to taste men, I couldn't admit it. Otherwise, it would seem like I'd kissed Sun Woo because I wanted to taste men.

The situation was growing even more awkward. Even though I felt guilty about lying, playing dumb seemed like the only way to manage.

Sun Woo stayed silent for a moment, then let out a soft sigh. "You really don't remember?" he asked.

"No. I'm weak with alcohol. I was drunk and don't remember. Did I make any mistakes?" I tried to look innocent, but my anxious eyes gave me away, trembling with guilt.

Sun Woo studied me with narrowed eyes. His intense gaze made the pressure almost unbearable.

Author, wasn't Sun Woo supposed to be a fragile character? Where's that delicate Sun Woo who seemed like he'd break if you touched him?

I nervously fidgeted with my hands, feeling increasingly flustered. Then Sun Woo smiled, a slow stretch of his lips that made me freeze in place.

"If you don't remember, should I help you remember?" he asked.

What?

Despite insisting I didn't remember anything, I reflexively covered my mouth with my hand. The action was so transparent and ridiculous that even I realized how stupid it looked. Sun Woo's laughter rang out, clear and genuine, and all my anxious feelings seemed to melt away. I found myself momentarily awestruck by his ocean-like magnanimity.

Still smiling, Sun Woo pulled a piece of paper from his bag and held it out. For a split second, I wondered if it was a lawsuit.

"I organized the exam prep notes that you couldn't finish over the weekend... here, take it," he said.

"Huh? Oh." I accepted the notes, surprised.

"So the exam prep is complete now, right?" he continued.

Looking at what I'd received, it was indeed the meticulously organized content he mentioned. While I'd been tangled up in awkward misunderstandings and guilt, Sun Woo had been diligently working on this.

"Thanks, Sun Woo," I said, feeling grateful.

"No problem. I got a lot of help from you too. Good luck on the exam." He offered his kind encouragement, then stood up to leave. But just as he reached the door, he paused and turned back, calling my name.

"Oh, and Ha Jin."

"Yeah?" I answered, my heart pounding as I took in the eerie smile on his otherwise handsome face. There was something about his presence that felt overwhelming, and I quietly waited for what he'd say next.

"How was it, tasting a man?" he asked.

My mind went blank. His tone was casual, devoid of any mockery, as if he genuinely wanted my opinion. But his question set off alarm bells in my head, loud and blaring.

“Rich kids’ thoughts are really hard to understand, aren’t they?” he continued, still smiling, but there was no warmth in his eyes.

“Th-that’s not it,” I sputtered, my voice cracking. I was completely flustered, desperately trying to explain.

I wanted to clear up the misunderstanding, but no words came to mind. My stuttering made me seem even more guilty, and any excuse I could think of felt pathetic. Even I would misunderstand if I were in his shoes. But really, it wasn’t even a misunderstanding—this whole mess was Ha Jin’s doing. He really left quite a disaster.

Unable to say anything more, I bit down hard on my lips, trying to suppress my panic.

“It’s fine,” Sun Woo said. “We live in different worlds anyway, you and I. You went to all that trouble just to taste a man? Why bother? Don’t you have people lining up for you?” He laughed lightly, though the sound was devoid of humor. “Ah! Is that it? You rich people get everything too easily, so you crave what’s difficult. Like perverts.”

His voice was calm, and his lips curved into a smile, but his eyes were cold and distant. My mind spun with panic. That’s not it... More than the misunderstanding itself, I worried about whether Sun Woo was hurt by all this.

“That’s... absolutely not what you think... it’s a misunderstanding...” I tried to explain, but my voice trembled, and I knew I wasn’t making things any better.

“I’d prefer if you didn’t talk to me anymore. It’s kind of disgusting.”

Sun Woo left with that bright, yet haunting, smile. I sat there, feeling the weight of his words settle into my chest. Of course, I could never remain a decent person in his eyes. His reaction was completely reasonable, and I sat quietly, consumed by my own guilt and regret.

“Ha Jin, why aren’t you dead yet...” I muttered bitterly.

Even after Sun Woo disappeared from view, I couldn’t move. I was frozen, trapped in my own spiraling thoughts. Damn Ha Jin, what were you so curious about men for? What tasting? I cursed him inwardly, replaying the whole humiliating scene over and over.

Eventually, I glanced at the clock. Class was about to start, and even in this mess, I knew I couldn’t afford to skip. For the sake of my grades, I told myself, trying to hold onto any sense of purpose. I guess I’m unavoidably following Ha Jin’s route.

Still, a wistful part of me couldn’t help but mourn what I’d lost. It was fun with Sun Woo... The memories of our time together were still vivid, and the ghost of that kiss lingered. My face heated up. Agh! Crazy! Ha Jin, you’re banned from alcohol for life.

Sun Woo was someone Ha Jin could never hope to have, anyway. I thought we could at least be friends, but Ha Jin's past—and my own drunken mistake—ruined everything.

With a sigh, I picked up the envelope on the table. The professor had handed it to me earlier, and I opened it, more out of idle curiosity than anything else. What I saw inside left me completely speechless.

"What the—?"

I weakly pulled out the papers, my eyes widening in disbelief. Inside the envelope were not exam prep notes, but the actual test questions for the midterm, along with detailed model answers written out neatly. All I had to do was memorize these to get a perfect score.

The professor's cryptic words from before suddenly made perfect sense: 'It must be hard for you, Ha Jin, with all the media attention these days, so just put in a little effort.'

It hit me like a ton of bricks. This was the reason Ha Jin always topped the class without studying. If I memorized this, I'd ace the midterms effortlessly. Everything clicked, and curses spilled from my lips.

"Shit, this was it? The reason Ha Jin tops the class without studying?"

I felt blindsided. I'd spent so much time wishing for Ha Jin's supposed intelligence, desperate to unlock his secret. And here it was, mocking me. No wonder they wouldn't give me Ha Jin's brains, I thought bitterly. Ha Jin's empty head... this was your real brain.

#013

The misunderstanding with Sun Woo and the leaked exam questions left my mind feeling foggy and gloomy. Unable to think clearly, I couldn't drive and had started walking to and from school. That day, too, I was walking home when a sudden longing for grandmother washed over me. Just as I was yearning for the comfort of a warm embrace to soothe my lonely heart, I spotted a familiar figure from behind.

I immediately ran forward, calling out, "Ok-bun!"

"Jin-i?"

Grandmother's face lit up with delight, and seeing her smile made all my worries and anxieties melt away. It felt as if all the impurities clouding my heart were being washed away. Is this what purification feels like?

"I haven't seen you lately," she said.

"I've been busy," I replied. "Exams are coming up soon."

"Is that so? Oh my, then my grandchild must have exams too. I worry about them, you know. The poor thing comes home late, balancing school and work, and then studies until dawn. They barely get a few hours of sleep before heading out again."

"That's really impressive," I said, genuinely in awe.

"I know," she sighed. "They say they're fine, but this grandmother's heart aches."

Unlike Ha Jin, who's involved in the exam corruption, I thought to myself, feeling a pang of guilt. While I admired how hardworking her grandchild was, grandmother shared some unfortunate news.

"What to do?" she said. "We won't be able to see our Jin-i anymore. I'm going down this weekend."

"No way," I protested. "I won't let you leave, Ok-bun."

"Oh dear, how can I leave my Jin-i behind?"

"Why are you leaving so soon?" I asked, my voice tinged with sadness. "Can't you stay longer?"

"I don't want to disturb my grandchild's studies," she explained. "They're already having such a hard time, and taking care of me would only make it harder."

"Oh, don't say that," I insisted. "I'm sure that's not true. Your grandchild probably feels more energized having you around."

"You little one, how do you know just what to say?" she said, her eyes twinkling. "You always know how to make this grandmother happy."

"If you're happy, how about getting coffee with me?" I suggested playfully.

"Oh my!" she gasped, amused.

"You said you're leaving this weekend," I added. "Before you go, please go on a date with me, Ok-bun."

"You're being quite the charmer!" she laughed.

Amused and touched, grandmother agreed with a smile. She pulled out her flip phone and pressed a few numbers, ready to call her grandchild.

“Hello, it’s me, dear. Yes, yes. I just wanted to hear your voice. Yes, that’s right. Have you eaten? No, I’m not tired. Making food for you is my happiness. Yes.”

Grandmother’s face glowed as she chatted with her grandchild, a radiant smile spreading across her features. She glanced at me and grinned even wider.

“I met him today. Jin-i,” she continued. “Yes, that pretty child I told you about. Jin-i wants to go for coffee. Oh, it’s fine. What do you mean ‘suspicious person’? Don’t you trust your grandmother? I have a better eye for people! Oh dear, you’re working now? No, no, if you join us, Jin-i might get jealous. Yes, yes. Okay, go ahead.”

When she hung up, she beamed at me.

“My grandchild gave permission for our date,” she said.

“Really? Then let’s go right now!” I exclaimed, then added, “But first, can I have your number, Ok-bun?”

“Oh my goodness,” she said, chuckling. “How can you be so cute and pretty? Your mother must adore you.”

She handed me her phone, and I eagerly saved my number under “Jin-i♥.” On my own phone, I saved her as “Lovely Ok-bun,” making her laugh joyfully once more.

I quickly searched for a nearby café and found a cozy one not too far away. We took a taxi there. The café was small and serene, with just a few tables scattered around, creating a peaceful atmosphere. Grandmother looked around with wide eyes, clearly delighted, as if she were visiting a café for the first time.

Her joy made me feel warm inside. I used to really enjoy being around people too. But somewhere along the way, being alone had become my norm. Spending time with Sun Woo had changed that, even if just a little, making me realize how wonderful it was to have someone close. But ever since he called me disgusting, those feelings of happiness had been crushed. Seeing Grandmother’s bright smile beside me now, I resolved to push away those dark thoughts and focus on our date.

I ordered a coffee suited to Grandmother’s taste. She mentioned she loved sweet things, so she held the cup in both hands, taking gentle, careful sips. She looked so cute, trying not to burn herself on the hot drink.

“Is the coffee okay? Sweet enough?” I asked.

“It’s very sweet,” she said, her eyes lighting up.

“Really?” I teased. “Then let me get you something else—”

Grandmother playfully swatted my hand away before I could reach for the cup.

"I like it sweet, just as it is," she said with a big smile, clutching the cup close.

In Ha Jin's body, I couldn't even enjoy sweet things myself. Watching Grandmother savor her coffee felt like I was living vicariously through her, and it filled my heart with warmth.

"Jin-i, you seem to have such a pure soul. That's why I like being around you," Grandmother said warmly.

"That's the first time anyone has said that about me," I replied, surprised.

"Oh my, then everyone else must not have mouths if they've never said such things," she teased.

While I'd grown used to hearing only harsh words and insults, Grandmother's compliment felt soothing, like the gentle warmth of steaming egg custard spreading through my heart.

"I'm so envious of your grandchild," I said. "Ok-bun, can't you just be my grandmother? I'd spend time with you like this every day."

"Alright then," she agreed with a laugh. "Jin-i, be my grandchild."

Smiling, I lowered my head to the table, rubbing my cheek against her hand, which was holding mine. It was the first time since being alone that I felt comfortable enough to be so affectionate with someone.

"My, how sweet and affectionate you are," she said, amused.

"When you go back," I asked, "will we never see each other again? You'll come back to Seoul, right?"

Grandmother didn't answer right away. She just gave me a soft smile, but it made something twist uneasily in my chest. I waited for her to promise she'd return, even if it was just to reassure me, but she stayed silent. Tears prickled at the corners of my eyes, and my nose started to sting. When she saw me about to cry, she seemed startled and reached out to gently stroke my face. I leaned into her warm, comforting touch.

"Jin-i, why are you about to cry?" she asked tenderly.

"I don't want to part with you, Ok-bun," I whispered.

"Oh dear, a grown person about to cry? Our Jin-i may be tall, but you're still a baby, a baby," she said, trying to lighten the mood.

“Then since I’m a baby,” I murmured, “please don’t leave.”

“ ... ”

Grandmother fell silent again, and my heart sank even deeper. I didn’t know why, but my parents came to mind in that moment, as if the vulnerability I’d felt from recent events had made me more fragile.

“I hate it when precious people leave,” I confessed, my voice breaking.

I wasn’t sure why I was saying such things when she was simply returning to the countryside. But something in her gentle, yet bittersweet expression gave me a sense that our paths might not cross again.

“Oh, Jin-i,” she said softly. “Grandmother is just going back to the countryside. Why are you so sad?”

“Because you haven’t promised to come back,” I replied, feeling a tear slip down my cheek.

Grandmother patted my hand gently, trying to comfort me. But suddenly, words began to spill out of me uncontrollably, as if the dam holding back all my fears and sadness had burst.

“Someone precious to me left without saying goodbye,” I began, my voice trembling. “After having so much fun together, they went deep into the ocean without any warning, leaving me alone in the vast sea. If they were going to do that, they should have taken me...”

“Oh no, don’t say such terrible things,” Grandmother gently interjected.

“They could have at least let me say goodbye,” I continued, tears welling up. “Then I could have prepared my heart. Why did they leave without a word? How are those left behind supposed to keep living? My heart still hurts so much. I should have been better to them, should have told them I loved them more. Why didn’t they let me do even that before they left? How could they just disappear?”

Grandmother silently patted my hand for a long time, her gentle presence offering comfort. Speaking these words out loud made me feel exposed, and a flush of embarrassment washed over me. Why had I suddenly opened up to her like this? I had never confided in anyone before, but something about Grandmother made me feel safe, as if my broken pieces could be held gently without judgment. She responded in her soothing, calming voice.

“If they say goodbye before leaving, your heart aches until the very moment they go, doesn’t it?” she murmured. “They probably left suddenly so Jin-i wouldn’t feel that pain.”

"I'd rather have felt the pain in those moments," I confessed. "The sadness afterward is so much worse. It's almost unbearable... If they're going to leave, they should tell us and give us time to prepare for the farewell. When they just disappear, those left behind live with a knife in their heart. The memories that surface out of nowhere keep tearing us apart."

Grandmother gazed into my eyes, her expression even sadder than before. Her gentle, searching question followed.

"Jin-i, does parting really need time?" she asked quietly.

"Yes," I replied. "Time to prepare for goodbye is absolutely necessary. Not giving that time only makes it easier for the one leaving. They can just walk away, but for those left behind... How do we endure the emptiness?"

"Ah, I see," she said softly. "Our Jin-i is giving this grandmother some wise advice."

Her face seemed more serene than I'd ever seen it, and my earlier anxiety dissipated, replaced by an unexpected sense of relief. We continued to chat about various topics, and eventually, she opened up about her grandchild.

Her daughter had come to Seoul to study when she was young. One day, she returned home pregnant, but she never revealed the father's identity, a secret she took to her grave. After giving birth alone, her health, already fragile, declined rapidly, and she passed away, leaving Grandmother to raise the child by herself. Despite the difficulties, Grandmother raised her grandchild, who had been a prodigy from a young age, excelling in school. She had to persuade the child to go to university instead of working to support them both, and eventually, they were accepted into A University in Seoul.

Listening to her story made me admire Grandmother even more. She had endured so much and raised both her daughter and grandchild alone.

"You're sad again, our Jin-i?" she teased, noticing my tearful eyes. I quickly shook my head, denying it.

"But your eyes are red," she said with a knowing smile.

"I'm not crying," I protested.

"Right, you're not," she said playfully. "You're holding up well, aren't you, our Jin-i?"

"I'm not crying. I haven't cried in over ten years," I insisted. "No matter how hard things got."

Grandmother's expression softened, and she looked at me with deep sadness. "Was there no one by your side to catch your tears?" she asked quietly.

At that, the dam I had been holding back broke, and the tears I'd kept hidden for so long burst forth. 'Ah, Grandmother, why are you making me cry? I was barely holding it together,' I thought, embarrassed as my tears streamed down both cheeks.

"Stop!" Grandmother said firmly, as if scolding a child. Then her handkerchief, full of her comforting scent, gently dabbed my tears.

Though my eyes remained shut, I was sure Grandmother wore her warm, familiar smile. But I kept my eyes closed, too afraid that seeing her face would make me cry even harder.

* * *

On our way back, Grandmother paused to examine the t-shirts displayed outside a clothing store. She picked one up and asked me curiously, "How much would this cost?"

It was a simple white short-sleeved t-shirt with a small sea turtle embroidered on the chest. Since it was on sale, it cost less than 20,000 won.

"Less than 20,000 won," I told her.

"Does it look pretty?" she asked.

"Are you going to wear it, Ok-bun?" I joked, smiling.

"No, it's for my grandchild," she replied.

"How tall is your grandchild?" I asked, imagining a petite young woman.

"About your height," she said, surprising me.

I tilted my head in confusion. I'm 185 cm tall—unusually tall for a woman. Could her grandchild really be that tall?

"Then should we get my size?" I offered.

Grandmother looked at me with a playful glint in her eyes. "Do you like it?" she asked.

"Pardon?" I replied, confused.

"My grandchild's shirt," she said, poking me gently. A smile broke across my face, and I couldn't help but nod.

"I love it," I said, feeling warmth spread through my chest.

"Then I'll buy it for you," she declared.

"No, let me buy it," I insisted, but she waved me off.

"I want to buy something for my grandchild," she said firmly.

I watched with a soft heart as Grandmother walked into the store. A few moments later, she emerged holding a shopping bag with the t-shirt inside. She handed it to me with a warm smile. "You'll look so handsome in this," she said.

"Ok-bun," I began, "can I visit you during summer vacation?"

"Of course," she replied. "Who would stop my grandchild from coming?"

Her words made my heart flutter, filling me with a sense of belonging, as if I had gained a real family. One good thing had come from becoming Ha Jin: meeting our Grandmother Ok-bun. It made everything worth it.

#014

I half-heartedly attended the remaining lectures. Kim Shin told me that while I'd always been strange, lately, I'd been strange in a different way. Well, it's not like being strange is anything new for me. I spent my days in a daze, barely responding to anything, and before I knew it, the exams were right around the corner. The midterms start tomorrow. After studying so hard with the test bank, I was given an even more incredible test question straight up. So, I fell into a dilemma about what to do.

I disposed of the test questions the day I received them. I put them through the shredder in Ha Jin's study. It shredded them perfectly. For a moment, I had the urge to stop, but I let them go through. I felt like having those papers in my possession would taint my life.

However, it bothered me that the questions remained in my memory since I had seen them. After deep contemplation, I made a difficult decision.

Whatever Ha Jin was like in the past, I am Ha Jin now.

So, I'll live my way.

* * *

"What am I going to do with you... you bastard."

Father had an extremely angry look on his face. It was even worse than the first day we met when he had beaten someone up. It felt like he'd forgotten to put on his usual smiling mask today. Before I could even have a proper reunion with my father after two months, I had to squeeze my eyes shut at the sight of another flying ashtray.

‘Damn it, they should switch to lightweight plastic ashtrays. Isn’t a glass ashtray basically a murder weapon?’

—THWACK!

The ashtray hit me square in the face, as if he’d been practicing for accuracy. The left side of my face felt like it had shattered, and all my senses focused on that pain. I wanted to collapse on the floor, roll around, and scream in agony, but the dark and gloomy atmosphere made me stand still and endure it silently.

Like before, the ashtray fell to the floor with blood on it. Because it hit me directly instead of grazing me, my left cheek took the full impact. Judging by the warm feeling flowing down my face, it must have been cut.

“Sir!”

Secretary Kim, who was always calm, rushed to stop my father. That’s how serious my father’s anger was—and how severe my injury was.

“Can’t you even eat the food that’s being spoon-fed to you? What do you want me to do? You didn’t take the exam? Huh, in all my life, this is the first time I’ve seen this kind of rebellion. Why? What’s the problem? You’ve been quiet lately—were you preparing to pull this big stunt?”

I opened my mouth to speak but had to close it due to the intense pain in my cheekbone.

“What’s lacking? What haven’t I given you? Let a kid live as they please, and they try to climb too high. Do you know how much money I spent getting you into that school?”

“Admission and graduating at the top of your class. Do you know how much I poured in for those conditions? Is it that hard to just quietly graduate from A University at the top of your class? If that’s too difficult, should I have someone take the exams for you?”

I could somewhat understand Father’s anger. He had poured money into properly educating his son, only to have it suddenly thrown away. Yes, it was worth being angry about, but not enough to destroy someone’s face. Fighting through the stinging pain, I managed to open my mouth.

“I’ll... handle... my studies... myself.”

It felt like my bones were crumbling with every word. Despite my effort, it seemed I hadn’t convinced Father, as his face remained scowling.

“You bastard, talking nonsense just because you have a hole in your face. Say something that makes sense. You’re going to study? You’re really being ridiculous. Did

you take your first-year exams yourself? Did you get into that university on your own merit? I've been feeding money into this since high school to get you admitted. You did the same thing back then too. So why are you acting like this now?"

"Sir, you can't!"

Secretary Kim barely managed to stop Father as he raised his hand. Father took deep breaths to control his emotions. Looking at Ha Jin's empty head, the admission was indeed suspicious. Sure enough, there had been corruption since high school. Nothing surprising anymore.

"You seem to think Eunha Group needs someone smart like you. Smart people are the ones we can hire. We're just the ones who give orders and make choices. Understand, Ha Jin? No matter how much we study, we can't catch up to naturally smart people."

His voice had calmed somewhat, becoming eerily normal compared to before. It really showed he was a corporate Chairman, being able to control himself so quickly. I quietly listened to his words. The communication was so one-sided. Even if I said more, he had his ears blocked, making real dialogue seem impossible.

"You know why I married your mother without looking at other conditions? I only looked at appearance. I thought my heir needed to have an incredible face if nothing else. That's how your grandfather married your grandmother and had me. You know why? Because that makes people pay more attention and desire you more. All we need is people's attention and reverence. Don't think about using your head, Ha Jin. We have excessive money and the looks they like. That's all we need."

Father kept clenching and unclenching his fists, desperately wanting to do something about my silence.

"I've been good to you. Did I ever say anything about you living like a bastard? I just told you not to beat people up. I said it was fine to spend money and play around like a dog. I told you you were doing well because it made people pay attention to you and grovel at your feet. Right? Our Ha Jin should listen to Daddy. But fucking hell, you don't take the exam? Are you in your right mind? People need to know you're smart. Do you know how much money I spent creating that image?"

Father walked over and leaned back on the sofa. He covered his eyes with one hand, as if he couldn't bear to look at me. With his other hand, he waved dismissively, shooing me away like an unwelcome guest. His weary gesture made me feel like nothing more than a nuisance.

"Secretary Kim, clean this up. Thoroughly."

"Yes, sir."

Secretary Kim approached me and quietly suggested we leave. I had no strength left to say anything, so I followed him out. The office manager at the desk bowed her head in concern when she saw me.

As soon as we entered the private elevator, Secretary Kim urgently examined my face. He dropped his usual tired office worker expression and frowned with worry. When he touched my face, a sharp pain shot through to the back of my head. My eyes fluttered from the intensity, and he carefully pressed a handkerchief to my face. It quickly soaked through with a large amount of blood.

Looking at the handkerchief now stained crimson, I couldn't help but wonder what Father thought when he saw me. How could someone not care at all when their own son's face is covered in blood and still say whatever they pleased?

"Doesn't it hurt?"

"It hurts... even... talking... is difficult."

"If it hurts, you don't need to answer."

When I stopped speaking, Secretary Kim adjusted the clean part of the handkerchief and gently wiped my face, his expression dark with concern. His gentle touch and worried demeanor revealed a different side of him, which felt strangely comforting. I had assumed he saw Ha Jin as just a troublesome burden that increased his workload. It seemed he cared more than I had thought.

"Still, you should have just taken the exam, young master. What's this all about, suddenly? You've never done anything like this before. Even if you're growing up, why in this way?"

Secretary Kim drove me to the hospital himself. I hadn't expected Father to react so violently. It had been a mistake to think of him as a normal, caring parent. And I felt a pang of sympathy for Ha Jin. His father had absolutely no faith in him, viewing him as nothing more than a puppet meant to dance to his commands. That thought lingered, refusing to leave me.

The cut near my eye eventually required surgical sutures, and a large bandage covered my face. It looked ridiculous, as there was no way to hide the injury.

"Well, thank goodness. If the impact had been just a bit more to the front, your eyeball would have ruptured."

At the doctor's assessment, Secretary Kim's expression turned even more remorseful. He blamed himself, saying he should have done more to prevent it. What's done is done, but if nothing else, I wished they would at least get rid of that glass ashtray.

Since it hurt too much for me to speak, Secretary Kim asked the doctor questions on my behalf.

“There won’t be any scarring, right?”

“We’ll do our best to prevent that. Ha Jin should absolutely avoid drinking alcohol and get plenty of rest. Take the medication on schedule. And don’t forget to come to the hospital daily for disinfection.”

I had no intention of living with traces of my damn father’s violence. Since I wanted to heal cleanly, I nodded.

While driving me home, Secretary Kim kept making earnest requests. He said we could arrange for a make-up exam, citing illness as the reason, and pleaded with me to take it. He was so insistent that I absolutely had to agree, so I nodded.

When I got home and lay in bed, the pain kept me from falling asleep easily. Only after taking another painkiller did the throbbing subside. Because of the wound, I couldn’t even lie on my side. I had to lie flat, staring up at the ceiling.

‘Damn Ha Jin. If his father was such a bastard, he should have at least warned me.’

In the webtoon, his father always had this kind-looking laugh, making me think Ha Jin’s family must be decent people. I had wondered how such a delinquent could have come from such a seemingly good man. But now it all made sense. Like father, like son. Understanding why Ha Jin’s personality turned out this way made me feel a pang of sympathy for him.

‘Damn... being a chaebol isn’t for just anyone.’

My already wide-open eyes began to sting. The image of Ha Jin’s worn-out face from the webtoon kept coming to mind. At the same time, I couldn’t help but feel sorry for him.

What was that damn author thinking when creating Ha Jin’s character? I suddenly felt afraid, wondering if there could be even more unfortunate storylines ahead.

#015

When I appeared at school, the atmosphere literally froze. How shocked they must have been to see the heir of Korea’s top group showing up with a conspicuous facial injury. Ironically, the wound made my excuse about being sick believably accepted. It seemed like no one would question my make-up exam, almost as if it had been part of Father’s grand plan.

“Ha Jin! What’s this? What happened after you didn’t show up for the exam?”

Kim Shin was making a huge fuss over me. At the noise, I pulled my cap down even further. Not that it would hide the wound on my face. While Kim Shin continued noisily asking about my well-being, I made eye contact with Sun Woo, who had turned around from his seat in front. He looked at me for a moment before turning back.

Well, he had called me disgusting. Having studied together with Sun Woo, I found myself missing being near him. I pretended everything was fine and took the business administration exam—one that I had no real connection with.

The exam questions were identical, down to the last letter, to the ones the professor had given me. Though I felt guilty for remembering the questions I'd already seen, I had no choice. If I didn't take the remaining exams, I felt my life might truly be threatened by Father. Despite feeling uneasy, I consoled myself that I hadn't looked at the answers and wrote down what I had studied with Sun Woo.

—

By Friday, after all the exams were finished, the classroom was bustling. It seemed like there was a group gathering planned, with people constantly mentioning times and places. Amid the noise, I quietly watched Sun Woo's back as he packed his things. Though he might have turned around at least once given my gaze, Sun Woo left the classroom without ever looking back.

Recently, the stitches had been removed, and only a thin dressing bandage remained on my face. With exams over, I felt a rare sense of liberation. Since I had promised to study on my own, I had thrown myself into studying without proper sleep. I wondered if I'd ever worked this hard in my life. I hadn't even put this much effort into my college entrance exams.

Damn... you worked hard trying to fill Ha Jin's empty head.

Just as I was about to leave, Kim Shin grabbed my hand.

"Ha Jin, won't you come to the department gathering with me?"

What is this?

Everyone around us also stared at Kim Shin in shock. It seemed I wasn't the only one who found it strange. Kim Shin was speaking in the same rhythm as Anna calling for Elsa in Frozen.

"What are you doing?"

"Ha Jin, our exams are over, and you haven't hung out with me at all lately. The others are renting a pub today to celebrate—let's go together. I want to get closer to our classmates too."

“Then go. Who’s stopping you?”

“You know I’m shy. I can’t say a word to others without you there.”

Unbelievable. It wasn’t that Kim Shin couldn’t speak—he just chose not to talk to others. He kept spouting nonsense, trying to convince me to go to the pub. Suddenly, the class representative appeared and joined Kim Shin in his persuasion.

“Ha Jin oppa, let’s go.”

The class rep was Mi-eun, a kind and cheerful person. She had neat, shoulder-length hair, and despite her model-student appearance, she was full of energy and had a strong voice. Though most of our classmates came from wealthy families and were likely hard to manage, Mi-eun showed exceptional leadership, skillfully guiding them. She was a true example of a leader, always socially adept when dealing with people. She even dared to joke with Ha Jin—though that was probably because I wasn’t acting like the original Ha Jin.

At Mi-eun’s use of “oppa,” I tried to correct her.

“I’m the same age as you.”

“Yeah, I know. But if you’re handsome, you’re oppa.”

Class rep Mi-eun called me oppa with a smile. Somehow, the atmosphere around Ha Jin had completely transformed. In the webtoon, Ha Jin was always surrounded by a suffocating silence. Everyone was too busy being wary of him. When I first took over Ha Jin’s body, people became awkward, and the mood turned cold even if I simply returned their greetings.

I guess the shift in atmosphere had to do with my quiet attendance in class. Ha Jin’s usual gang, who used to occupy the back seats, had disbanded because I no longer hung out with them. Who would’ve thought Ha Jin quietly attending classes would become a reality?

You’ve become human, Ha Jin. Well done, well done.

In this new, friendlier atmosphere, Sun Woo would have fit in well too. But he always rushed out of class, probably because of his part-time job. Still, Mi-eun made sure to look after him.

It drove me crazy how much I worried about Sun Woo, almost as if I had truly been possessed by Ha Jin’s spirit.

—

In the noisy pub, Kim Shin sharply smacked Mi-eun's hand away as she tried to offer me a drink. "No way. Ha Jin can't drink until his facial wound heals."

Mi-eun, her eyes already unfocused, pouted and whined.

"Whyyyyy! And Kim Shin, get out of here. Just give us some space! We want to get closer to Ha Jin too."

"You think I'll give up my spot that I've invested over ten years in?"

"Crazy. That's some serious obsession."

Mi-eun glared at Kim Shin with a frown. Considering they hadn't talked much before, the two had become friends remarkably fast. Mi-eun's indiscriminate friendliness played a big part, and Kim Shin's sly personality matched well with hers. Even so, Kim Shin's overly protective behavior made it hard for me to start conversations with other people.

"Ah! Then we can just ignore Kim Shin and talk to Ha Jin." Mi-eun turned to me with a mischievous grin. "Ha Jin, you look pretty even with the wound. Who did this? I'll go kill them right now."

I burst out laughing, unable to contain myself. Seeing Mi-eun switch from sweet to suddenly vengeful was hilarious. Her gentle appearance paired with such harsh words was too funny to handle.

At the same time, I imagined Mi-eun confronting my father—the person she'd threatened to kill. I could picture her standing firm, speaking boldly, while my father wore his mask of civility, laughing hollowly while seething inside. The image was oddly entertaining.

"Oh? You're laughing? Ha Jin, are you trying to seduce me right now?" Mi-eun teased. "My goodness, seducing me without even saying a word? Our Ha Jin is amazing!"

She smiled brightly, clearly pleased, then downed a shot of soju in one go. Letting out a satisfied "Whew—," she narrowed her eyes slightly, and I mirrored her expression, imagining the taste of soju.

Kim Shin waved his hands in front of Mi-eun, trying to shoo her away, before moving closer to me. "There's no non-alcoholic drinks here. What should we do?" he whispered in my ear. It seemed he knew even about Ha Jin's inability to drink, probably from being around him so much. Kim Shin and Ha Jin must have been pretty close.

"It's fine," I replied. Since I'd imposed a drinking ban on Ha Jin, he wasn't touching anything with alcohol, not even non-alcoholic drinks.

"But everyone else is drinking."

“Like you said, I can use my facial wound as an excuse.”

“Ha Jin, it upsets me every time I see your wound.”

“It’s almost healed now.”

“Huh? Why are you two whispering?” Mi-eun narrowed her eyes, looking suspicious.

“This won’t do,” she declared, standing up with a determined expression. Then she shouted in a voice that drowned out the pub’s music:

“Hey! Let’s mix up the tables! No sitting at the same table for more than thirty minutes!”

“Mi-eun, you should leave that table first. You’ve been there the whole time. The class rep should set an example,” someone called out.

“Huh, who’s that?” Mi-eun demanded. “Who dares to talk nonsense? Ah, Min-ho, are you crazy? You dare talk back to the class rep? Then why don’t you be the class rep!”

Mi-eun immediately started making her rounds, patting people on the back and urging them to switch up their seating. The students, who stood up reluctantly, kept glancing at my table with a mix of curiosity and nervousness. This marked the beginning of Ha Jin’s transformation from outcast to insider.

Even as everyone shuffled about chaotically, I stayed put. Kim Shin was dragged to another table by Mi-eun, and suddenly, my table filled up with classmates I’d never spoken to before.

Maybe it was the alcohol, but some of them actually started talking to me first, which made things less awkward. The general consensus seemed to be: “Ha Jin is better than we thought?” Or, put more bluntly, “He’s not the bastard the rumors made him out to be?”

The atmosphere grew livelier as more people lost their inhibitions. Just as I was settling in, someone captivating appeared at the entrance to the pub. For a brief moment, the entire room seemed to fall silent before the chatter resumed. How could someone’s entrance be so protagonist-like?

Sun Woo’s gaze lingered on me for a second before Mi-eun’s energetic wave drew his attention.

“Oh? Sun Woo’s here? Come over here!” she called, practically glowing with excitement.

When Sun Woo tried to sit at another table, Mi-eun sprang up, grabbed his wrist, and pulled him over to my side. After seating him next to me, she announced dramatically,

“Hey, this is our department, you know? Where else can you find a university like this? It’s thrilling! I’m so glad I studied here. I love it! I’m so happy!”

A chorus of cheers erupted around us. Mi-eun laughed joyfully, and when Sun Woo tried to stand, she pushed him back down, saying, “Stay here. Neither of you move from these seats. Class rep’s orders.” Even though her words were already slurred from drinking, she spoke with authority and kept looking back at us as she walked away, making sure we stayed put.

In the now slightly awkward silence, I figured I should at least greet Sun Woo, given that he’d just arrived.

“Sun Woo, you’re late?” I said.

As expected, there was no response. I had anticipated the cold shoulder, but it still left a small scratch on my heart.

#016

“Oh, Sun Woo, what brings you here? You never come to these gatherings.”

“The class rep told me to come.”

Sun Woo’s response to Beom-jun’s question was barely audible over the music. Somehow, Mi-eun heard it from far away. She jumped up from her seat and turned toward us.

“Sun Woo! Don’t call me ‘class rep.’ It sounds so cold. Just call me Mi-eun.”

“Hey, she’s drunk. Someone send her home.”

“Ah, her voice is so loud. My ears hurt!”

“Who gave the class rep a microphone? Someone take it away.”

“That’s just her natural voice.”

Various voices called out from all around. I found myself smiling at how these typical college student conversations were unfolding in Ha Jin’s life. When I felt Sun Woo’s head turn toward me, I quickly composed my expression. As I pretended nothing had happened, Min-ha, sitting across from me, noticed my empty glass and asked.

“Ha Jin, aren’t you drinking?”

“Because of my facial wound. I want to, but I’m holding back.”

“How did you get that wound? We were all in an uproar that day, saying we should kill whoever hurt your face. Even if it wasn’t a person but an object, we should destroy it. Ah, Mi-eun was the angriest, and I was second, Ha Jin.”

Min-ha, with her upturned eyes giving her a cat-like appearance, spoke shyly with a faint smile in a calm tone that contrasted with her sharp features. Though her calm delivery didn’t match her rough words, I just smiled at that.

“Ha Jin, you seem different when you smile. I don’t know how you’ll take this, but it’s really pretty.”

I scratched the back of my head at being called pretty. What part of this face was pretty? Handsome, maybe, but pretty?

“Right. Rumors really can’t be trusted.”

When Beom-jun nodded in agreement, I couldn’t help but smile bitterly.

“My rumors are pretty nasty, aren’t they?”

“No! That’s not what I meant. Cha Beom-jun, could you not say unnecessary things?”

Beom-jun, who received unwarranted criticism, also had to endure Min-ha’s punches. As Min-ha punched him with a shy face, Beom-jun squirmed, trying to avoid her fists while complaining about the pain.

While watching their squabble, I glanced to the side and saw Sun Woo sitting expressionlessly, not even looking in my direction.

I feel like I should apologize and clear up the misunderstanding, but I don’t know how to untangle this mess. Too many things have been happening to me lately to even attempt improving my relationship with Sun Woo. Now that I can finally catch my breath and start worrying about him, it feels like Sun Woo’s dislike of me might be destiny.

Lost in these thoughts, I looked forward and saw Min-ha still hitting Beom-jun. I should probably stop them first.

“Min-ha, stop hitting Beom-jun. It’s not like he started the rumors.”

“Still. Because of rumors spread by idiots like him, it’s such a waste that we couldn’t talk to Ha Jin for a whole year. They turned a perfectly fine person into trash.”

‘I really was trash, Min-ha.’

Though Min-ha said that, she stopped punching when I intervened. Beom-jun felt all over his body where he'd been hit. It must have hurt more than it looked, as his face contorted into a grimace.

"Your fists are damn spicy, Lee Min-ha!"

"Yeah, my fists are spicy. There are levels of spiciness, and this was just level 1. You should watch what you say from now on, Beom-jun."

"How would me watching what I say stop rumors?"

"What's that? You want to taste level 2?"

"Ah, no. I get it. I'll be careful. Ha Jin, thanks for stopping Min-ha. If you hadn't, I would've gotten a bone broken. No joke, Min-ha's punches are seriously strong."

"You two seem close. It's nice to see."

"No, Ha Jin. I'm not close with Beom-jun. I'm closer to you."

"You're crazy, Lee Min-ha. We've been friends since elementary school. Isn't this your first time talking to Ha Jin? Acting like you're so close."

"Hm? Want to try level 3?"

"Hey, why won't you let me talk?"

"That's right. That's exactly why I'm doing this."

When I laughed at their banter, Min-ha stared at me blankly with slightly unfocused eyes. Beom-jun saw her expression and pretended to vomit beside her. I thought he might get hit by Min-ha again, but she was ignoring whatever Beom-jun was doing.

Sun Woo wasn't drinking or eating. He just sat there quietly without saying anything. I thought about saying something to him but only opened and closed my mouth. He had told me not to get involved. I was considering whether I should move seats now.

"Sun Woo, how did you do on the midterms?"

Thankfully, Beom-jun spoke to Sun Woo. I perked up my ears at his question, waiting to hear Sun Woo's answer. Did he do well? He must have, since he was originally smart.

"Okay."

Sun Woo's voice had returned to how it was when I first met him. I thought it had softened somewhat while we studied together, but now it was completely cold.

"In our department, Ha Jin is first and Sun Woo is second, right?"

Beom-jun's eyes sparkled as he looked back and forth between us. My conscience churned violently, making me feel as unstable as if I were on a sinking ship. I couldn't answer, and Sun Woo didn't respond either. Beom-jun, who asked the question, scratched the back of his head, seemingly embarrassed by himself.

"Hey, Beom-jun. Why are you asking things like that? How could they answer something so awkward?"

"I was just curious..."

"What, do you want to show off that you study well too? Beom-jun must be in the upper ranks, right?"

"No. I think I messed up this exam. The professors seem to have too high expectations for us high school graduates."

"Beom-jun, stop whining annoyingly."

"I'll prove those rumors wrong with this exam."

"Aren't these always the ones who do well on tests and then cry over missing one question?"

"No, that's not true. Min-ha, I'll show you my grade report, okay?"

"Why should I look at your grade report? I'm not your parent."

"Can't you just take a look? Ah, like those exam cheating scandals in the news lately. Those corrupt professors—why can't I find one like that? I wish I could get test answers too."

"Be careful what you wish for."

"Right? A university has its standards."

Listening to their conversation, I erased even the slight smile I'd been wearing. Ha Jin really had no conscience. How could he think of entering A University, known for gathering Korea's top students, through admissions fraud? And he didn't stop there—he even manipulated his grades.

Just then, Mi-eun's voice rang loudly through the pub.

"Raise your glasses!"

“Yes, yes, class rep. We must.”

“Hey, class rep says raise your glasses.”

Everyone filled and raised their glasses. Not wanting to just sit there, I picked up the soju bottle next to me and poured some into my glass. As I raised my soju glass, I could feel Sun Woo, who had been quiet until now, looking at me. Unable to turn my head in his direction, I looked at Min-ha sitting across from me, who gave me a shy wink.

“Hey! Lee Min-ha, come here!”

Mi-eun’s voice struck my ears.

“Why suddenly?”

“Aish, who are you trying to flirt with, Ha Jin?”

Somehow, Mi-eun had noticed even from that distance and immediately summoned Min-ha, who had winked at me.

“I just had something in my eye?”

“Come here before I raise my voice.”

“It’s already super loud, though?”

Min-ha winked once more before leaving the table and going to Mi-eun. Kim Shin quickly came to fill the empty seat.

“Finally made it, Ha Jin.”

Kim Shin, smiling brightly, looked perfectly fine despite having drunk quite a lot. That used to be how I looked.

‘Damn Ha Jin.’

My body was restless sitting there, unable to have a drink. I’m good at drinking. No, I was good at drinking. I loved that feeling of being drunk. Now, it’s like a distant memory. I couldn’t risk getting drunk and making another scene. I might try to kiss someone like I did with Sun Woo. Though disappointing, alcohol was absolutely forbidden to prevent such unfortunate incidents.

“You know the Business Department is the best, right?”

Everyone cheered at Mi-eun’s shout.

“We know, we know!”

“Business Department is the best!”

“Honestly, our department has everything!”

“Right. We have it all!”

Everyone was making a ruckus, pounding on the tables. When Mi-eun yelled “Drink!” and downed her glass, everyone emptied their glasses. Seeing the soju bottle and filled glass beside me, Kim Shin smiled and held out his glass. When Beom-jun followed suit, I picked up my glass too.

Only Sun Woo at our table remained still. When Kim Shin signaled with his eyes to join the toast, Sun Woo reluctantly raised his glass, clinked it, but set it down without drinking.

“What, Sun Woo’s not drinking?”

“Don’t force people who don’t want to drink.”

When Kim Shin spoke considerately, Beom-jun shook his head as if wronged.

“No, that’s not it. I was just curious if he wasn’t going to drink...”

“Let’s drink among ourselves and leave non-drinkers alone.”

Kim Shin casually downed his glass. Beom-jun erased his wronged expression and emptied his glass too. It was a pleasant drinking atmosphere. It would be nice if Sun Woo enjoyed it too, but he seemed to have no intention of drinking.

From what I’d seen before, it wasn’t that he couldn’t drink. I figured he must have plans later. Like Kim Shin said, you shouldn’t force people who don’t want to drink.

I was about to bring my soju glass to my lips to drink with them when a sudden hand stopped me.

Someone snatched my soju glass in an instant. The liquid spilled from the momentum, wetting my fingers and the hand of the person who stopped me. I froze, watching the droplets fall from my fingers onto the table below.

Silence fell over the table. No one could speak about this situation. That’s how unexpected it was—who had grabbed my soju glass. My gaze followed the hand holding the glass. Soon, my eyes met the handsome face with its usually straight forehead slightly creased.

“Don’t drink.”

A low, warning tone.

It was Sun Woo.

#017

I wasn’t the only one surprised by his intervention. Beom-jun also had his eyes wide open, seemingly shocked by Sun Woo’s behavior. Kim Shin was surprised at first but quickly looked at Sun Woo with a smiling face. When everyone at the table turned their attention to Sun Woo, he frowned and withdrew his hand.

“You said you weren’t drinking because of the wound on your face.”

Although he spoke casually as if it meant nothing, wasn’t the fact that he stopped me proof that he was concerned about me? Could this be a green light in our relationship? Hope began to bloom in my heart. I straightened up when Kim Shin, who had already refilled his glass, clinked it against my glass on the table.

“It’s soju. Good for disinfecting, right?”

Kim Shin gestured toward the soju bottle beside me and smiled. Understanding his smile, I picked up my glass and slowly drank. Sun Woo didn’t stop me this time. He just watched with a cold gaze. His eyes were so cold that it seemed more like a red light than a green light for improving our relationship. Maybe he was worried I might do something strange again while drinking. That explanation made sense.

‘Damn. Should have known better than to get my hopes up.’

“How is it, Ha Jin? Is the drink good?”

Kim Shin kept smiling. I just nodded, and he refilled my glass with soju. The bottle he was holding had been next to me the whole time.

“Oh, Ha Jin, you must be good with alcohol. You’re drinking really well.”

“Ha Jin can handle his drinks.”

Kim Shin agreed with Beom-jun.

“Are you drinking straight soju? Aren’t you eating anything? Your stomach will hurt.”

“Our Ha Jin likes fruit as a side dish.”

Kim Shin answered for me and pushed an apple toward me, firmly pierced with a fork. Though I felt slightly embarrassed by Kim Shin treating me like a child, I was receiving his help, so I took the fork he offered without saying anything.

“Wow, I thought Ha Jin only drank western liquor.”

Beom-jun kept his mouth open, apparently amazed at me drinking soju. Kim Shin lightly tapped Beom-jun’s chin with his hand, and only then did he close his mouth. Kim Shin winked at the soju bottle next to me. Then another loud voice was heard from somewhere.

“Kim Shin, come here right now!”

“Oh no, Ha Jin. I’m being summoned by the class rep again.”

“Kim Shin, why are you doing the same thing as Min-ha over there when you’re banned from that table? Want to get scolded? Did you get dust in your eyes too, huh?”

“Ha Jin, I’ll come back when the class rep’s guard is down. Don’t drink too much.”

After Kim Shin left, others came to fill the table. Conversations about midterms and ordinary college life flowed naturally. When someone offered a drink, I emptied my glass along with everyone else’s cheers. Each time, I could feel Sun Woo’s cold gaze on me, but I deliberately ignored it and filled my glass with the soju bottle next to me.

“Hey? You shouldn’t pour your own drinks.”

“I don’t like others filling my glass.”

“What’s this? Kim Shin can do it but we can’t?”

Beom-jun made a deflating sound with his mouth pouting. Since it obviously wasn’t allowed, I just smiled. After all, this soju bottle beside me was filled with water. It was a bottle Kim Shin had prepared to help me fit in since I couldn’t drink alcohol. That’s why I could drink without worrying about getting drunk, and why Kim Shin had winked and smiled.

The drinking party continued naturally. After drinking all the water Kim Shin had prepared in my soju glass, Beom-jun noticed the empty bottle and poured me real soju.

“Wow, finally got to pour Ha Jin a drink!”

I smiled at Beom-jun’s proud comment while thinking of a way to escape. Knowing Ha Jin’s drinking habits, I had no intention of drinking real alcohol. Finally, I got up while fiddling with my phone that wasn’t even ringing.

“Where are you going?”

“Phone call.”

I answered naturally and went outside the bar. The university district was bustling with many students. Young people filled the streets, enjoying their post-midterm happiness.

As I was taking in the atmosphere of ordinary college students, scenes from the webtoon came to mind. His messy drinking in dark bars. Suddenly, it felt surreal that Ha Jin was in an ordinary university district bar. Ha Jin as a normal college student? I laughed absently.

While leaning against a wall in the alley, someone approached. Since people usually came here to smoke, I tried to move away. I didn't like secondhand smoke. However, when I turned to leave, I froze at the sight of who had entered the alley.

Tall with a sturdy build. The protagonist whose eyes now held only fierce intensity.

It was Sun Woo.

“Oh, hi?”

In my confusion, all that came out was a greeting. My empty head was saying hello despite being ignored earlier when I tried to talk to him. Since Sun Woo didn't smoke, I quickly tried to think of why he might have come to the alley, but I couldn't figure it out. It certainly couldn't be that he followed me out.

I was about to move aside to avoid irritating Sun Woo. If only he hadn't blocked my way. He suddenly stood in front of me. It was such an intentional gesture that I was taken aback. What could he want with me?

“Are you okay?”

Sun Woo asked me the question but then made an unpleasant face as if I had been the one to approach him. Even though I was trying to avoid him as he'd wanted, he was the one blocking and talking to me. I couldn't understand why he was acting this way toward me.

‘If you dislike it that much, why even talk to me?’

Since Sun Woo was still blocking my way, I decided to answer even though he probably hated interacting with me.

“I'm fine.”

Even after my response, Sun Woo didn't move aside. Instead, his demeanor became even more intimidating. He bit his lip before finally letting out a sigh. When he looked at me again, his fierce gaze had softened slightly.

"Look at you. You can't handle alcohol well."

His voice had a hint of gentleness. Sun Woo reached out and held my chin, turning it slightly left and right to examine me.

"Sun Woo, I'm really... completely fine..."

Embarrassed by his close inspection, I stepped back to escape his hand. Though Sun Woo withdrew his hand, his gaze remained fixed on me.

"You were drinking soju continuously?"

"It's not like that."

I see. Sun Woo thought I was drinking real soju. Well, having seen my drunken behavior before, he must have been concerned. Our kind protagonist was worried that this bastard Ha Jin might do something strange while drunk again.

Since I was guilty of past behavior, I felt small under his gaze and decided to try to slip past him. As I brushed past Sun Woo, he quietly watched me go. Like proving sobriety to a police officer, I walked as straight and properly as I could. I thought I walked perfectly straight in a line. Just when I thought I'd made it through safely, a chilling voice called out from behind me, stopping me in my tracks.

"Ha Jin."

Unfortunately, even my proper walking wasn't enough to pass. When I turned toward Sun Woo, he strode toward me with his long legs. His face up close was unfamiliar. Instead of his usual neat and melancholy appearance from the webtoon, he wore the expression of a dangerous predator.

"Let's go. I'll take you home."

Before I could say anything, Sun Woo grabbed my wrist and pulled me out of the alley. His hand was hotter than I expected, and I was surprised by the strength of his grip on my wrist. If we were to fight, I'd raise my hand in defeat. No, this isn't the time to be gauging fighting odds. At this rate, I might end up being dragged home by Sun Woo.

"Sun Woo, I'm not drunk. I'm really fine?"

"When you're drunk, you're good at pretending you're not."

Ah, well, that was true.

"I'm really not drunk."

Sun Woo wouldn't listen to my words. With no choice, I stopped walking and pulled him back. Since I had a similar sturdy build to his, Sun Woo stopped. His face turned toward me was distorted with complex, unidentifiable emotions.

'Why is Sun Woo acting like this?'

"Let's go back inside. They'll worry if we're missing."

I pulled my wrist free from Sun Woo's loosened grip. Then I left him there and went back into the bar. Glancing back, I saw him still standing there, staring at his own hand.

'Is he going to sanitize his hand because it touched me?'

Sun Woo remained standing there until I was completely inside the bar.

"Where did you go?"

Mi-eun must have been less vigilant because Kim Shin was sitting quietly at the table, greeting me.

"Oh, phone call."

"Hmm, Ha Jin got a phone call?"

Kim Shin looked at the empty seat beside me and smiled knowingly.

"The mood's winding down, let's leave, Ha Jin. I'll take you home."

Everyone's offering to take me home today.

"How can someone who's been drinking offer to take anyone home?"

"I called our manager. I wasn't planning to drink and drive."

"It's fine. I haven't been drinking, so I can drive my own car."

"You brought your car?"

"Yeah."

"Then can't you give me a ride?"

“Didn’t you say you called the manager?”

“I can just cancel that. It’s just one phone call.”

“Have you ever seen me let anyone ride in my passenger seat?”

“No. Tsk, that’s harsh. You can’t even do that much for me?”

Kim Shin made a pitiful expression that wouldn’t work at all while spinning his glass around.

“Wow, did Kim Shin put honey on himself?”

Mi-eun, looking disgusted, lightly dragged Kim Shin away. Even as several others filled the table, Sun Woo hadn’t come back.

“What’s this? Did Sun Woo leave?”

Mi-eun had returned to the table and asked while looking at the empty seat beside me. And Beom-jun, who had briefly left his seat, came back and sat down.

“Seems like it? Haven’t seen him for a while.”

“Ah, Sun Woo. He should have said something before leaving. If I see him at school, he’s not getting away with this. Hey, Beom-jun, have you been at this table the whole time?”

“Why?”

“What do you mean ‘why’? I told you to change tables every 30 minutes.”

“When? I didn’t hear that.”

“What? How could you not hear me with how loud my voice is?”

“I really didn’t!”

“Look at this bad habit of lying with such an innocent face. Huh?”

Mi-eun, who had been fuming, attacked by wrapping her arm around Beom-jun’s neck and squeezing.

“Ugh, kek kek. Hey, isn’t this school violence?”

“Then go report it to the professor.”

While standing between the two bickering, I spoke to Mi-eun.

“I think I’ll head home now.”

“Why! No way. If you leave too, this place will get dirty.”

“Right. Ha Jin, if you leave, who’s going to hold Mi-eun back?”

“My wound is pulling. I think I should rest.”

When I made up an excuse about my wound that didn’t actually hurt, Mi-eun dramatically fussed over me.

“Ah! That won’t do. Let’s get you home quickly, our Ha Jin oppa. We can’t let your face scar!”

Mi-eun urgently pushed my back, leading me toward the entrance. Thanks to that, Beom-jun, now free from Mi-eun, mouthed “thank you” to me. When I tried to leave, Kim Shin immediately grabbed his bag to follow. But Mi-eun caught him.

“Where do you think you’re going?”

“I need to go home too.”

“Who said you could go?”

“Huh?”

Mi-eun, with strength from who knows where, held onto Kim Shin while heading inside and waved to me.

“Get home safe. Let’s see that pretty face next week, Ha Jin.”

Next to the brightly smiling Mi-eun was Kim Shin, muttering, “But the manager is coming... I really need to go...”

“I’m off then.”

I said goodbye casually and left the bar. The weather was now practically summer.

Though my head should have been clear after solving the problem of the imminent midterms, it was heavy and confusing because of Sun Woo. It was especially frustrating that I couldn’t even drink in Ha Jin’s body. I wanted to get drunk and shake off these feelings lightly.

I really needed to get rid of these emotions somehow...

I walked through the crowds to where my car was parked. After paying the parking fee and getting my car key, I went to the car and opened the driver's door. Just as I was about to get in, someone slammed the door shut, preventing me from entering. I turned my head to see who it was.

"Sun Woo?"

Sun Woo, who I thought had already gone home, was standing behind me. The gaze of a predator who had caught its prey shifted to me. The hot summer air brushed coolly across my nape and disappeared.

#018

"Sun Woo?"

Why is Sun Woo showing up here out of nowhere? I looked at him dumbfounded by his sudden appearance. Sun Woo, looking slightly angry, snatched the car keys from my hand.

"Get in the passenger seat."

After speaking coldly, Sun Woo got into the driver's seat. Since I wasn't doing anything, he opened the window.

"What are you doing? Get in."

"Oh..."

Why? I didn't understand why Sun Woo was acting this way, but since I had done something wrong, I meekly followed his words. After confirming that I had gotten into the passenger seat and fastened my seatbelt, Sun Woo started the car.

'He knows how to drive?'

He drove through the complicated Daehakro streets without any problem and got onto the main road. Surprisingly, Sun Woo was a good driver. No, now's not the time to be admiring this.

"I can drive though."

"So you can drink and drive?"

"Why would I drink and drive?"

I didn't even drink alcohol. Then suddenly I recalled how I drank plain water as if it were soju at the pub.

“Sun Woo. I really didn’t drink.”

“Ha Jin’s drinking habit. It’s nasty.”

Sun Woo spoke as if he was disgusted.

“Drinking habit?”

“Acting like you’re not drunk. That’s your drinking habit.”

“No. Today I really didn’t drink.”

Sun Woo didn’t respond to my words at all. He seemed to truly believe it was drunken nonsense spouted by an alcoholic. This is unfair.

Sun Woo’s expression as he drove was cold to the point of exuding chilliness. Just going like this felt awkward so I said something.

“Do you know where my house is?”

“I know.”

“Wow. Sun Woo has a good memory, remembering my house that you’ve only been to a few times.”

“Having a good memory is the problem.”

Even without him specifying what the problem was, I felt like I knew. Let’s just shut up, Ha Jin. I had made up my mind to quietly go, but after some time passed, Sun Woo asked me a question first.

“You. You didn’t come on the first day of exams, right? How sick were you that you couldn’t even take the exam?”

“ ... ”

This was something I really had to keep my mouth shut about. How could I say with my own mouth that it wasn’t because I was sick, but because I was shocked by the exam corruption scandal so I didn’t take it? An awkward silence passed for a while. Since I kept my mouth firmly shut, Sun Woo didn’t say anything more either. This is how I let another opportunity slip away. Sun Woo asked me a question out of concern for me, but I had to swallow it alone because I was afraid of becoming trash if I answered.

How long did I endure in this suffocating silence? Before long, the familiar neighborhood appeared. Soon we arrived at my house and after parking in the parking lot, I awkwardly unfastened my seatbelt.

“Thanks, Sun Woo.”

Even a jerk of a classmate is still a classmate, so I internally applauded the good nature of the protagonist who personally drove out of worry that I would drink and drive.

Sun Woo turned off the engine and sighed, then rested his head on the steering wheel and turned his head to look at me. The drowsy gaze and furrowed brows looked lewd... must be Ha Jin's influence? Although I had unfastened my seatbelt, Sun Woo wasn't getting out. I also didn't find the timing to get out while looking at his reaction, so I spoke to him.

“Why didn't you come back into the pub earlier? Mi-eun was looking for you.”

“Ha Jin.”

Ignoring my question, the way Sun Woo slowly uttered my name sounded so seductive for some reason.

I didn't even touch alcohol, but right now it felt like I was completely drunk. My face flushed with heat and I felt strangely thirsty. Just because Sun Woo called my name.

“Yeah?”

“Has your curiosity been satisfied?”

I understood what curiosity Sun Woo was referring to and my body stiffened. As expected, it was too much for Sun Woo to just let it go. Even if he thinks I'm a drunkard, I felt like I needed to apologize properly right now.

“Sun Woo. I'm sorry for saying those things to you that day when I was drunk. I don't know if you'll forgive me with these words. But there's nothing I can do except apologize.”

“Those things?”

“Ah... about wanting to kiss you...”

After speaking in a small voice, my face flushed with heat. I really don't know what I'm doing. I've become a really strange person because of my drinking. This is all Ha Jin's fault for not being able to hold his liquor.

‘Other than having a lot of money, he's completely useless.’

Sun Woo quietly looked at me then asked.

“Are you curious about men?”

“No!”

I answered hurriedly. I, who am not Ha Jin, am not curious about that at all. Since there were things Sun Woo had heard, when I changed my words and showed a duplicitous attitude, he made a slightly displeased face.

“I’m curious though.”

Sun Woo, why are you curious about that? I looked at our handsome protagonist spouting strange things with a dumb expression. Sun Woo must have thought I looked quite stupid, because I saw the corners of his mouth slightly lift in a smile. Not a pleasant smile, but one that seemed to contain a bit of ridicule.

“Rather than men. I’m curious about you, Ha Jin.”

Sun Woo raised his body and brought his face close to mine. Seeing Sun Woo’s face up close while practically sober, I unconsciously swallowed my saliva. The back of my neck stiffened and sweat beaded on my back. Sun Woo had only come a little closer but my body was completely tense.

“You’re not saying you want to kiss this time?”

“Because I’m not drunk...”

“Even though you get completely drunk on one can of beer, you drank a whole bottle of soju and you’re fine?”

“I’m really not drunk...”

Sun Woo’s hand cupped the back of my head as I was slightly moving away from him. I could feel each of his fingers entering my hair. In front of Sun Woo’s face that had gotten even closer, I lowered my gaze. Just looking at his face led people to ecstasy.

‘Damn... Sun Woo really is handsome.’

“Can you find out with just once?”

“Find out what?”

“Raise your head.”

After saying that, before I could raise my head, Sun Woo grabbed my chin with his left hand and lifted it. Having my head forcibly raised, my stiff body ached.

“Ugh.”

A groan burst out of my mouth from the pain. At the same time, Sun Woo put more strength into the hand that was holding me, so my chin hurt. Furrowing my brow, I was pondering if Sun Woo was picking a fight with me and if I should confront him, when he whispered quietly in my ear.

“I want to taste Ha Jin though.”

“Me?”

‘No, but why?’

Sun Woo frowned as if annoyed, then soon pulled my head closer to him. Sun Woo’s face overlapped with mine, and soon his moist lips overlapped with my lips.

‘He’s crazy! Sun Woo kissed me first!’

When I resisted to get away, Sun Woo gripped the back of my head even tighter. Sun Woo tried to pry open my tightly closed lips with his tongue, but when I endured and didn’t open them, he bit my lower lip hard. I had no choice but to open them from the pain.

“Ahh!”

As if he had been waiting, Sun Woo’s hot and soft tongue invaded and lapped at the roof of my mouth and mucous membranes everywhere. I, who had been trying to get away, could only let out rough breaths as my body gradually heated up.

“Ha...”

I hurriedly raised my hands and tightly gripped Sun Woo’s clothes. As if that stimulated him even more, Sun Woo explored my mouth more intensely. I couldn’t help but let out heated breaths due to his tongue that was wildly stirring as if crazy. The breaths I managed to let out were hot and sticky. Sun Woo’s kiss felt so good it made me completely lose my mind. Now forgetting to refuse, I was busy exploring his mouth too.

It was so sweet it made my insides ache. Our breathing quickened as if we had sprinted with all our might.

“Ungh...”

A tingling current flowed down my lower abdomen. Soon, my body turned to jelly and I ended up clinging to Sun Woo. I put my arms around his neck and tilted my head to the side to get even closer. That made the kiss even more densely seamless.

Sun Woo seemed to like biting lips, as he bit them repeatedly. It hurt but it stimulated me more, so I left it. I even wanted to tell him to do it harder.

The almost obsessive kiss continued regardless of our saliva mixing together. Only the desire to explore him more welled up. The kiss that continued endlessly for a long time seemed like it would never end. It felt like all the stimulation in the world was concentrated on my lips. Sun Woo's subtle soap scent that I faintly smelled was also nice.

The sticky kiss only stopped after Sun Woo pulled away. Seeing his slightly parted lips made me want to do more.

Sun Woo's face as he looked at me still dazed from the afterglow pleasantly crumpled.

"Ha... Sun Woo."

When I called out to him in a hazy gaze, he roughly pushed me away. Having been weakly clinging to his touch, I was pushed back against the seat.

"Damn it..."

Sun Woo bit his lower lip and looked at me panting for breath. My mind was a mess from the excitement and I couldn't think properly. Without realizing it, I reached out my hand to him to do more. Kissing Sun Woo while not drunk felt so good it sent my mind to space. But my hand only waved in the air and powerlessly fell down.

It was because Sun Woo had opened the car door and gotten out.

I quietly watched his back as he exhaled roughly and left the parking lot. Sun Woo didn't look back even once as if he had no regrets. Left alone in the car, I buried my body in the seat. My lips were covered in saliva that could be either of ours. I wiped my lips that were still moist with the back of my hand.

"Haa, why is he so good at kissing too."

The sticky lingering feeling made it hard for me to get out of the car. It didn't matter why Sun Woo kissed me. My body had completely melted into him. It made me clearly realize how powerless pleasure makes people.

I, who didn't understand how Ha Jin in the webtoon was half-crazed falling for Sun Woo, came to somewhat understand those feelings. It may be because I had been living too ascetically, but Sun Woo was definitely a protagonist full of charms that drive people crazy.

If you don't know the taste you just don't know, but once you know it and experience it twice, this is what drives people crazy. So that's why my body got so worked up in this absurd situation?

'Uh, no. The other party left. Calm down.'

Calming Dolly who had gotten all worked up, I sat in the car like that for a long time.

[The Lives of the Golden Spoons]

Ha Jin's Banned List 6. No drunk driving

└ What? Isn't drunk driving originally prohibited by law?

└ Lol prohibiting what's already prohibited by law? What nonsense lol

└ Oh I know I know. Everything else is okay but drunk driving is not. Yup.

└ Ha Jin driving without a license is okay but drunk driving is not

└└ Lol why is driving without a license okay? Lol

└└└ He's the male lead so let's overlook that much.

└ If Ha Jin drunk drives, I'm dropping this.

└└ Me too

└└ Wow lol guys stop overreacting lol he hasn't drunk driven yet lol

└ Thinking about our Ha Jin drunk driving makes me go cold.

└ If Ha Jin gets caught drunk driving, Kim Shin will probably come switch drivers for him. Godly Kim!

└└ All hail Godly Kim! Godly Kim would do that and more. Isn't he obsessed with Ha Jin? Lol

└└ True lol whenever I see Godly Kim, it seems like true love for Ha Jin, so funny lol. He does everything he's told. Has a cold handsome face but

└└ Freshly baked Kim, warm and crispy Godly Kim lol. It's annoying how the author drew a mere side character so handsome for no reason. He keeps catching the eye even though he doesn't do much.

└└└ Guys, don't buy stock in Godly Kim. He's the side character of side characters! Plus he has zero contact with Sun Woo lol. Mr. Ha Jin is the sub-male lead. Just imagining Godly Kim getting pushed down gives me goosebumps.

└└└ Ha Jin on the bottom lol

└ Agreeing with the prohibition list for the first time

└ Lol this is number 6 in the series. But why is the content so normal for once? Lol

└ I'm at a loss for words because it's so obvious. Please make it something absurd next time.

└└ True lol it's weird because it's too sane lol

#019

“Ah... Ha Jin...”

Looking dumbfounded, I checked my lower region. A damp feeling. Covering my face with both hands, I let out a pained groan. What's going on now? It's embarrassing at this age, but... it was a wet dream.

Why is Sun Woo appearing in my dreams? It was clear my body hadn't cooled down from yesterday's kiss. If I had known this would happen, I should have ran around the neighborhood or soaked in cold water for 30 minutes before going to bed.

“Ha Jin, get it together.”

Staggering up, I headed to the bathroom. Thank heavens the housekeeper doesn't come on weekends. Standing at the sink trying to wash it off with my hands, I was filled with self-loathing. Another deep sigh escaped from within.

“Damn... are you going through puberty, Ha Jin?”

After taking a cold shower, I tried to calm down a bit by drinking a glass of water in the kitchen.

With no appetite, I just turned on the unintelligible TV and sat vacantly on the sofa.

As I was wasting meaningless time spending my weekend like this, I heard the sound of the door lock code being entered. The housekeeper? Secretary Kim? There shouldn't be anyone visiting this house on the weekend. Feeling puzzled, I turned my head to the side.

Soon the heavy front door opened and the person who appeared was a noble and beautiful woman to the point of being speechless. The woman with lush, lightly-permed brown hair whose features could be clearly seen even from a distance had a face that greatly resembled mine.

The woman wearing a bright silk blouse and long skirt was expressionlessly taking off her shoes while fixing her gaze on me. Finding slippers with familiarity, she put them on and walked straight over to me.

“Ha Jin.”

I thought the dry voice didn't suit her. She, who appeared to have not a shred of emotion towards me, was Ha Jin's mother.

“I heard the chairman hit you. You look fine though.”

Chairman?

For a married couple, there was a strong sense of distance. What? In the webtoon, I only saw her smiling kindly, so I couldn't even imagine her treating me with such an indifferent face.

‘Starting with Ha Jin, there's no normal person in this house? Jeez.’

“Get ready.”

“Get ready?”

“Why are you stupidly asking again? The thing we always do quarterly. Let's go shopping.”

What kind of shopping do we do quarterly?

As I hesitated at the sudden situation, she sighed and said “Get ready and come out quickly” before sitting on the sofa. Immediately shifting her gaze to her phone, I had no choice but to awkwardly head to the dressing room without being able to say anything.

I tilted my head as I took out clothes to wear. Now that I think about it, from the perspective of me who had been alone since childhood, there was something I didn't know was strange because it seemed normal. There was absolutely no interaction with my parents. I was busy getting hit whenever I saw my father. Even though she must have heard her son got beaten by his father to the point his face was torn, there was not a single contact from my mother. I also didn't think to contact her.

“It's strange.”

Even now, the way she's treating her son is really strange. Someone worse than others. Before, when I was in high school, two teachers had a really bad fight but since they worked at the same school they couldn't avoid seeing each other, and whenever they met they would look at each other with eyes like that. It was an attitude of unavoidably knowing each other.

Recalling the outfit she was wearing, I also put on a suit to match. When I finished getting ready and went out, she was brightly smiling while talking on the phone. As soon as I came out, she hung up and I could see her expression harden again.

“Let’s go. I have a charity event in the afternoon so there’s no time.”

When we went outside, a high-end black sedan was waiting. Where should I sit? The passenger seat? Or next to Ha Jin’s mother? As I hesitated, the person wearing a black suit opened the back door. I got in and sat next to her.

“Did you gild your hand or something?”

Clicking her tongue at me, she started the car.

The Ha Jin’s mother I know is the nation’s first love actress, Baek Su-ah. Receiving the public’s love, she suddenly announced her retirement at the peak of her popularity. And soon news that she became the daughter-in-law of the Eunha Group chaebol family decorated the front page of newspapers for days.

She was good at acting and digested any role perfectly, so in the brief moment many projects were coming in, her career ended abruptly as she got married. Some people congratulated her saying she only had happy days left, while others were disappointed they could no longer see her acting.

Looking at photos of Baek Su-ah’s acting days that I saw while searching, I could understand what it means for a person to sparkle and shine. Seeing how no actress has surpassed Baek Su-ah’s popularity even now shows how great her status was.

The Baek Su-ah who used to sparkle and be full of life was gone, and the woman next to me had dry, flavorless eyes. She seems like she would suit being under flashy spotlights rather than sitting still in a luxurious car...

Seeing it from the perspective of a third party rather than her son, I felt bad for her. I don’t know how she feels, but from what I see now, her life doesn’t look enjoyable.

‘Being a chaebol doesn’t mean everything is good.’

“You should know your face is your asset. I’m advising you not to needlessly cause injuries, so take it to heart. You know, right? The chairman hates damages to his possessions.”

With her flawless, smooth face, she furrowed her brow.

“Maintain the face I gave you well.”

“Yes.”

When I answered quietly, she glanced at me as if surprised.

"I heard you said you're studying. It's ridiculous, really. You think studying works just because you decide to? Even having a head full of only flowers needs to be in moderation. Don't act up and do as you've always done. That suits you."

This family... seems to need psychological treatment.

After moving like that, the place we arrived at was Pluie Department Store, where global luxury brands are said to fight each other to open stores. It was a world-famous department store headquartered in France.

'Ah, here...'

It was the department store that frequently appeared in the webtoon.

We were soon guided by a personal shopper to a private room. The room was wider than I thought, and the floor was covered with a luxurious carpet so not a single footstep could be heard. There was a spacious sofa and table where we sat. The personal shopper who guided me seemed to be talking with my mother and selecting clothes while looking at a lookbook on a tablet. Sitting down, a wave of fatigue hit me. After hearing my mother's sarcastic words disguised as advice, my mental state was in tatters. My father hits me with an ashtray while my mother lashes out with sharp words.

"That's enough for my clothes, bring a few outfits for Ha Jin too."

"Understood."

She meticulously picked out her own clothes, then just glossed over mine as just clothes. Well, any clothes were fine with me, so I just stayed still, but I could feel her glancing at me again.

"Are you hurting somewhere?"

She seemed to find my silence strange.

"No."

"Okay."

Mother didn't ask anymore and lost interest.

This is a blood-related family, right? Seeing how her face resembles mine, we're clearly related by blood. But our relationship seemed worse than that of strangers, so it felt weird.

I endured the heavy silence while drinking the beverage placed on the table. She seemed to be exchanging messages with someone as she only looked at her phone for a while. Seeing her smile occasionally, it must be someone she's quite close with.

– Knock knock

Someone knocked and entered. It was a middle-aged woman I had never seen before, but she was dressed neatly and looked high-class, likely wearing luxury brands.

"I heard you were here, Madam, so I came to greet you."

The woman greeting from the doorway had a smile, but it was trembling slightly as if it was forced.

"Ah, is that so? Why come all the way to greet me? You don't need to do that."

Mother spoke kindly while sitting, but it felt like she found the woman who came to greet her annoying.

The woman standing and greeting versus Baek Su-ah sitting and receiving the greeting. Even without nitpicking, the hierarchy was evident. Mother looked at me and let out a small sigh before asking the woman.

"Is your child doing well?"

"Thanks to help from the Eunha Group side, he recovered quickly. I'm only now expressing my gratitude."

"That's fortunate."

"Jung Woo is a bit, you know. His jokes go too far..."

Jung Woo? At the appearance of the familiar name, I soon realized it was the name of the bastard who had passed out in front of me when I first possessed this body. So we're talking about that now?

But Ha Jin was the one who hit him, so why is Jung Woo's mother coming in with her head bowed?

"Why bring up things that have passed? We were both about to become uncomfortable, so it's fortunate it was resolved well."

"Right?"

Then the door opened again and the personal shopper entered, with other employees pulling in hangers with several outfits. As they came in, Jung Woo's mother looked awkward and bowed her head again.

"I'll get going then. Have a good time. Madam."

"Okay."

She looked at me bowing my head without a word and just left the room without saying anything. Her pride must have been quite hurt to greet me who put her son in that state. I would have felt uncomfortable receiving her greeting too, so it was rather fortunate.

"Ha Jin."

As soon as Jung Woo's mother left, Baek Su-ah called for me with a frown. Seeing negative emotions on her dry face, I automatically checked if there was anything around me she could throw.

'Ah, that glass with the drink... a bit scary.'

Does Baek Su-ah also have violent tendencies like father? I automatically shrank back.

"I find these things burdensome and hate it. I don't care if you meet women here and there or do whatever, but refrain from using violence."

Baek Su-ah spoke in a warning tone and started examining the clothes that were brought in.

'Ah, Ha Jin, even the shit you stirred up is shitty. The family members are also awful.'

Feeling suffocated for no reason, I got up from my seat saying I would use the restroom and left the room. I want to just go home like this. What bullshit quarterly shopping. It's not like forcing people who don't get along to shake hands. It was a really strange family culture.

I was walking down the hallway to go to the restroom an employee guided me to when I bumped into someone coming from around the corner. I said someone, but it felt like running into a telephone pole.

"I'm sorry."

Apologizing, I immediately picked up the clothes the other person dropped on the floor. The clothes looked expensive at a glance, so I lightly dusted them off with my hand, concerned I might have gotten dust on them. Then I held out the clothes I picked up to the person I bumped into. Seeing the person wearing a black suit, likely an employee, I couldn't help but be startled.

‘Sun Woo? This is where he works on weekends?’

He was standing there coldly without saying anything, looking more gloomy than usual.

‘Wait. What... is this fate? That Sun Woo is working at Pluie Department Store?’

I newly admired how solid the webtoon’s narrative was. Sun Woo suddenly appeared and intently stared at me who bumped into him with a cold expression, hardening his face. I don’t know if it’s because the webtoon world is small, but half of me was glad to meet him here while the other half was flustered by his chilly gaze. Sun Woo wordlessly took the clothes from me.

‘His stare is piercing...’

I awkwardly rubbed my face with my hand. I was going to greet Sun Woo but didn’t because the atmosphere felt like he would kill me if I spoke. It was piercingly embarrassing that I did this and that with him who appeared in my dream last night. If I have any conscience, I shouldn’t pretend to know him now...

Without a word, I passed by Sun Woo and headed to the restroom.

There was no one in the restroom, likely because it was a VIP-only one and still morning. Since I was here, I thought I should take care of simple business and went to the urinal, but suddenly someone pushed me and I ended up facing the wall in the corner of the restroom against my will.

Turning around at the sudden situation... there was Sun Woo with an ominous air.

#020

I looked at Sun Woo with a face full of guilt. He couldn’t possibly know I had a wet dream about him, right? It doesn’t make sense, but from Sun Woo’s eyes, it seemed like it.

Sun Woo’s icy gaze turned towards me and my breath caught in my throat.

Sun Woo didn’t say anything, but I was getting severely scolded by those eyes.

With a wall behind me and Sun Woo firmly blocking the front, I just waited for him to let me go. I was exactly like a rabbit in front of a tiger. It would be nice if he could generously let me run into the bushes...

Sun Woo’s gaze that had been obsessively staring at me from earlier was burdensome, so I lowered my head and looked down to see my shiny leather shoes in contrast to Sun Woo’s dull and wrinkled shoes. Sun Woo and poverty. They were incompatible words.

“Sun Woo? Fancy meeting you here?”

I barely managed to speak, breaking the silence.

As expected, it had no effect and only heavy silence pressed down on me. I looked up at him with the courage I mustered, but he still had a murderous air, so I lowered my eyes again. Befitting of a protagonist, his presence was no joke.

“Ha Jin.”

A languid voice. Why does this bastard Sun Woo have a sexy voice even in this situation?

“Yeah?”

A strange atmosphere that wouldn't be weird to suddenly start kissing hovered between him and me.

Being reminded of yesterday's events by his voice calling me, I felt my ears turning red. I was barely calming the heat that was slowly rising to my face when Sun Woo arrogantly lifted my chin with one outstretched finger.

‘You crazy body! Why are you getting excited by this!’

Wondering what it was expecting, every cell in my body was going wild. If this atmosphere continued, it was 100% a kiss, and my mouth had already gone dry with thirst. My throat bobbed unconsciously. I feared Sun Woo's gaze on me would expose all my feelings, so my body stiffened with tension. But the words that came out of Sun Woo's mouth were only as cold as ice.

“Don't get tangled up with me.”

“What? Oh...”

Never mind a kiss, I would be lucky not to get punched in this atmosphere.

Leaving me like that, Sun Woo exited the restroom.

Only after he left did the tension dissipate and the strength that had filled my body drained away.

“That was one hell of a threatening warning.”

I was a little sad that Sun Woo told me not to get involved with him. Even though he was worried I would drink and personally drove me...why is he telling me not to do that?

The protagonist who says he'll do everything himself.

'Whatever, do it all yourself then.'

The shopping didn't take very long, and I was dropped off in front of my house with the clothes we bought.

Why is everyone, both my mother and Sun Woo, treating me like this? How miserable.

Sniffing once, I went into the house.

* * *

'Ah... professor...'

I didn't understand why the professor was directly assigning our team project members. Don't students usually autonomously form teams with people they want to work with? This was a first in my college life. Plus, why does the business administration department have so many team projects? I had managed to avoid Sun Woo for everything else, but because our advising professor pushed me into the strongest 4-person team, I had no choice.

Well, I know he's looking out for me but... anyone could see this team was formed in order of grades from 1st to 4th.

"Wow, Ha Jin oppa. Just trust me. I'll do everything for you."

Mi-eun from the department... well, you did seem smart.

"Oh, Ha Jin. Our top student!"

Beom-jun. You're a bit unexpected.

"..."

Sun Woo, sorry.

The assignment was to research the impact of SNS on the economy by teams and give a presentation on it. The problem was it wasn't just an assignment that reflected 10% of our grade... the presentation itself was the final exam. Then we have no choice but to unite with Sun Woo and work hard.

I was already feeling bleak about the road ahead.

"Let's have Ha Jin do the presentation."

Mi-eun was already assigning roles to each person, displaying her unique leadership.

“Why is Ha Jin presenting?”

“His face is trustworthy. Even if Ha Jin said he made soybean paste with red beans, I would believe it wholeheartedly.”

“Wow, Mi-eun? Isn’t that a bit obsessive of you?”

“What the. Beom-jun, you know it too from the lectures. External aspects are also an important factor.”

“I didn’t know you would apply it like this.”

“Putting what I learned into practice.”

At Mi-eun’s resolute words saying “Present!”, I looked at Sun Woo.

“Wouldn’t Sun Woo be better than me?”

“How is he better? You’re the same. Sun Woo is too perfect so he lacks humanity.”

“Hey! Then where is our Ha Jin lacking?”

“Beom-jun, don’t unnecessarily defend Ha Jin. How could our Ha Jin be lacking anywhere? It’s just that our Ha Jin has more persuasive power. He gives off a feeling that makes you want to shower him with affection, you know?”

“...Wow, our department’s top student has gone completely crazy.”

Clicking his tongue, Beom-jun moved his chair away from Mi-eun. I was just grateful for a role where I didn’t have to do anything with Sun Woo. After discussing for a long time after that and deciding what each person would research, we were finally able to leave.

As I was walking down the hallway after leaving the classroom, Mi-eun called out and stopped me.

“Ha Jin.”

“Yeah?”

“Are you on bad terms with Sun Woo?”

“...Why?”

"It's obvious you two are trying your hardest not to look at each other and talk. Anyone with a bit of interest could tell, you know? Did something happen?"

"No. Not really."

"Hmm, is that so? I purposely arranged it so you two wouldn't overlap much during the team project since I thought you were on bad terms. Then should I just not care and mix you two together?"

"No. Wait."

When I hurriedly stopped her, Mi-eun laughed as if she had expected it.

"You two seemed close until midterms. Last time at the department gathering too, Sun Woo said he wouldn't come but as soon as he heard you were coming and drinking, he immediately showed up, so I thought you were close. Did you fight in the meantime?"

Eh, that's probably not it. There's no way Sun Woo would come just because I was mentioned.

"Well..."

"You're not kids, what are you fighting about? Won't you make up?"

"It was my one-sided fault. There's nothing to make up over."

"You're both in your youth? I got it. Still, try to work it out. Almost all our department's classes overlap, you know. How long are you going to stay uncomfortable like this?"

Mi-eun told me not to worry about the team project and gave me a small consolation before leaving. Of course I want to make up too. But when the other person is expressing their dislike with their whole body like that, I can't forcibly approach him either. Doing that would be another form of violence.

"But what did I do that narrow-minded bastard Sun Woo hates me so much for?"

Ah... right. It's understandable that he hates me. He probably thinks the guy who said he wants to taste men is approaching him with ulterior motives. Yup, I get it.

'Ha Jin, you empty-headed bastard.'

* * *

"Damn it. Ha Jin's evil spirit. I need to perform an exorcism or something."

Waking up with a strange feeling, fortunately it was before I made a mess. I barely calmed myself and looked at the clock to see it was a little past 4am. Seeing the still dark outside, I was discouraged. It seemed difficult to fall back asleep in this state.

I decided to go for a light jog around the neighborhood to cool off my heat. The neighborhood with only the street lamps on was simply quiet. I had to expend energy like this for the day to flow somewhat peacefully.

“That crazy bastard. It’s not even sexual frustration.”

Just how much did he flaunt his lower half for it to be this bad?

I ran with all my energy and felt thirsty, so I went into a nearby convenience store.

“Hello.”

I gave a brief greeting at the ringing bell and headed straight for the beverage corner. I picked up a bottled water and habitually grabbed a chocolate milk too. Only when I reached the counter did I realize I had brought not only water but chocolate milk as well. I don’t go to convenience stores often, so I guess buying it for Sun Woo every time I went became a habit.

I placed the water and chocolate milk on the counter, thinking ‘The employee must be tired from working the early morning shift’ as they silently scanned the barcodes, and raised my head. Wow... it’s Sun Woo.

“Ack! Sun Woo?”

I was so startled I thought my heart would jump out of my mouth. At my call, Sun Woo snatched the card from me, processed the payment, and handed it back to me.

The situation made it seem like I had purposely come here to find him, making me feel strange. I had just ran wherever my feet took me. Moreover, this convenience store was a bit far from the neighborhood I live in.

‘Crap. Is he misunderstanding? That I came all the way to where he works?’

With that thought, I suddenly opened my mouth.

“I just woke up early and happened to come while jogging. I absolutely did not come knowing you work here...”

After saying it, the excuse sounded shabby. On top of that, Sun Woo seemed to have decided not to pay attention to whatever I said and picked up a book on the side without responding. I hurriedly grabbed the water and chocolate milk and tried to leave, but

turned back again. Placing the chocolate milk on the counter, I spoke to Sun Woo who didn't take his eyes off the book.

"Sun Woo, I bought this thinking of you. I guess buying this whenever I see it became a habit. I bought it for you, so I'll leave it here."

I ran out, afraid Sun Woo might throw the milk at me. And I sprinted towards home at full speed without looking back.

Thanks to using all my energy, I felt tired as soon as I got home. I immediately laid on the bed and closed my eyes as if collapsing. And in a light sleep, I dreamt of endlessly running away from Sun Woo who kept throwing chocolate milk. I definitely slept but... somehow I feel more tired than before sleeping.

[The Lives of the Golden Spoons]

Ha Jin's Banned List 7. No phone apps besides default ones

└ What? Even banking apps?

└└ The male lead doesn't use banking apps

└└└ Lol then does he do phone banking by pressing the numbers?

└└└└ Nope, the secretaries handle everything. The male lead only has cards

└ Katakalk has already taken over Korea, you know?

└└ Only text messages. Chatting on Katakalk is punishable by death

└└└ Even my grandma has Katakalk lol

└└└ Lol can he keep checking Katakalk profile pictures and zoom in?

└└└└ No Katakalk! Our Ha Jin doesn't even look at his phone lol

└ I want to see Ha Jin's Katakalk profile picture be a foreign car's steering wheel with a watch visible and his status message [Fighting today too]

└└ Ha Jin is a chaebol, how the hell would he do that? Lol

└└ Ha Jin buying a drink with a gift certificate he got from that, so cuuute lol

└└└ Miserable

└└└└ Lol not punishable by death but miserable lol definitely save Ha Jin!

└ No game apps either? Sending friend invite messages because he has no hearts

└└ Lol nope. Even if allowed, he can only send hearts to Su but absolutely never allowed to request help himself.

└└└ No Katak! Yuck.