

Yes, It's Me. The Obsessive Side Top

##021 - Read Yes, It's Me. The Obsessive Side Top #021

#021

'What is this now?'

When Secretary Kim told me to get ready for a meal, I thought maybe there was a quarterly family meal just like there was quarterly shopping. But when I arrived, it was a dinner gathering for the Eunha Group. This isn't just a simple meal.

There was grandfather, a few middle-aged men I didn't know, and father. Seeing no other men my age, it seemed I was the only grandson invited among grandfather's grandsons.

"Oh my, Ha Jin, you're growing more dashing by the day?"

As I stayed still, someone approached and spoke to me. No matter how much you pretend to be friendly, I don't know you. I simply laughed and gave brief "yes" responses. The other person seemed to have nothing more to say either as they laughed shortly and immediately left. A few people coming in pretended to know me, but the only people I knew here were grandfather and father.

Being called to a place like this, I could feel the weight on my shoulders as it hit me that I'm in the position of Eunha Group's successor.

'Please just let me spend money.'

I thought I would quietly eat and leave... but I couldn't do that because people kept bringing up my name here and there. In this setting, talking about me seemed to be the easiest topic.

"Isn't Ha Jin the first in our family to enter A University?"

"The threshold for A University should be a bit high."

"Father. Did you even give Ha Jin a gift for getting into A University?"

Who keeps saying that? Don't they know I got in by bribing my way through?

Or.

Do they know and are still saying that?

The one with chubby cheeks kept mentioning A University and my name. I'm already a sophomore, so there's no reason to bring up an admission gift now. So he's definitely not asking because he's really curious. It was clear he had other motives, so I just let out a small, unnoticeable sigh.

Grandfather stopped eating, put down his utensils, and looked at me with a benevolent smile. Is that a mask too? Thinking that made me feel really strange.

"Ha Jin, it seems your uncle is very interested in you."

"Hahaha. I guess so."

Ah, so he was my uncle. Then is he father's older brother? But why did father, the younger brother, inherit the group? Is it ability? Or...

Suddenly a strange thought popped into my head. It's about what father said before when I got hit for not going to take the exam. What father said then strangely drew my gaze to uncle and father's faces. There was a clear difference in looks. Father had a handsome face to the point you'd believe it if someone said he was an actor. Uncle just gave off an ordinary middle-aged man vibe. It's also because he doesn't manage his chubby cheeks but still.

"So. Ha Jin, is there anything you want?"

Grandfather asked me. Who receives an admission gift a year later? Well, there are things I want, and I would accept if he gives me something. But is it okay to talk about it here?

"It's fine. I already gave him a lot."

Father intervened. I clicked my tongue and resumed eating. As I ate a well-fermented radish kimchi, uncle suddenly laughed loudly.

"Hahaha, getting into A University is no ordinary feat. The family should do something for him. Isn't it so pride-inducing to have such a smart nephew?"

Uncle emphasized 'smart' and smiled at me.

"Handsome, smart, isn't he quite the catch? I always thought he was hopeless at studying since he kept causing trouble, but I guess he has innate intelligence? I heard he doesn't lose the top spot at school either?"

"Please stop. We're all here to eat together."

Father stopped uncle and looked at grandfather.

“He’s just attending college. You don’t have to pay much attention.”

“Just college? A University? Wow, listen to our little brother acting mighty. Is it because you have a great son? That conceit is no joke.”

Uncle laughed heartily and started eating again.

“Ha Jin.”

I tried to just eat but grandfather called my name again. Does this family hate seeing me eat that much? It’s really hard to take a spoonful of rice. I put down my spoon and looked at grandfather to see him smiling with an extremely kind face. The kind of face someone who always carries candies in his pocket would have as he hands them out one by one to kids he runs into in the countryside. If I didn’t know father’s personality, I might have been completely fooled. But no way. The Eunha Group people are my number one targets of caution.

“Ha Jin. Come see me once before you leave.”

“Ah, yes...”

‘Damn it. What is he trying to do?’

If it’s this family, I’m super wary. Would grandfather really be any different? Same shit, different day. After that, uncle didn’t cross the line with me anymore. They talked about company matters amongst themselves, and uncle seemed to imply to grandfather asking for some help.

As soon as the meal ended, father immediately approached me.

“Don’t say anything useless to grandfather.”

Whew, so threatening. I gave father a cold look as my own little rebellion and headed to where someone was guiding me. I had tea separately with grandfather in a large room. Grandfather drank warm green tea while I had an espresso. I hadn’t been drinking coffee because it tasted bad these days, but when they said they’d give me what I usually drink, I just went along with it. But.

‘Huh? Why is this espresso so delicious?’

It had an eye-opening taste.

As I ate while saying it was delicious, grandfather warmly smiled like he was looking at a cute little puppy. Well, I decided not to believe the Eunha Group people at face value anymore, but it wasn’t a bad gaze.

“Ha Jin. Come to think of it, grandfather hasn’t given you a college admission gift yet. Were you disappointed?”

“No. I wasn’t disappointed at all.”

“Really? Has Ha Jin grown up? When you were young, you used to pester grandfather so much to buy you things.”

It’s not like he got in with his own abilities, so he probably couldn’t ask for a gift. I guess Ha Jin at least had a conscience.

“Tell me if you need anything. I’ll give it to you as a belated congratulatory gift for my grandson’s admission.”

My mouth was itching to say it. Can I say it? Should I? Will I get hit again if I do?

I was scared grandfather would take off his smiling mask and throw whatever he could grab at me if I said it, but it would be a waste to miss this chance if I didn’t. Money is the only thing left anyway, so wouldn’t he find it cute if I swindled some? Alright, I’ll just say it and see. With a determined face, I told grandfather.

“There’s a place I want to invest in.”

“Invest?”

Grandfather’s eyebrows twitched at my words. He seemed surprised to hear the word ‘invest’ come out of my mouth. I was about to take back my words at his twitching eyebrows, but he was still smiling so I gathered my courage.

“Yes. I want to try it once, thinking of it as just a social experience.”

You see, I know of a very aggressive startup company with high growth potential. Why else would the title of this webtoon be “The Lives of the Golden Spoons”? It’s because all the characters appearing are spoiled brats. The high school protagonist Sin Yeo-un who is currently developing a platform that will hit it big in a few years, spreading across the world and dominating the SNS scene. It was truly a trajectory befitting a webtoon protagonist.

Everyone has had this thought at least once in their life. Ah, I should have bought stock in that company when it first started. Why didn’t I know of such an innovative idea? If I had known, of course I would have bought it... but I don’t actually have money. What investment can such a person make?

But now I have a grandfather who can provide ample support, and I even know a place that is guaranteed to rise like I’m some prophet.

‘What, why do I already hear the sound of money coming in? It feels nice.’

“I see. Ha Jin is having interesting thoughts after becoming a college student. Hoho, what a rascal. A rascal indeed.”

Grandfather chuckled and accepted my request.

* * *

“Do what?”

Not understanding, I earnestly asked Mi-eun again with the will of ‘It’s not, right? Say it’s not.’ in my eyes.

“I’m saying for you and Sun Woo to go on a date. And post pictures of your date on SNS.”

“Why?”

“For our A+ grade.”

“What does that have to do with this?”

‘Mi-eun. Why are you doing this, Mi-eun? Hm?’

Didn’t you say you knew Sun Woo and I were on bad terms and arranged it so we wouldn’t overlap much as consideration? At my desperate gaze, Mi-eun quietly said to me, “Sorry, it’s for our grade.”

“We need to differentiate from the other teams. Just researching and presenting doesn’t suit my style.”

Beom-jun was just nonchalantly agreeing with everything Mi-eun said next to me. Unconditional agreement. Acting carefree saying it’s not his business. I didn’t know what Sun Woo was thinking as he stayed silent. I was the only one at a loss.

“The impact of SNS on the economy. Let’s experiment to see how big that impact is.”

“The professor just told us to research though.”

“Tsk ts. They say the disciple should aim to surpass the teacher. The other kids will do well too, but don’t you think we need something innovative to get an A+?”

“Why does that lead to a date? And why are you specifying a date between me and Sun Woo? You and Beom-jun can do it too.”

“When there are two people with great visuals in our team, there’s no reason not to use that.”

Saying that, Mi-eun noisily closed her laptop and laughed playfully.

“Let’s try to get a good grade. Okay?”

Seeing Mi-eun not budging at all, I sent a gaze asking Sun Woo for help. Sun Woo, who I thought would naturally say he wouldn’t do it with me, calmly looked at Mi-eun and spoke.

“What do we need to do?”

“What?”

“Tsk, Ha Jin oppa. Calm down. I won’t eat you up. As expected, Sun Woo thinks deeply. You know how powerful SNS influence is, right? Like when something an influencer uses suddenly goes out of stock. But it’s hard for us to cast such people. Then? We can just make our own. What’s the problem when there are two handsome guys like this?”

“If it’s casting, I’ll do it. I can do that much.”

The only celebrity that came to mind was Ha Jin’s ex-girlfriend, I-na, but...

“It’s fine. I wasn’t planning on casting anyone anyway. If we experience it directly, won’t the professor look upon us more favorably? Ha Jin, calm down a bit. Anyone seeing you would think we’re selling you off somewhere.”

At Mi-eun’s words, Beom-jun patted my shoulder to comfort me.

“Yeah. We just need to take a few pictures and post them on SNS. Don’t worry, Ha Jin.”

“Beom-jun.”

Sun Woo quietly called Beom-jun’s name. At his name being suddenly called, Beom-jun kept meaninglessly patting my shoulder like a malfunctioning robot. Come to think of it, this might be the first time I’m seeing Sun Woo call someone else’s name. But why does his voice calling someone sound so murderous?

While calling Beom-jun, Sun Woo’s gaze was still directed at me.

“Get your hand off.”

It was Sun Woo’s extremely cold and blunt voice.

If Sun Woo had only said that much, I really would have been so surprised I passed out, but he added,

“Ha Jin isn’t a kid, so stop comforting him.”

“Ah, uh. Okay.”

With creaking movements, Beom-jun retracted the hand that had been patting me. Once Beom-jun withdrew his hand, Sun Woo turned his head. How much does Sun Woo dislike me that he finds even his friend’s consolation distasteful?

“Many people post date photos. There won’t be anything special about it.”

Sun Woo calmly asked a question. What? Is everyone serious about the presentation while I’m getting too swept up in personal feelings? Since Sun Woo wasn’t rejecting it that much, I decided not to protest further either. Actually, the reason I protested was because Sun Woo disliked me, so I stepped up in his place.

“Of course. I’ll write a post. It’s a restaurant that hasn’t opened yet. If we post date photos on SNS and tag that restaurant, people will come check the post I wrote, right? We’ll investigate the number of views on that post and search volume for the restaurant name, and present on how much influence SNS has on the economy.”

“Wow, our department president is no joke.”

“Hoho, I just get a flood of ideas looking at you two. Go on a date tomorrow and give me the photos. I’ll make a new SNS account and post them.”

“How can we suddenly go tomorrow? Sun Woo, don’t you have a part-time job?”

“I don’t on Fridays.”

At Sun Woo’s answer, Mi-eun smiled like she already knew. At this point, it feels like the three of them are in on it to tease me.

“Go eat dinner after school tomorrow. I’ll talk to the restaurant.”

“Didn’t you say it hasn’t opened yet?”

“It’s my older sister’s restaurant. She said she’d do that much for me. Look at this. I’m showing you reference photos, so you need to take pictures with this composition. If you take weird photos, be prepared to go on another date.”

The photos Mi-eun showed were a few date pictures of couples. A photo of two people close together with bright smiles, a photo of the food set on the table, and a solo shot of each person looking at the camera.

“You need to take a total of four. Try your best to take flattering shots.”

“Even the first photo?”

“That’s the most important. We’ll use it as the cover photo, so smile brightly and affectionately, got it?”

Ah... I don’t think it’ll work out?

I did see Sun Woo smiling a bit when we studied together briefly, but even that was just a slight smile. I don’t know if we can really take a photo smiling affectionately like that picture.

As if reading my mind, Mi-eun warns me again.

“If I’m not satisfied, you’re going on another date. Let’s finish it in one go. That way we can quickly organize the data too.”

Looking uncomfortable doing nothing, Beom-jun scratched the back of his head and asked,

“Should I go with them if they’re awkward?”

“The two of us will do it.”

Sun Woo immediately refused.

Beom-jun received Mi-eun’s fierce glare and weakly replied, “Alright, got it.”

I knew Sun Woo was obsessed with getting an A+ because of his grades scholarship. But to the point he’d go on a date with me whom he dislikes so much?

“Whew, Beom-jun. Don’t butt in for no reason.”

“Ah, but I want to eat with Ha Jin too.”

“Are you crazy? We can all go eat together after finishing the assignment.”

“But I don’t want to eat with you...”

“What did you say?”

“Oh, you heard? Guess my true feelings slipped out.”

Beom-jun spoke teasingly and quickly grabbed his bag to escape. Mi-eun made a murderous expression and said, "Do it properly," before going to catch Beom-jun. Left alone, I awkwardly smiled.

"Let's hang in there for just one day tomorrow, Sun Woo."

There was no response.

'Damn, should I really transfer... Business administration doesn't suit me at all.'

* * *

A date. And with Sun Woo of all people!

I was picking out clothes in the dressing room when I fell into contemplation. Should I wear a t-shirt and pants like usual? Or should I dress up a bit?

Thinking about it, Ha Jin always wore suits in the webtoon. Seeing how Kim Shin also always comes to school in a suit, it doesn't seem to be an outfit that stands out much... After mulling it over for a while, I gave up and took out the clothes I got from the department store with my mother not long ago. Since I'm dressing up, I tied my hair up to show my forehead too.

When I came out to the living room to go to school, the housekeeper saw me and grinned.

"Ha Jin, it's been a while. Seeing you in that style."

"I'm putting in a bit of effort because I have something important today."

"What important thing? A date?"

"Ah, yes..."

"Oh my, the other person will totally fall for you. Looking closely, Ha Jin has great features."

No. There's absolutely no way the other person will fall for me. Because...

"Ah, that friend who had good features too hasn't come by at all lately? Was it Sun Woo?"

The person I'm going on a date with is Sun Woo.

'I'm going on a date with that friend today...'

* * *

“What’s with you today, Ha Jin?”

As soon as Kim Shin saw me, he stuck to me more than usual with a grin.

“As expected, this style suits you well. Hmm, what, are you trying to make me fall for you again?”

“Gross. Don’t stick to me.”

“Want to go to Sky Bar after school today? Let’s drink the non-alcoholic cocktails you like. I can’t let you go home like this.”

Clicking my tongue at Kim Shin and calling it nonsense, I entered the lecture hall. Kim Shin followed behind me, persistently clinging and begging me to hang out with him today. Entering the lecture hall, Sun Woo sitting in the front immediately caught my eye. Sun Woo was in his usual attire, so I felt embarrassed for getting excited by myself. I’m the only one who got hyped up.

“Eek! Ha Jin oppa, you’re insane today! Why are you so sexy today? Huh?”

“Because you told me to do something.”

At Mi-eun’s exaggerated admiration, I playfully pinched her cheek and headed to the back seats, but she touched her cheek and followed me with a laugh.

“Ah, Ha Jin oppa. Why are you touching me? Don’t come on so strong. You’re making my heart flutter.”

“What did Mi-eun tell you to do? Mi-eun, what did you make Ha Jin do?”

“Ah, Kim Shin, you don’t need to know. It’s our secret.”

“What kind of secret do you two have?”

“Can you mind your own business? Kim Shin, when are you going to leave Ha Jin’s side?”

Since Mi-eun’s voice was so loud, Beom-jun who was sitting in the front turned around and fiddled with his ear.

“Mi-eun. Let’s lower the decibels a bit. I can’t hear soft sounds these days because of you.”

“Then wear a hearing aid or something!”

"If I wear a hearing aid, I think my eardrums will burst from your voice. Do you want to become an eardrum girlfriend or an eardrum punching woman?"

"How about a woman who punches you?"

"Ah, sorry. I'll quietly shrivel up."

Beom-jun put his tail down and as he turned his body forward, he said to me in a small voice.

"Have a good date today."

Right then, the professor entered and the small commotion quickly died down. Kim Shin must have heard what Beom-jun said softly because he leaned towards me during class.

"You're going on a date? With who? Have you been seeing someone lately?"

"It's not like that."

"What do you mean, Ha Jin? I'm hurt. You used to tell me everything."

"It's because it's not a real date."

"What does that mean, not a real date?"

Kim Shin kept asking curiously, but I just ignored him so he didn't bother me anymore. After the lecture ended, even Min-ha came to me saying this kind of atmosphere is nice too and chattered on for a while before leaving. The other kids also complimented my style in passing. It was surprising that I was somehow maintaining friendships with my classmates. To think Ha Jin is having such an ordinary college life. Of course, the relationship with Sun Woo was the same as in the webtoon.

* * *

The store Mi-eun told us about was a distance that required driving from the school, so Sun Woo and I decided to take my car. After finishing classes, I went to the car first and was sitting in it when Sun Woo got in not long after.

"Hi Sun Woo."

My greeting was very naturally ignored. I wasn't expecting a response anyway.

I started the car and put on soft music. If there wasn't even a small noise, it felt like I wouldn't be able to breathe properly. The road was very congested as it overlapped with rush hour. It moved extremely slowly as if crawling, jammed like the relationship

between me and Sun Woo. The road conditions were better in comparison. Sun Woo and I had no movement at all. While waiting at a red light, I turned my head to look at Sun Woo. Barely suppressing the instinctive urge to just shut up and go, I attempted conversation for the sake of my smooth school life.

“Are you hungry? Aren’t you excited about what food will come out? I’m curious what kind of personality the restaurant owner who is Mi-eun’s older sister will have. They say between sisters, if one is lively, the other is usually quiet.”

Sun Woo turned his head at my words and stared at me intently.

If you’re going to ignore me then ignore me, if you’re going to talk then talk, why are you just looking? It’s embarrassing. I wanted him to at least curse at me instead.

“Mi-eun has really good leadership, right? I think they chose the department president well. Her ideas seem quite innovative too.”

Sun Woo was still silent. Having already started talking, I couldn’t stop halfway.

“Isn’t Beom-jun extremely laid-back? No matter what Mi-eun says, he just accepts it without batting an eye. He seems good-natured.”

As I chattered on by myself, Sun Woo, who had been keeping silent until then, spoke in a voice oozing with a chilly air.

“Ha Jin, do you bring up other people as a topic during dates? It doesn’t seem courteous to your date.”

“Huh?”

What kind of bullshit is that? It’s not even a real date...

Is Sun Woo really such a slave to grades? He immerses himself to this extent for grades?

“Ah, sorry.”

I did apologize first, but I had nothing more to say after that.

In the suffocating silence, was he trying to say if not other people, we should talk about each other’s recent happenings? While I was pondering what topic to bring up, Sun Woo spoke to me first.

“What’s with the scar on your face?”

Sun Woo's voice was as cold as the air conditioner turned on in the car. Sun Woo was asking about the scar that had already disappeared without a trace. He sure asks fast.

"I had a bit of a fight. It got scratched."

"With who?"

Should I say it was father? It wasn't a pleasant family matter so I didn't want to reveal it. With no answer from me, Sun Woo added,

"Girlfriend?"

How does he interpret my silence like that? I shook my head with a bitter smile. As if I have time to date right now.

Then Sun Woo spoke again as if mocking me.

"Or is it a boyfriend?"

Ha, seriously. I'm dumbfounded.

#023

How can boyfriend be the next suggestion after girlfriend? Judging from Sun Woo's expression, it didn't seem to mean male friend. So... Sun Woo is still angry about that incident? Sun Woo looked like he didn't believe me despite my denial. I had no choice but to bring up the unpleasant family matters I didn't want to talk about.

"It's not like that. Father got a bit violent over something that made him snap. That's how it happened."

Sun Woo seemed to flinch and waver at my answer. He's probably thinking he asked the wrong question. I smiled as if it was no big deal.

"It was my fault. I deserved to get hit."

'Damn it, how did I deserve to get hit? It's abuse.'

"Are you okay?"

"Yeah. It's completely healed now. Want to see?"

While waiting at the red light, I turned my head to show Sun Woo my left cheek. The moment I felt Sun Woo's gaze touch my cheek, that area seemed to heat up. I hurriedly turned my head back forward in a fluster.

“Ah, I’m driving.”

“Do you usually get hit often?”

“No. This was the first time.”

“Last time you had a scar on your forehead too.”

Good memory.

“Ah, right. That’s true.”

Come to think of it, I did get hit every time we met. Two assaults in just two meetings.

It made me reasonably suspect Ha Jin’s personality turned out this way from getting hit since young.

After that, there was no more conversation between us. The mood just got heavy from unnecessarily bringing up family matters. I gripped the steering wheel for no reason. I don’t know what Sun Woo was thinking, but he didn’t open his mouth after that. After some time passed in silence like that, we arrived at the restaurant Mi-eun told us about. There wasn’t even a sign up front yet, and as I was hesitating outside, a woman who looked exactly like Mi-eun gestured for us to come in from inside.

The restaurant interior had about 10 tables, and with the beige tones and all wooden furniture, it gave off a warm and tidy impression. I bowed my head in greeting to Mi-eun’s older sister.

“Hello. We’re Mi-eun’s classmates in the same major.”

She welcomed us with a friendly smile.

“She said she was sending two handsome guys but it was really true. Come on in. As you can probably tell, I’m Mi-eun’s older sister. Just call me boss comfortably. I actually want to hear people call me boss.”

“Ah, yes. Boss.”

“You must be Ha Jin?”

The owner immediately called my name that I hadn’t even mentioned. Did Mi-eun send her my picture? As I was wondering, the owner let out a small laugh as she looked at me.

“Mi-eun said the one who you want to shower with affection just by looking at him is Ha Jin. The one who is unbelievably handsome is Sun Woo. Right?”

“Hahaha... Mi-eun said that?”

“You two are exactly as she described. Ah, you must be hungry. Sit over there. I’m going to start making the food now so it’ll take a bit. You’re my first customers so I’ll make you something delicious.”

Watching the owner quickly go into the kitchen, I sat at the table she guided us to. As I was sitting blankly, Sun Woo nodded his head at me.

“We should take the pictures.”

“Now? Let’s take them after eating.”

If we take pictures in this cold atmosphere, I doubt they’ll come out well. I said it would be better to take them after filling our stomachs and the mood gets more amicable, and Sun Woo simply nodded.

I suddenly wanted to say something to Sun Woo, but in the end I couldn’t get any words out of my mouth. We had another round 2 of silence like this when Sun Woo abruptly asked me a question.

“Are you not drinking these days?”

“Drinking? No, I’m not. I go straight home after school so there’s no chance to drink.”

“You used to hang out and play with friends a lot before?”

“That was... when I was partying without a care. People usually can’t get their mind straight in their first year of college.”

That was when Ha Jin was partying. Now I’m too busy keeping up with my studies, so when I come home I study and have no time. You guys probably prepared for business administration since high school, but I’m barely keeping up with classes starting from zero base. If it wasn’t for Sun Woo’s notes, I would have turned in a blank midterm exam.

“I just got swayed here and there after becoming an adult. Now that I’m a sophomore, I need to get it together.”

Silence stretched on again after my answer ended. Can we even take pictures like this? We need to smile affectionately close together.

I looked at Sun Woo with worry, but he just seemed calm, I don’t know what he was thinking.

Ah, I'm jealous of the protagonist's mentality. I'm worried if I can take an affectionate photo with Sun Woo right now.

"The pasta and steak are ready."

The owner appeared with perfect timing, holding plates in both hands.

Placing the pasta plate down and then the steak plate, she gave a simple explanation.

"This is arrabbiata pasta. Do you like spicy food? And this is tenderloin steak. It's aged meat so it will be tender."

"Thank you, boss."

I thanked her and was about to eat when Sun Woo placed an additional order with the owner.

"Boss, could you make one more cream pasta?"

"Ah, is the portion a bit small?"

"I'm really hungry."

"Of course I can. Eat up. I'll make it for you."

As the owner cheerfully went back into the kitchen, Sun Woo moved the pasta plate to his side and fully pushed the steak plate to me.

"The pasta is spicy."

"Pasta can be spicy too? No matter how spicy pasta is, how spicy can it be?"

Despite his warning, I twirled the pasta onto my fork without concern and stuffed a mouthful. After chewing once or twice, my face quickly turned red.

'What is this? Why is this pasta so spicy?'

As if he knew this would happen, Sun Woo let out a small sigh and went to get water from the water dispenser at the entrance, and in the meantime, the owner came out with drinks in her hands.

"I forgot to give you drinks. This is our restaurant's signature ade that I personally made, try it. It will be refreshing and sweet."

Placing the drinks on the table, the owner went back into the kitchen. I was put off by the description of it being sweet, but I felt like I had to drink it for now to put out the

chaos in my mouth. Just as Sun Woo arrived with a cup of water in his hand, I chugged down the iced ade the owner brought.

“Drink mine too.”

Sun Woo held out his drink to me who had finished the whole drink. Putting the water he brought in front of himself. Is it because I dumped it all into my mouth at once? My throat was burning. And it was terribly sweet. Because my body doesn't like sweet tastes, I didn't really want to drink more. But I thought I should force myself to drink it since Sun Woo considerably gave it to me, so I took a sip and put it down while internally shouting ‘Ugh, sweet’.

I don't think I can eat that pasta. I should just eat the steak in front of me.

“Sun Woo.”

I was about to cut the steak in front of my eyes when I raised my head and affectionately called Sun Woo.

No, I didn't mean to call him... I mean this... What is it? My body is out of control again?

“Can you cut the steak for me?”

Sun Woo, who was watching me smile prettily with my eyes curved, hesitated for a moment. I, who once again showed my drunken behavior to Sun Woo, am going to die.

“Ha Jin.”

“Hmm? I'm hungry. Sun Woo, can you cut it for me?”

“Did you drink?”

“No.”

Sun Woo looked around trying to find a liquor bottle. When a bottle still wasn't in sight, he took the ade he had handed to me and took a sip to try it. I was curious too. What made me drunk again? Damn it... I really can't stand the settings given to Ha Jin.

“Was what you drank the same as this?”

“Mmhmm. Super sweet, right?”

“It's alcohol. Seems like wine.”

“Really? I can't really tell.”

I'm screwed. Wine? The owner definitely said it was ade when she gave it to us? Look, you can see the bubbles fizzing even now. Contrary to the thoughts in my head, my body was pushing the steak plate to Sun Woo.

"Cut it for me."

Sun Woo blankly stared at the plate I handed him.

As he was silently looking at it, I thought he might smash the plate on my head, but Sun Woo took the plate in front of himself, picked up the knife, and started cutting it into pieces.

Damn it, my body should just wait for the steak plate that will soon come back, but it unnecessarily stuck out my upper body and opened my mouth.

"Ah."

To my body begging Sun Woo to feed me like a baby bird... rest in peace...

Instead of stabbing my neck with the knife in his hand, Sun Woo cut the steak, picked it up with a fork, and held it out to me.

"Oh my, what's this? You two are being so cute."

As I was receiving the steak, I internally shouted no! No! countless times at the owner's words. But contrary to those inner thoughts, my drunken body was just smiling ever so brightly. When I saw the owner place the cream pasta on the table, the corners of my eyes naturally drooped. I didn't know my expressions were this diverse. Seeing my expression filled with emotion, the owner laughed merrily.

"Heehee, this is the first time I'm envious of Mi-eun. Mi-eun will have college life together with you guys, right? Should I go back to college too? Will the school accept an older student like me?"

"You want to attend together?"

"Yeah. Then will you take the same classes as me?"

"Boss."

In the middle of the conversation, Sun Woo suddenly interjected. Thanks Sun Woo. Thanks to you, no useless words came out of my mouth.

"I tasted wine in the ade. Is it alcohol?"

“Huh? Ah, that’s wine ade. It’s made by adding wine and fruit syrup to carbonated water. Tastes good, right? I was wondering what young people would like these days and thought that would be good, so I added it to the menu. How is it?”

“It’s delicious. We already finished it all.”

I held out the empty glass to the owner.

No, if drinking this much makes me lose control, at least make me lose consciousness too. Watching my body do things with a clear mind is hell.

“You already finished one glass? Want more?”

“No, just cola please.”

Sun Woo refused and asked for cola.

“Okay. One moment.”

The owner cheerfully went back into the kitchen again. Sun Woo now held out meat on a fork to me even without me opening my mouth. Ah... I wish he would just hit my head with anything nearby.

What’s the point of feeling ashamed? My body diligently accepted the meat he held out. While smiling ever so brightly at that.

The small silver lining is that at least I didn’t say anything atrocious like your lips look tasty.

Yeah. Let’s console ourselves with that.

The owner soon placed a glass of cola on the table and left. Sun Woo handed me the cola glass.

“Just drink cola.”

“Should I? The wine ade was a bit sweet. I don’t like sweet things.”

“I know.”

He said it like it was obvious. His response somehow moved me.

#024

Sun Woo subtly knew my tastes well. So I was surprised for a moment, but I thought he must have particularly keen observation skills and left it at that. After drinking the cola,

meat suddenly appeared in front of my eyes. I obediently accepted it and was grinning for some reason.

The store playing soft music had a nice ambiance with orange indirect lighting. It seemed to provide even more coziness in contrast to the dark neighborhood seen outside. As I vacantly looked outside, Sun Woo pushed a plate of cream pasta in front of me.

“Eat this. I tasted it and it’s not spicy.”

“Wow, did you taste it first for me? Are you Gimi Sanggung?”

Sun Woo must have found my words absurd as he raised one eyebrow.

“Do you act like this in front of other people too?”

“Act like what?”

“Drunken behavior. Do you do this?”

“It’s not drunken behavior. And I’ve never drank with anyone else besides you.”

“Ha Jin sure lies well when drunk.”

“I’m not lying.”

“I’m not drunk, I’ve never kissed, I didn’t drink soju after drinking it. Everything that comes out of your mouth is a lie?”

“Sun Woo, then make me shut my mouth.”

‘No Ha Jin. That’s not it.’

I just hope Sun Woo brings a sewing machine and sews my mouth shut.

“How?”

Sun Woo asking with half-lidded eyes was fatally alluring. A main character’s experience really shows. It wasn’t the alcohol, but a desire to connect with him in any way possible rippled through me. Sun Woo’s languid question was violently shaking me standing on a precarious tightrope. My mind was soon filled with the word kiss. It felt like the words asking him to kiss me would directly come out of my mouth.

“However you want.”

Fortunately or unfortunately, instead of the word kiss that filled my head, other words came out of my mouth. In the end, the choice was given to Sun Woo. What choice will he make? I was curious but also found myself eerie for being like this.

‘Since when did I get filled with such lustful demons?’

The only two kisses in my life were entirely with Sun Woo. It feels like I fell into a pit after learning pleasure at a late age and can’t climb out while floundering.

They say an old burglar doesn’t know when the day dawns*.

Sun Woo looked me over with a peculiar gaze. Even my body that lost control from being drunk flinched at that gaze. But it soon smiled brightly and ate the cream pasta he pushed to me.

Throughout the meal, Sun Woo didn’t avoid my gaze or ignore me. As if I tend to get a bit weaker when I’m just drunk, even his eyes softened a little.

As I ate, I finally remembered the photos. We were definitely told to take one food photo.

“Sun Woo. We didn’t take a food photo.”

What, my body is listening to me? As I was going “ooh” at my mouth spouting what I wanted to say, it opened again.

“We’ll have to go on another date.”

Looking at me grinning while twitching my nose bridge... that doesn’t seem to be it. As if I wasn’t even worth dealing with, Sun Woo wordlessly got up from his seat and went towards the kitchen to call the owner.

“Boss, we forgot to take food photos, could you perhaps send them separately to Mi-eun?”

“Okay! I’ll send those to Mi-eun.”

Hearing the owner’s energetic reply, Sun Woo returned to his seat.

“I wanted to go on another date though.”

“Just eat your food. Don’t say useless things.”

I liked hearing Sun Woo scolding me. Somehow it felt like we returned to how we were before our relationship soured. It’s much better than... him silently ignoring me.

The food was delicious and the atmosphere with Sun Woo was good. The only flaw was me getting drunk?

Damn it, how did I become an alcohol mess...

Looking at the cleanly emptied plates, I shifted my gaze to Sun Woo sitting across from me. As expected, my idea to take photos after eating was right. With his face much softer than before, I took out my phone.

"Let's take photos, Sun Woo."

I held up my phone to take a solo shot of Sun Woo. His expressionless face as he blankly stared filled up the screen. As I vacantly looked at the phone screen, the Sun Woo there spoke to me.

"You're not taking it?"

"I will. Let me admire you a bit more."

"What are you admiring while holding a phone?"

"Admiring Sun Woo's handsome face."

Sun Woo snickered and snatched the phone from my hand.

"Why are you looking at it through a machine? Just look at me."

"Oh? Okay."

Yikes. Why are you smiling?

Sun Woo held up the phone he took towards me.

"I'll take yours first."

"What should I do? I need to look more handsome than you."

"Just stay still. You're good enough as you are."

I naturally smiled at Sun Woo. While taking the photo, I thought it was rather fortunate that I was drunk. It made for a very natural smile. If not, I would have been too nervous in front of Sun Woo to smile and probably made a sour face instead. Click. The shutter sound went off and Sun Woo handed the phone back to me. I took the phone, filled the screen with his face, and said,

"Sun Woo, try smiling."

At my words, Sun Woo slightly curled the corners of his mouth. It was a minuscule smile but that's something. I quickly took the photo and went to the kitchen to ask the owner. Now the only photo left was one affectionate shot of the two of us together.

As per the owner's request, I moved to sit next to Sun Woo.

"Get closer together. You two were being so cute playing well together earlier. I should have taken a photo of that."

Getting close to Sun Woo, his distinct soap scent wafted over. Liking the warm and fluffy scent, my head gradually tilted towards him.

"You smell nice."

"I know that too."

"Know what?"

"That you like my scent. I already know."

I snickered at his words.

"I'm taking it."

At the owner's voice, I held back my laughter and looked forward. With a deep smile on my face.

The owner said the photo came out well and handed me the phone, looking proud at the cleanly emptied plates.

"How was the taste?"

"It was super delicious. I'll come visit again when you open next time."

"Oh I'd love that. I'm good at making escargot too but I couldn't make it because I didn't get the ingredients yet. I'll make that for you next time you come. You have to come eat it."

"Yes. Thank you for today."

"Okay, be careful driving at night."

Glancing at my car keys now in Sun Woo's hand, the owner said that and saw us out of the store. We thanked the owner and turned to leave.

In the weather that could be considered summer, the heat seemed to rise even more. The parking spot was a bit of a distance away. As I was slowly walking while looking around the neighborhood, Sun Woo grabbed my hand.

“Are you okay?”

“Yeah. I’m fine.”

I lowered my gaze to our clasped hands. There was no hesitation or wavering on Sun Woo’s face. He held my hand and led me along as if it was the most natural thing. Walking a step behind, I ended up walking next to him by having my hand held by Sun Woo.

“Is this an extension of our date too?”

Come to think of it, I didn’t spout nonsense anymore. I wondered if my body regaining control meant the alcohol was wearing off. Since she said it was wine ade, the alcohol content probably wasn’t that high. I must be sobering up fast from being drunk.

“Want to get coffee?”

“Coffee?”

“You said you like drinking coffee after a meal.”

“Oh right. I do.”

When I answered with a smile, Sun Woo smiled back looking pleased about something. Seeing that smile clearly showing on his face, I blankly stared at him.

‘Wow, Sun Woo’s smile... it’s super rare even in the webtoon.’

“Let’s go. Do you know any cafes around here?”

“Huh? I do.”

The cafe I went to with grandma came to mind at Sun Woo’s words. It was a carefully chosen location with memories, so it was a place stuck in my head.

“Type in the address. Let’s go there.”

“Okay.”

Sun Woo naturally took the wheel and drove to the cafe I typed in. Soft music I selected flowed in the car and the dark roads sparkled with street lamps and building lights.

Sun Woo driving next to me and taking me to drink coffee felt surreal. If his kindness and gentleness are coming out because I'm drunk...

'Getting drunk is pretty good too?'

Arriving at the cafe, I pushed aside Sun Woo who said he would order and stood in front of the counter. I got an espresso that I learned the taste of this time... and ordered the menu grandma had last time for Sun Woo since he likes sweet things.

There were no other men who came to the cafe together, so I could feel people stealing glances at us. The bell rang signaling the drinks were ready, and as Sun Woo left the seat, someone approached me and cast a shadow.

Looking up, it was the woman who had been sneaking peeks at me. The cute-looking woman blushed and held out a piece of paper to me.

"Um... I'm really gathering my courage to give you this. Please contact me."

She spoke shyly and quickly returned to her seat when Sun Woo approached. On the paper, her age, name, and contact information were written.

"What is it?"

"She gave me her contact info before leaving."

Sun Woo, who put down the coffee, took the paper from my hand.

"Are you allowed to accept this while on a date?"

"Huh?"

We're still on a date? Not knowing how to react, I stayed still and Sun Woo tucked the paper under his cup coaster.

"That was mine though."

I muttered while fiddling with my coffee cup for no reason.

It was the first time I received someone's contact info. I was going to keep it as a memento...

Sun Woo drank his coffee as if he didn't care and said one word – "Sweet."

"It's sweet? Should I order you something else?"

"No, I like that it's sweet."

Huh? That line is exactly the same as grandma's? I burst out laughing seeing big Sun Woo say the same thing as grandma.

"Why are you laughing?"

"Ah, someone said the exact same thing as you after eating that. I just remembered."

Sun Woo moved one corner of his mouth. His brows were furrowed as if something displeased him.

"You have no manners, Ha Jin."

"Ah, sorry. For laughing."

"Not that. You keep thinking of someone else. Isn't it basic to focus only on your date partner while on a date?"

Wow, Sun Woo's immersion is impressive.

I shortly nodded my head and drank my coffee. Sun Woo quietly observed me.

"Ha Jin, are you sober now?"

"Yeah..."

Sun Woo, keenly noticing my bullshit greatly decreased, let out a languid sigh.

"I'll still drive though."

"Okay..."

How sweet, Sun Woo.

In the webtoon, his gaze was miserable so this sweetness was new. The Ha Jin in the webtoon was captivated by Sun Woo's empty, will-less eyes. I prefer the current Sun Woo over that Sun Woo though.

How did Sun Woo end up like that again? Ah, after his only family died, he became confused because of his biological father who suddenly appeared.

I hope he doesn't get that hollow gaze, but the story will flow according to the webtoon in the end, right? Sin Yeo-un, the main character who will save the struggling Sun Woo, will appear.

Sun Woo deliciously ate the coffee he said was sweet. Watching him drink the still warm coffee, my mouth became sweet too. I hate even imagining this sweetness, but I like the sweetness Sun Woo gives me.

[The Lives of the Golden Spoons]

Ha Jin's Prohibition List 8. No getting drunk

└ Lol isn't the purpose of drinking to get drunk?

└ Ha Jin, stumble and fall once while drunk!

└└ The moment you stagger while drunk, death penalty!

└└└ Ha Jin's readers are raising him super strong.

└ You need to get hammered drunk on makgeolli served as a snack at a volunteer farming event and pass out

└└ Someone drag this person out lol

└ No no, he needs to get angry drinking with shaky hands after Sun Woo runs away

└└ Mm~ good taste

└└ Is that alcoholism? Death penalty.

└└└ No, not alcoholism lol. Anger lol

└ Is it possible for drunk Ha Jin to go to karaoke after a company dinner and get heated with a tambourine?

└└ Lol why would our Ha Jin go to karaoke for a company dinner lol he's still a student

└└ Breaks the pot with the tambourine.

└ This is possible since Ha Jin hasn't gotten drunk in the webtoon yet.

└ Should he drink non-alcoholic beverages? Then Ha Jin's figure will get ruined sigh

└└ Ugh, imagining it is terrible. Let's give non-alcoholic drinks the death penalty.

└└└ Lol why is everyone getting a taste for giving Ha Jin the death penalty.

└ Only one thing is allowed regarding getting drunk – getting drunk on Sun Woo's lips
>.<

ㄴㄴ Lolololol fuck lolololol

ㄴ Where is this kind of nonsense from? Lol just tell him not to drink.

ㄴ They're telling him not to do all sorts of things lol. It's no fun without some absurdity.

Translator's notes:

– Gimi Sanggung: Referring to a lady-in-waiting who tastes the king's food before him in historical dramas

– An old burglar doesn't know when the day dawns: A Korean saying meaning an expert in something is unaware/oblivious in that area

#025

With final exams approaching, there was something I had to resolve. I barely managed to take a step with heavy feet. Even that only amounted to getting into the elevator. Somehow, the moment the elevator went up felt bitterly like bidding farewell to this world and ascending to the afterlife.

"Will I get hit again?"

My left cheek that had barely healed throbbed, and without realizing it, I clutched my cheek. It's a moment Ha Jin seems a bit pitiful.

Contacting father was both difficult and easy. I didn't have father's contact information. Since we don't contact each other, his number wasn't saved on my new phone. But when I told Secretary Kim I had something to discuss with father, a meeting was quickly arranged.

With a ding, the elevator doors opened. Past the wide marble floors would be the chairman's office with luxurious carpeting. I reasonably suspect the reason for the carpet is to protect from thrown ashtrays.

"Hello."

I greeted the office manager at the desk with a determined mind. The office manager looked at me and stood up with an anxious face.

"Please wait a moment. There's still... a guest here."

The office manager hesitated at the word guest. It was quite different from the perfect announcer-like pronunciation whenever we met.

"A guest?"

I had clearly made an appointment and arrived on time.

Left with no choice but to stand in front of the desk, the office manager smiled awkwardly.

“Ha Jin, would you like some coffee?”

“It’s alright. Will it take long?”

“...It didn’t take that long.”

The office manager replied in past tense. Thinking about the meaning of the answer, it seemed this guest had visited a few times before. As I was looking around at the interior, a familiar sound came from inside.

“Isn’t that the sound of an ashtray falling?”

“Oh... I’m not sure. I didn’t hear it.”

It wasn’t a loudly ringing sound, but there was definitely a subtle vibration felt on the floor along with the heavy thud of something falling.

“Looks like there’s someone else who gets hit besides me.”

When I jokingly said that to the flustered office manager, she just smiled awkwardly and avoided my gaze.

As the office manager said, the heavy glass door of the office opened not long after. And the person who came out was unexpected.

An ordinary boy around my age.

He came out with a heavy, sunken gaze, and seeing me, he bit his lip. Bowing to either greet the office manager or me at an ambiguous angle, he headed straight for the elevator.

“Who is that?”

Before he got on the elevator, I asked the office manager while looking at his back.

I was curious about the identity of the young man who got hit and left the office of a large corporation’s chairman. But no answer came out of the office manager’s mouth, and I heard the sound of gritted teeth seemingly coming from the man standing in front of the elevator.

But who is he to get hit by Ha Jin’s father?

“Young master Ha Jin? You can come in now.”

Secretary Kim opened the office door and called me inside. I think I came at a bad time... I unreasonably blame the previous visitor.

Seeing my father's face with the brilliant sunlight pouring through the large glass windows behind him, I felt suffocated. He had a benevolent expression, but seeing his chest heaving, it seemed his excitement hadn't died down yet.

Facing him, I couldn't help but feel like I would get hit again.

“So what business did you come to see me for? Please don't let it be cleaning up your mess. I'm in a bad mood right now.”

“This final exam...”

“Ah, is it about that damned studying again?”

Father cut me off before I could finish. He spoke sarcastically and sat on the sofa, propping his elbow on the armrest and pressing a finger firmly next to his brow. The familiar ashtray was on the table in front of him. I hope it won't be used again.

“I came to tell you I don't need the professor's help.”

“Ha, this is absurd.”

Father got up from the sofa and walked over to me. Stopping right in front of me, father looked me in the eye and observed me for a long time. Then he soon clicked his tongue and sneered.

“Has this bastard really gone crazy? Why are you like this these days?”

“I wish you would give me a chance.”

“A chance? Didn't I give you one? You should have done well when I gave it to you. Why are you suddenly going nuts? Why are you all making a fuss these days? You should just live as you are. Why are you struggling, huh? It makes me want to step on you.”

Father's cheek seemed to twitch slightly, then his shoulder moved greatly.

At that moment, with a dull impact, my jaw throbbed with pain. Father looked down at his fist that he swung at me, then turned his gaze to me standing silently with my head turned. A low sigh is heard, followed by the sound of him calling Secretary Kim.

“Secretary Kim, do as this bastard wants.”

Unable to even clutch my aching jaw, I stood still as he pushed my shoulder with his hand. My figure stumbling back looked truly pathetic. Getting punched by father... and despised...

‘Ha Jin. Why do you keep showing me this side of you, making me feel your asshole behavior was justified.’

I bit my lip to hold back the words that seemed to pour out. It felt like father’s punches would increase with a single word. I decided not to provoke him further as he was already agitated, and as I stayed still, father’s arrogant words were directed at me.

“But know this. My expectations are high. And you’re someone who doesn’t meet those expectations. You bastard. Just effort won’t be enough for you to meet my expectations. I don’t take back a card I’ve discarded once. Even if it causes me immense loss.”

He looked down at the back of his hand and frowned. The back of his hand had a small scratch. Just from getting his hand slightly scratched. I got a scar on my forehead and my cheekbone ripped open from assault. Father pointed to the door as if annoyed.

“Get out.”

Secretary Kim took out a handkerchief from his breast pocket and handed it to me, seeing me out to the door. Secretary Kim should probably stock up on large quantities of handkerchiefs to give to people who get hit each time. The office manager at the desk grabbed me with a pitying face.

“Ha Jin, at least put some ointment on before you go.”

The office manager took me to the break room next to the desk and took out disinfectant from the first-aid kit, wiping my mouth with a cotton swab soaked in it, then applying ointment and even putting on a band-aid. The side of my mouth must have split open from the punch.

Getting injuries on my face right before exams has become a daily occurrence.

* * *

“What’s with the mask?”

“I caught a cold.”

Kim Shin couldn’t hold back and snickered.

“They say even dogs don’t catch colds in May. You caught a cold in this weather? Our Ha Jin keeps making me want to take care of him these days.”

Kim Shin laughed and brushed my bangs aside, placing his palm on my forehead.

“There’s no fever though? Is my hand just warm?”

Kim Shin clenched and unclenched his hand, then soon brought his face close. As Kim Shin approached to check my fever with his forehead, I pulled back and he abruptly stopped. It wasn’t that I stepped back, but someone pulled me back from behind.

“The department president was looking for you. Let’s go.”

Sun Woo looked at Kim Shin with a chilly expression. Sun Woo must have gripped my arm with a lot of force because it felt like the blood wasn’t flowing.

“Mi-eun is really overflowing with passion.”

I freed my arm from Sun Woo’s grasp and waved goodbye to Kim Shin. Kim Shin brightly smiled and waved back.

“Ha Jin, call me if you need someone to nurse you. I took care of you a lot since we were young. We even slept in the same bed before.”

‘What is he saying?’

I just ignored it and followed Sun Woo.

“Where does it hurt?”

After the date mission Mi-eun gave us for the assignment, Sun Woo somewhat settled into the position of a normal classmate. He no longer avoided me or showed dislike. Although he didn’t act particularly close either.

“No. I’m fine.”

At my words, Sun Woo turned around and blocked me from the front. Sun Woo, who looked only a few centimeters taller than me, exuded a pressuring presence, perhaps because he was the protagonist, despite our small height difference.

Sun Woo raised his hand and placed it on my forehead, just as Kim Shin had done. Not expecting his hand to touch my forehead, I was startled and pulled my head back. Sun Woo easily placed his hand on my forehead again as I retreated.

“You have a bit of a fever though?”

That’s because you suddenly surprised me.

"I'm really fine. More importantly, Mi-eun must be waiting. Shouldn't we hurry before she yells?"

"She didn't call."

"Huh?"

"I said Mi-eun didn't call. I just thought we could get a meal together."

What is this?

It felt like something unbelievable happened, my mind went blank and my head that had been spinning well froze on the spot. I couldn't figure out why Sun Woo lied no matter how much I thought about it.

"Let's go. I'll buy you food."

The place Sun Woo dragged me to in a daze was a porridge restaurant. Sun Woo ordered abalone porridge for me and bibimbap for himself. When the food came out, I had no choice but to take off my mask. Then Sun Woo grabbed my chin and examined it, turning it side to side. Startled by his sudden touch, I had to shake my head while clumsily gripping the spoon.

"What's this?"

"Ah. It's nothing much."

Stunned that Sun Woo was buying me a meal, I awkwardly rubbed the scab on the corner of my mouth with my hand. The not yet healed wound roughly grazed my palm.

"Did you get hit again?"

"It just happened."

"...Let's talk after eating."

Sun Woo slowly started eating. I also ate the porridge and occasionally felt Sun Woo's gaze directed at me. His gaze felt warm and it made me feel strange. He probably finds me quite pitiful.

If I were Sun Woo, I would feel concerned too if I found out Ha Jin was suffering from domestic violence. I thought the kid was a bit messed up, but it turns out he has such a pitiful family situation? Well, that doesn't justify the shit Ha Jin has done so far though.

But the porridge tastes good since Sun Woo bought it for me.

Translator's note: This is a Korean saying meaning catching a cold in May (late spring) is very rare/unlikely.

#026

After eating porridge, Sun Woo stopped in front of a cafe.

"So it's not a cold then?"

"Yeah."

"Let me see."

Sun Woo's hand reached for my forehead again. His touch lingered for about 2 seconds before withdrawing, leaving a slight sense of disappointment. It felt nice and cozy.

"You don't have a fever. Want to drink coffee then?"

"No, not really."

To drink coffee, I'd have to take off my mask. At my refusal, Sun Woo simply said okay and headed back to school. He asked nonchalantly,

"You got hit by your father? Why?"

"Ah..."

"You don't have to say if it's uncomfortable."

"It's nothing much. It might feel a bit empty if you hear it."

"What is it?"

Sun Woo waited for my answer. When I actually tried to talk about it, I felt pathetic being hit by my father at this age.

"He's probably worried my grades will drop. Since he invested money and I suddenly said I'll do it on my own, he must have gotten pissed. And the thought that he can't trust Ha Jin is dominant."

How will Sun Woo view me getting hit over grades at this age?

"You know I'm a bit lacking from studying with me. Father must have seen that too."

"Is there no other reason besides that?"

“Hmm, for now, that seems to be it.”

“For now? Sounds like there were times you got hit for other things in the past.”

“It hasn’t been long since I got my act together. You know too. That I partied a lot.”

Sun Woo seriously examined my expression as I spoke. His demeanor was like looking at a precarious delinquent youth, so I smirked.

“My family situation isn’t that pitiful. Father just has high expectations, that’s all. He’s worried I might not be able to meet them. His expression of it is just a bit intense, that’s all.”

“So if the grade issue is resolved, there will be no reason for you to get hit?”

“Probably?”

Sun Woo grabbed my arm and stood me up.

He looked endlessly serious facing me. What is he setting the mood for to say something?

“Let’s study together, Ha Jin.”

“Huh?”

He’s saying he’ll study for exams with me again? Sun Woo?

Is he crazy? I’m totally fine with it. I immediately nodded with a bright expression.

“Really? Then should we do it in the department room during free periods?”

“No. Let’s do it at your house every day after school.”

I did wonder why it had to be at my house, but is now the time to nitpick that? I firmly grasped the lifeline thrown to me.

“I’d be grateful if you do that. It’s more comfortable too. But don’t you have a part-time job?”

Sun Woo was busy working part-time every day. The only day he didn’t have work was Friday.

“I quit them all.”

He quit them all. Even though he was working so diligently to make money.

“Why?”

“I have something to do this vacation.”

I wondered what that could be. But since the webtoon starts from the third year of college, I didn’t know what he did during the summer vacation of his second year.

“Really? Then let’s eat dinner and study together every day.”

Sun Woo nodded at my words.

Why did the kiss with Sun Woo come to mind at that moment? As expected of a body captivated by pleasure. Why am I needlessly anticipating something?

* * *

I sought out Kim Shin to get help from his files for this final exam as well. He was sitting on the club room sofa looking bored, but his face bloomed with color when I entered.

“What brings our Ha Jin here? To the club room and all?”

Kim Shin asked in a slick tone and sprang up to stand in front of me. With a delighted air, he playfully touched my hair with his long fingers. I slapped his hand away and simply stated my business.

“I was hoping to get the files for the final exam too.”

“Hmm, the files again? Is that why you came? Nothing else? Like you missed me. Or you want to eat together. Or watch a movie. There’s a lot, you know.”

“Just having the files is enough.”

It’s not like I have that kind of relationship with Kim Shin.

At my answer, Kim Shin grinned and took out a stack of papers from his bag that was sprawled on the table.

“I prepared them in advance. Aren’t you grateful?”

“You prepared these in advance?”

Well, this aspect was convenient at least.

As I admired his preparedness, Kim Shin linked arms with me and clung close, pestering me.

“Grateful, right? Then let’s go to the get-together this time. It’s the regular meeting this time. I don’t know about the rest, but at least come to the regular meeting. You know the kids come because of you. Hmm? I went through the trouble of getting the files for you too.”

Kim Shin kept urging me to go in a soft voice. Thinking I would never go to a thug gathering, I ignored him and tried to leave the club room, but Kim Shin brought up something that might tempt me.

“We decided on the place you like, the shooting range, this time.”

My steps came to an abrupt halt. The corners of my mouth twitched slightly, revealing my pleasure. Fortunately, I had my back turned to him. I turned my head, struggling not to show that I liked it. Kim Shin smiled at me as if he expected this.

“Shooting range?”

“You love shooting to death. Feel like going a little now?”

Ha Jin and I unexpectedly have something in common? I was called a sharpshooter in the military. With skills that never missed once I shot, I even got close to 5 days of vacation as a shooting reward before. For someone like me, I couldn’t help but perk up at the mention of shooting.

“...Where is it?”

In the end, I couldn’t resist the temptation and readily accepted attending that gathering.

* * *

“Phew, this is hard.”

The final exams are even more difficult. I took my hands off the laptop and sighed.

I’m barely keeping up, but it’s still hard as expected.

“You’ve gotten much better compared to the midterms.”

Sun Woo also took his hands off his laptop and leaned back in his chair.

Of course. If I was an empty can during midterms, now I’m a can with a bit of a bottom. This is all thanks to my blood, sweat, and tears.

“Should we call it a day?”

“Yeah.”

As I was closing and organizing my laptop, Sun Woo quietly looked at me. Seeing him suddenly reminded me of the gathering.

"I don't think I can study this Saturday because I have plans."

"What plans?"

"A get-together with friends. It happens twice a year and they said it's this Saturday."

"Ah, those friends?"

His tone sounded somewhat sarcastic. Sun Woo seemed to be thinking about something, then frowned as his eyebrows twitched.

"Is it a drinking occasion?"

Sun Woo's eyes narrowed as he looked at me.

"No, we're meeting around lunchtime and it'll end before dinner. Since we're meeting at a shooting range, there probably won't be alcohol."

Only then did Sun Woo relax his expression at my answer.

'...What was that?'

Sun Woo's reaction felt strange.

* * *

The place we arrived at was a high-end shooting range located not too far from Seoul. The outdoor parking lot was filled with expensive vehicles as if it were a supercar exhibition. I handed my car over to the waiting staff and entered the beige-toned building, where a neatly dressed employee guided me to a spot. Bulletproof glass separated the exterior and interior, and luxurious leather sofas were widely spread out in a row on the inside. Outside, a wide lawn was laid out, and there was something like a dirt-covered hill at a slight distance.

A gathering of the offspring of Korea's top corporations. This group, led by Ha Jin, holds a regular meeting twice a year. It seems they meet often even when it's not the day of the regular meeting.

Those who were already there welcomed me warmly as I showed up at the gathering after a long time.

"Ha Jin. Wow, I thought you were dead. Why is it so hard to see your face these days? It's no fun without you."

“Why has it been so long? Your number is out of service. Give me your new number later?”

“What the. Why does Ha Jin keep getting more handsome?”

I saw a few familiar faces from school. As everyone said something to me, I spotted Kim Shin behind them. His fierce face that was talking with others turned gentle with a smile as soon as he saw me. Kim Shin approached me with a grin.

“You’re here, Ha Jin? It would have been even better if we came together. While going on a drive too.”

Seeing people shaking their heads behind him, it seemed this kind of nonsense wasn’t a one-off. Kim Shin, not minding it, took me to the sofa. I sat down on the plush sofa and surveyed my surroundings.

In front of the bulletproof glass, long shotguns were lined up neatly in a row. They seemed to be personal firearms, each with a name tag attached to the shotgun.

While the news of shooting was welcome, I was a bit worried since I had never handled a shotgun even in the military. Well, shooting is probably the same.

Judging from the outdoor environment, it’s probably clay shooting.

“When are we starting?”

“What’s the rush? We’ll do it when we’re in the mood after eating and drinking a bit.”

Handling firearms while drinking alcohol. These guys seem completely out of their minds.

“I prepared the non-alcoholic drink for you too. Want me to bring it?”

“No. It’s okay.”

Despite my refusal, Kim Shin was simply happy that I came. Looking around, people were greeting each other and drinking in a relaxed atmosphere.

Kim Shin, who was sitting next to me, considerably drank from a glass of beverage instead of alcohol and deliciously ate a side dish he picked up. If someone saw, they would think it was alcohol, not a beverage.

“Are your studies going well these days?”

“Thanks to you getting me the files. Somewhat.”

“Why are you studying when you didn’t before?”

Kim Shin stared at me intently as if trying to grasp my hidden motives. You guessed wrong, Kim Shin. I’m really studying.

When I didn’t answer, Kim Shin laughed softly.

“The professor gives you the answer key.”

I flinched at Kim Shin’s words but quickly composed my expression as if it was nothing.

“You knew?”

“How long have I been stuck to you? You think I wouldn’t know that? Isn’t it overwhelming to suddenly study? It must be hard. You haven’t touched studying since middle school. You only did a bit of English because you were forced to at home. The rest is completely.”

Kim Shin made a slashing motion across his throat with his fingertips.

What, Kim Shin knew Ha Jin’s head was empty too? He seems to know more about Ha Jin than I do.

“It is overwhelming, but I’m catching up little by little.”

“Hmm, so you got hit by the chairman because of that?”

“Yeah.”

“Does he still do that these days? I thought he stopped after you entered college...”

Kim Shin muttered with a gloomy face as if he was the one who got hit.

So Ha Jin has been getting hit since a long time ago. Well, it was irrelevant. I won’t do things that will get me hit in the future... so I won’t get hit, right? But come to think of it, I wondered if saying I’ll study is something to get hit over.

‘Damn it, Ha Jin’s family!’

“Is Actress Baek still the same too? A relationship worse than strangers?”

Kim Shin really doesn’t seem to not know anything about Ha Jin.

“Still the same.”

“That’s too much. She can’t blame the chairman so she’s redirecting her arrow to innocent you... In a way, you’re a victim too.”

Kim Shin erased his gloomy expression and pointed to himself with a smiling face and outstretched finger.

“Someone who is more like family than family despite not being related.”

“Who?”

“Huh? You don’t see this finger?”

“I don’t see it.”

“How disappointing. Am I the only one who cherishes Ha Jin? Can’t you give me even a small handful of affection? I’m someone who is extremely thirsty for Ha Jin’s love.”

I let out an absurd laugh at Kim Shin’s words.

#027

One of the members of the gathering was shooting. He shouldered the long shotgun and stylishly hit the clay pigeon flying up.

The clay pigeons flew up from the left and right, shattering to pieces and falling to the ground with banging sounds.

‘Oh, this looks fun.’

I got up from my seat and walked towards the bulletproof glass. I picked up any one of the shotguns lined up there. There were name tags, but who cares. If the owner stops me, I can just pick up another gun.

Either everyone was too distracted drinking alcohol, or they couldn’t tell me it was their gun, because no one stopped me. Opening the door that separated the indoors and outdoors, there were circular shooting positions marked on the green lawn.

“Please come this way.”

A person who seemed to be an instructor wearing a bulletproof vest guided me to the center.

“We have prepared skeet shooting for today.”

Having just seen someone else shooting, I knew it was a style of shooting where clay pigeons are launched alternately from the left and right. The instructor handed me

earmuffs and bullets. Thanks to my military experience and observing the person who shot before me, I put on the earmuffs and loaded the gun using my judgment.

I shouldered the heavier-than-expected shotgun and took my stance. I'll hit it well, right? Since it's not a single shot but a gun that scatters pellets, it seemed like it would be okay. Still, as a military veteran, I took a quite cool stance. I thought my pose looked pretty awesome and signaled to launch the clay pigeons.

"Go."

At my shout, the left and right clay pigeons were launched into the air with a slight gap. I quickly followed the clay pigeons and pulled the trigger. My shoulder reflexively shook from the recoil of the bullets being fired.

With banging sounds ringing in my ears, the fired bullets hit the clay pigeons and shattered them to pieces. It went very smoothly for the first shot. As expected of a sharpshooter.

'This is fun.'

The instructor gave me a thumbs up and passed me more bullets. I reloaded and took my stance again.

"Go."

The clay pigeons flew up from both sides again and I hit them accurately. The sight of the clay pigeons shattering in a cloud of smoke was excellent for relieving stress.

Ha, it feels like I can breathe a little easier. Is this why Ha Jin liked shooting too?

I fired a few more shots like that. Everyone just watched me shoot and no one came to join me. Occasionally, when I looked back, I could see people sticking to the bulletproof glass giving me thumbs up or waving. Ha Jin is a total celebrity.

In the midst of feeling proud of my unforgotten shooting skills, I noticed someone entering from the corner of my eye. He was tall with a sturdy build, and seemed to be one of the gathering members as he was walking towards me with a grin.

He wasn't holding a gun and stopped walking next to me. Even though he had a smiling face, his slightly damp-looking gaze sent shivers down my spine.

"Ha Jin, long time no see."

"Yeah."

His gaze felt like it was licking me all over, and with an unpleasant feeling, I thought 'Should I leave?' But he reached out his hand towards the gun I was holding.

'Ah, is it that guy's?'

I handed it over to him without any regret and gave the earmuffs to the instructor.

I just wanted to get away from that guy's gaze first. But the moment I tried to take a step, he blocked me.

-Click

He took the gun from me, shouldered it, and aimed it at me.

'Did this bastard not go to the military? He doesn't even know you should never point a gun at a person?'

Just as I was thinking they were really out of their minds, I saw people beyond the bulletproof glass panicking. Only then did I feel something was seriously wrong.

"Hey! Jung Woo!"

Kim Shin shouted his name and ran over in a hurry.

"Fuck. Stop it. Kim Shin. If you don't want to see Ha Jin's head blown off."

Jung Woo?

Racking my brain at the familiar name, I remembered it was the name of the bastard who was passed out on the table when I first possessed this body. I remembered his bloody appearance. Why did I have to pick this guy's gun of all things?

"Are you all healed?"

At my nonchalant question, the boy snorted as if dumbfounded.

"Can't you see? I'm all healed and even aiming a gun at you."

"Put it down."

When I reached out to lower the muzzle, he avoided it and aimed at me again.

"Fuck, you have some guts. That's why you acted so brazen even after beating someone up. Right?"

"Didn't you learn during safety training not to point it at people?"

“Oh. A spoiled rich kid doesn’t know that. Only people like you follow that.”

As Kim Shin tried to move his feet while gauging the situation, Jung Woo put his finger on the trigger.

“Everyone get out except Ha Jin. If not, I’ll really shoot.”

Kim Shin faltered at Jung Woo’s words. The instructor seemed to have noticed something and didn’t move hastily, just carefully observed how I would react. At his attitude, I gave him a reassuring smile and nodded as if to say it’s okay.

“Everyone please leave. It seems Jung Woo has something to say to me.”

“Ha Jin!”

“It’s fine, so please close the door and leave.”

Kim Shin looked at Jung Woo pointing the gun at me and left following the instructor as if he had no choice, closing the door. Now only Jung Woo and I remained at the shooting range. Through the bulletproof glass, everyone was looking with shocked expressions, making me feel like I was trapped in a zoo.

Sigh... Ha Jin, what kind of shit is it this time? How do I clean this up?

“Wow, Ha Jin is so freaking cool. I’m falling for you. Huh?”

“Falling for me over something like this.”

“Fuck, seriously... Shouldn’t you be a little scared? It’s embarrassing for me.”

Jung Woo laughed but was dumbfounded by my calm appearance.

“Fuck, even this is so Ha Jin-like that it’s annoying. Seeing you live well after half-killing someone pisses me off.”

I looked him straight in the eye and calmly spoke to him.

“Were you hurt a lot?”

“I was hurt enough for my head to spin. There’s no place that didn’t get stitched up. I thought I became a rag doll or something. Eunha Group must be amazing. Renowned doctors came and treated me. I even stayed in the VIP ward. Isn’t it ironic that I got to enjoy such luxury because you beat me up?”

“I didn’t know you were hurt that badly.”

“When did you ever care about me? You only saw me as someone who lowered the class of your gatherings.”

Ah, Ha Jin...

Jung Woo seemed to have a lot of pent up feelings towards Ha Jin. Filled with hatred, he spat out each sharp word directed at me, making it hard to listen.

“If I apologize...”

“What? Apologize?”

Jung Woo cut off my words and laughed loudly. The shotgun shouldered on him shook up and down greatly with his laughter. The muzzle was still pointed at me. And his finger was gripping the trigger.

“Want to try it? Apologizing? Ha Jin is apologizing? That’s fucking amazing. Go ahead. Apologize.”

Before I could say anything, Jung Woo continued.

“But don’t just apologize, try kneeling down. And lie face down on the ground and apologize.”

No, I don’t even want to apologize for Ha Jin’s wrongdoing, and now he’s telling me to kneel? To a guy threatening me with a gun at that?

“If I apologize like that, will it make you feel better?”

When I spoke with one corner of my mouth twitching, not wanting to do it, Jung Woo’s expression flickered with madness.

“Fuck, it’s so tempting. You bastard. Do you really not want to do it with me once?”

What?

As I stayed still, Jung Woo stuck out his tongue and licked his lips. No wonder I got chills from the first time I saw him.

“You said you were interested in men, didn’t you?”

“Do I look interested?”

“You said it yourself. How does a man taste? That you’re curious. Fuck, even if I say I’ll let you know, you totally reject me. I’m good with Ha Jin either way, front or back.”

Crazy. Ha Jin's life is really spectacular. Birds of a feather flock together, but how does he have someone like this around him? As I looked dumbfounded, Jung Woo waved the gun muzzle.

"Ha Jin, don't you see the gun in front of you?"

"I see it."

"You seem to firmly believe I won't shoot. What will you do, I really want to shoot you dead right now."

"Then shoot."

"What?"

Jung Woo hardened his expression and asked while looking at me with force in his hand.

"Shoot. If you want to shoot, you should shoot. If that will make you feel better, do it."

Jung Woo's breath momentarily stopped. He twisted his lips and sneered.

"Crazy bastard."

"Jung Woo, no matter what, it's a bit much for you to call me crazy while pointing a gun at me."

"Bullshit..."

Jung Woo stared at me as if he would chew me up and swallow me at any moment. Then he laughed like a madman and soon his eyes, red with burst capillaries from using too much force, appeared. He slowly parted his lips.

"It would be a waste to kill you. If you're going to die anyway, you should have done it with me just once."

"I feel like I've become Chunhyang*. Byun Jung Woo."

"Fuck, what a shitty feeling! Was me asking to do it once something to beat me half to death over?"

Ah, only now do I realize what happened the moment I first possessed this body.

So Jung Woo asked Ha Jin to do it once and got beaten half to death.

That crazy Ha Jin, even if he went overboard, how could he beat the kid to the point of dying?

Jung Woo was trembling as he barely aimed the gun at me, resting it on his hand. If it's a shotgun at this distance, even if I survive, my face and body will all be torn apart.

'Should I just get shot and die? Die.'

I smiled at Jung Woo, raising the corners of my mouth as if to say go ahead and try it. Very benevolently.

As if he hated my smile, Jung Woo bit his lower lip hard with his teeth. His pale lips trembled slightly. The hand holding the gun slowly moved. His eyes momentarily became hazy as if thinking about something, and he opened his mouth weakly.

"Goodbye. Ha Jin."

He bids farewell in an extremely dry voice. His voice felt painfully constricting on my skin. The sound of Jung Woo's clothes brushing against my ear was clearly audible.

With those words, his right index finger pulled the trigger. His movements seemed to be in slow motion and my eyes closed.

*Translator's note: Chunhyang is the female protagonist of a famous Korean folktale known for her chastity and loyalty. The male lead threatens her to sleep with him.

#028

– Click

Only the sound of the trigger being pulled rang from the gun that didn't fire. Looking at Jung Woo's surprised face, I smiled as if I knew this would happen.

Jung Woo kept pulling the trigger, but the gun showed no response. Of course. There were no loaded bullets in the shotgun.

"Do you know how many rounds a shotgun can hold? Do you remember I just shot two clay pigeons?"

"Fuck!"

Jung Woo finally realized that he had been threatening me with an empty gun from the start. His eyes turned to anger when he realized I was toying with him, knowing there were no bullets left.

In case he engaged in hand-to-hand combat, I barely blocked him suddenly swinging the shotgun with my left arm raised. A thudding sound and a sharp pain followed. Without time to be in pain, I immediately punched Jung Woo's wrist as he swung again.

Momentarily, his grip loosened and I snatched the shotgun in that gap. The name tag on the shotgun that returned to my hand dangled in front of my eyes. The name written on it wasn't his.

"It's not even your gun."

As soon as I took the gun, the security team rushed in and surrounded Jung Woo. While restrained, Jung Woo yelled with veins bulging on his neck.

"Let go! Let go right now!"

Jung Woo's unblinking whites of the eyes turned even redder and his struggling appearance was hard to see as a normal human being.

"A bastard like you needs to be punished. Right, Ha Jin?"

"I know. But it's not worth repaying with death."

"What did I do wrong to end up half dead?"

"Don't you know better?"

"Crazy Ha Jin. Your kind are a cancerous lump on society. You think you're born noble? You don't even know everyone is born naked the same way."

He was still snorting and letting out rough breaths.

"Fuck. Categorizing people within the same group, what bullshit. You're saying I'm low class? A chaebol snob? I'm not a chaebol, just a self-made family that got lucky. You guys ride on your parents' coattails and act like punks without any skills. Isn't that even lower? You'll never know until you die that you're the truly low class ones."

Jung Woo seemed to have said all he wanted to say and finally stopped struggling. Seeing his face, I somehow felt that I really came to bear Ha Jin's karma. Jung Woo's eyes were filled with nothing but hostility.

"What if I had really died? Were you going to spend the rest of your life in a cell as a murderer?"

"It wouldn't be so bad to kill a bastard like you and live like that."

"Why are you giving up on life? Just because of me?"

"I don't have a life anyway. Rather than just hanging around the edges of your kind, it's better to do one big thing and bid farewell to this world."

"Jung Woo. Don't tie your neck to me. I'm living my life, so why aren't you living yours and just getting dragged around?"

Those weren't words that should come from someone who looked down on and ostracized people. But the current me didn't disdain him or think we were of different classes just because he was a chaebol snob. So I wanted him to stop his rampage-like actions.

Jung Woo listened to my words with a pale complexion, tightly closing his lips. His forehead that had veins popping was smooth again. Seeing Jung Woo who seemed to have calmed down a bit, I continued speaking gently.

"As you said, will these kids who live off their parents' coattails without any skills be able to fulfill their roles in society? If you rise to the top, they'll all try to cater to you. Right?"

Saying it felt like spitting at the sky. Jung Woo must have agreed with my words as he snickered.

"Ha Jin. You know you're the most incompetent, right?"

"I know. So try oppressing me with power and status, not physical force."

"You bastard. You really say the most tempting things."

"Stop asking me to serve you. I won't do it."

As soon as I finished speaking, Jung Woo burst into laughter. His snake-like face looked like a boy my age for the first time. He looked at me with the face of a child venting his dissatisfaction from not getting attention.

"What do I need to become to oppress you with status?"

"I don't know? Maybe become the president?"

"You're telling me to never even dream of it in my life?"

"You understand well."

"Fuck."

Jung Woo was dragged out of the shooting range by the security team, but he turned back once more.

“Ha Jin.”

Then he called out to me, trying to maintain a calm voice, but I could feel it slightly trembling at the end.

“I’m glad you didn’t die.”

“Yeah, I need to be alive for you to do it with me once, right?”

“Crazy bastard.”

With a sigh-mixed smile, Jung Woo was dragged out of the shooting range like that.

Once the whole situation was cleared up, the security team opened the door they were blocking. Kim Shin, who couldn’t enter because of them, ran over in one stride and wrapped his arms around my shoulders.

“Are you okay?”

His touch was so desperate that his finger marks were left on my skin. His lips that had turned pale were red and swollen, probably from biting them in anxiety. He was scanning me with fierce eyes, making me shrink back reflexively. What, did Kim Shin know how to make this kind of expression too? Feeling strange, I slightly shook off his grip on my shoulders and escaped from him.

Only then did I look around. Just like when I first possessed this body, everyone had frightened faces. Now seeing those faces made me feel disillusioned. I slowly moved my gaze, staring at each of them individually. They all looked at me with sympathetic and worried gazes in response to my gaze.

It was the people here who drove Jung Woo to that state. My role was probably the biggest among them.

Not wanting to see their faces anymore, I left the spot. Kim Shin followed behind me, and I requested to rest and was guided to an empty office.

“Drink this.”

Kim Shin held out a cup of warm water with slightly trembling hands. It seemed he needed to calm down more than me. I got up from the sofa and sat Kim Shin down.

“Why?”

Kim Shin overreacted to my small action. His eyes were still sharply fierce.

“You seem more shocked than me.”

“Haa, of course I’d be shocked. Seriously. Ha Jin...”

His sharply raised eyes drooped. In an instant, the fierce Kim Shin was gone and a trivial Kim Shin sat there, swaying like a dandelion fluff in the wind.

“You could have at least told me there were no bullets.”

“Didn’t the instructor tell you?”

“I didn’t even think to ask and my mind went blank, unable to think of anything. I just felt like you were really going to die...”

Kim Shin lowered his head, trailing off. I handed the warm water he gave me back to him. At my action, Kim Shin brought his hand to his heart and looked at me with sparkling eyes in a burdensome way.

“Ha Jin. I’m too shocked right now to properly feel this moving situation. Can you treat me like this again later?”

“Looks like you’re fine now.”

Seeing him spout nonsense like it’s nothing. Kim Shin seemed to have regained his energy. Color returned to his face and his eyes curved beautifully. His smiling face was docile again.

“I contacted Secretary Kim. Wait here for a bit. I’ll go wrap up the gathering and send the kids off.”

A short while after Kim Shin left, the sound of urgent footsteps that seemed to be running was heard in the quiet hallway. Soon the door opened and Secretary Kim appeared, panting with his tie askew.

“Secretary Kim.”

As I stood up from where I was sitting, Secretary Kim stopped in front of me and took rapid breaths.

“Whew, huff, coming... running at full speed at this age is killing me.”

“You came quickly. The roads must have been jammed since it’s the weekend.”

“Are you unharmed? I got a rough update on my way that it was resolved...”

When I smiled at Secretary Kim, he let out a big sigh at my appearance.

“Haa, thank goodness. Don’t worry about the follow-up. We will take measures so he never appears in front of young master Ha Jin again. And we will hold those in charge of management here accountable.”

“Secretary Kim. I’m not in a position to hold anyone accountable. I hope this matter can be let go like this.”

“What? What do you mean by that...”

Secretary Kim made a very puzzled expression, then ruffled my hair with both hands before letting go. It seemed he was checking if I was injured. There’s no way a nonexistent injury would be felt.

“You weren’t hit on the head, right?”

“I wasn’t hit.”

Secretary Kim’s expression, which always looked like a weary office worker, seemed to have become more varied these days, so I smiled slightly, making him furrow his brow.

“Letting it go like this will leave greater trouble later.”

“The one who did wrong first was us. I talked it out with Jung Woo before sending him off, so he won’t do that again.”

Secretary Kim was dumbfounded by my words.

“Young master Ha Jin. I heard you almost died?”

“I could have died if I was shot.”

“Yes. I heard you were threatened with a gun. What if the other person tries to kill you again?”

“He won’t do that.”

“How can you be sure?”

The last time I saw Jung Woo’s face, I had a feeling he wouldn’t harbor hostility towards me anymore. And Ha Jin was a main character-level figure in the webtoon, so he wouldn’t die, right? Probably?

Come to think of it, I wondered how Ha Jin would have handled the incident with Jung Woo. Would he have shot as soon as Jung Woo entered the shooting range? With his asshole personality, he seems more than capable of that.

“I don’t die that easily.”

At my words, Secretary Kim flinched.

“Ah. Right. You don’t die easily.”

“Why are you repeating my words in a scary way? As if you failed to kill me.”

Secretary Kim just laughed as if it was a joke and took out a handkerchief to wipe the sweat he shed from running. It was ironic to see him using the handkerchief properly. He had always used it to wipe my blood.

I asked Secretary Kim again to quietly let this matter go. I made a few more requests and then came out with Secretary Kim.

“Will father call for me again?”

At my question, Secretary Kim let out an empty laugh.

“No way. This time you’re the victim, so he won’t do that.”

“Is that so?”

Secretary Kim stopped in front of a black sedan and bowed before getting in the car. Then he soon rolled down the window.

“You must have been startled, should I give you a ride?”

“No, it’s okay. I’ll go in my own car.”

“More than that, I’m not sure if it’s right to just let it go quietly. Shouldn’t we at least send that person overseas?”

“It’s fine. If he messes with me again, we can take action then.”

“Young master Ha Jin. You’ve changed a lot.”

“Why? Because I’m not acting like a punk like before?”

When I laughed, Secretary Kim laughed along.

“I like it.”

Secretary Kim started the car like that, letting out a laugh.

The mood had already turned into a mess, and while I was talking separately with Secretary Kim, Kim Shin must have properly wrapped things up as everyone had left. I walked to my car, which was left alone in the now empty parking lot. I got in the car, started the engine, and stayed still for a while.

I thought I was fine, but when I got in the car, my left arm hurt. It seemed the pain from getting hit by the swinging shotgun was only being felt now. It must be because the tension had dissipated.

It didn't feel too difficult to drive, but I hesitated to start right away. As I was sitting still in the car like that, someone knocked on the window.

When I rolled down the window, Kim Shin bowed his body and made eye contact with me, looking worried.

"You haven't left yet?"

"I can't bring myself to leave because I'm worried about you, Ha Jin."

He still cares a lot despite just being Ha Jin's friend. Not only does he smile innocently in front of me despite his sharp eyes, but I also recalled Kim Shin's desperate face as he ran to stop Jung Woo, making me smile weakly.

"Should I drive for you?"

"..."

I felt like I should refuse, but the words didn't come out of my mouth. Kim Shin opened the car door, reading my mood. He naturally made me get out and sat in the driver's seat himself. With his natural actions, I got out of the car without realizing it and headed to the passenger seat.

Sitting in the passenger seat, Kim Shin reached over and fastened my seatbelt for me.

"You have good manners, Kim Shin."

"I'm doing this because it's you, Ha Jin."

"You disgusting guy."

"Want me to show you something even more disgusting?"

Kim Shin smiled with his eyes beautifully curved, then stretched his right arm and placed his hand towards the back of my seat. Then he turned his head back and reversed the car.

“How was it? Did you fall for me? Am I cool?”

He smoothly pulled out in one go and wagged his tail like a puppy waiting for praise. Seeing that, I held out my palm to Kim Shin.

“Hand.”

Kim Shin understood my intention and grinned, placing his right hand on top of mine with a plop. He liked it even though he knew he was being treated like a dog. How deep was their friendship that Kim Shin was so blindly devoted to Ha Jin?

As Kim Shin’s hand was placed, the rebound made my arm move and I frowned at the sharp pain.

“Your arm must hurt.”

“I think I got injured while blocking earlier.”

“Should we go to the hospital?”

At Kim Shin’s worried suggestion, I thought my body was my asset and nodded.

“Let’s do that. Drop me off at the hospital.”

When I agreed to do as Kim Shin said, his expression brightened incomparably. He even hummed as he drove the car. We stopped by the hospital on the way, got a simple examination, and even got medicine to prepare for any possible infection. When I opened the medicine packet in the car and took it right away, Kim Shin looked at me worriedly.

“Can you take it on an empty stomach?”

“I roughly ate earlier.”

“Still, you should have eaten a meal before taking it.”

“I’m planning to take it once more before going to bed later.”

Kim Shin started the car. Looking at the clock, it matched the time I expected the gathering to end. The incident caused the gathering to end in a rush without even properly starting, and since it ended early, I talked with Secretary Kim and stopped by the hospital, so the timing roughly matched.

“Ha Jin, no matter how much you say there were no bullets, it was still reckless. It’s not the first time I’ve seen you in precarious situations. Think about the people watching too. You know I think about you a lot, right?”

His voice was filled with worry.

“Mmm...”

My answer was slowly drawn out. Kim Shin glanced at me while driving.

“Are you sleepy, Ha Jin?”

“Yeah... is it the medicine?”

“Get some shut-eye. I’ll wake you up when we arrive at your place.”

“Do you know where I live?”

“Of course I do.”

“I moved out and live on my own though?”

“Don’t worry. I know everything.”

Really?

I don’t know. Ha Jin probably told him. I buried my head in the seat and closed my eyes, feeling drowsy. Kim Shin lowered the volume of the music playing in the car. Thanks to Kim Shin’s smooth driving, I quickly fell asleep.

* * *

“...Jin ...up.”

Something called out to me as if echoing from a distant place.

“Ha Jin. Wake up.”

A gentle voice was carefully waking me up. When I opened my eyes, Kim Shin was smiling and fiddling with my hair. His lips were visible right in front of my eyes. They were still red and swollen from biting them out of worry for me.

“You’re awake?”

A warm gaze was directed at me, which really didn’t suit that cold face.

“Looks like I fell asleep.”

As I regained my senses, my mouth felt sweet, showing how deeply I had slept. With my mind still hazy, I leaned my head back and closed my eyes for a moment. Even with my eyes closed, I could feel Kim Shin looking at me and smiling.

“I was going to wait until you woke up, but the guest isn’t leaving and keeps staying?”

“Guest?”

Does it mean a guest came to my house? When Kim Shin turned off the engine, the interior light in the car automatically turned on. Kim Shin stayed close to me like that for a while longer, stroking my hair. I could feel him letting out a small laugh seeing me having a hard time waking up. His breath tickled me, making me open my eyes. Kim Shin got out of the car first, and seeing me still sluggish from sleep, he opened the passenger door for me instead.

“You still turn weak and limp when drowsy with sleep.”

Kim Shin helped me get out, unable to come to my senses, and pointed outside with his finger.

“I left the parking lot shutter open because I didn’t know how to close it. A guest has been waiting for a while.”

“Huh?”

Staggering as I walked, I shifted my gaze outside. I looked with drowsy eyes, and seeing the person referred to as the guest, my sleepiness completely went away.

The guest was none other than Sun Woo.

‘Why is Sun Woo here? We agreed to skip today because I had a gathering and he would come around lunchtime tomorrow, which is Sunday.’

I walked quickly towards Sun Woo.

“Is today Sunday?”

My head must not have fully woken up from sleep, so I asked a strange question without thinking properly.

“Today is Saturday.”

“Right? Did we plan to study together today?”

“No. I just thought your gathering would end around this time. It wasn’t too late so I came to study.”

“Did you wait long?”

“About 30 minutes since I saw your car come in?”

Sun Woo didn't take his eyes off my face. His gaze, as cold as it could be, was tinged with obsession.

‘No way, Kim Shin stayed still in the car for 30 minutes just because I was asleep? He must have seen Sun Woo here...’

I thought Kim Shin was being too considerate of me. He must have felt bad waking me up since I was asleep.

“What's this. You two meet on weekends to study too?”

Kim Shin heard our conversation and walked over, laughing playfully. Sun Woo kept looking at me without giving Kim Shin a single glance, even as he approached. Kim Shin also ignored Sun Woo like that and asked me with a grin. It was as if the two of them were under a magic spell that made them unable to see each other.

‘What's with these guys?’

“Is it for the final exams? Is that why you're studying together?”

“Yeah. Because of the final exams.”

“Hmm, what about me? I got you the test files and everything, but you're studying with someone else, Ha Jin?”

Since what Kim Shin said wasn't wrong, I stayed still, and Sun Woo pulled me towards him. Still drowsy with sleep and lacking strength, I was easily dragged by him. Sun Woo's firm chest touched my back. Despite still being in a hazy state, I couldn't help but admire, ‘He has a nice body,’ as I slightly felt his body against my back.

“Let's go inside.”

As if displeased with me being weak, Sun Woo lightly pushed my shoulder. With that, I took a step forward. And my steps naturally continued.

“Oh, okay. Let's go in.”

Sun Woo naturally followed behind me as I headed towards the entrance. And behind him, Kim Shin followed, moving his body side to side as if having fun.

“Let me study with you too. You're not going to throw me away after just getting the test files from me, right? Our Ha Jin isn't such a heartless person, is he?”

Right, if I had a conscience, I couldn't tell Kim Shin who got me the test files to go home in this situation. Although Sun Woo doesn't seem to like Kim Shin very much, I couldn't exclude Kim Shin in this situation. He helps me in many ways, so I can't chase him away saying I don't want to study with him...

"Do you want to do that?"

"Yes, yes. Let's eat dinner and study together. What do you want to eat? What's good in this neighborhood?"

Kim Shin spoke with an excited face and followed behind the two of us who were ahead. As we were about to open the front door and go inside, a loud bell rang from Kim Shin's pocket.

"Ah, I'll take a call and come in."

Saying that, Kim Shin answered the phone as if it was bothersome.

Sun Woo and I entered the entrance, and the door closed behind us with a click of the lock.

At the same time, an arm wrapped around my waist and I was swiftly pulled into Sun Woo's embrace. Sun Woo with his cold gaze approached my face closely and instantly covered my lips with his.

"Mmph."

Sun Woo's hot tongue ravaged the inside of my mouth. Surprised by his sudden action, I wrapped my arms around Sun Woo's back and clasped my hands to avoid falling over.

As I wrapped my arms around him, Sun Woo tilted his head to the side and pressed even more densely against me.

"Mmm..."

While fiercely exploring me, Sun Woo's eyes remained cold, staring into my two eyes. His gaze that seemed to never let go for a single moment moved away at the sound of knocking on the front door.

Sun Woo pulled away from me and gently wiped the corner of my mouth with his soft touch.

"Looks like you didn't kiss."

That was the conclusion Sun Woo arrived at after suddenly showering me with kisses.

Sun Woo passed by me who was in a daze and opened the front door. Kim Shin came inside with an excited face and sniffed around.

“Wow, it’s full of Ha Jin’s scent.”

Kim Shin passed by me who was in a daze and quickly went inside, busy looking around the house.

Sun Woo tapped me as if playing a game of freeze tag. At his touch, my frozen body soon moved. As I took off my shoes and entered, Sun Woo whispered in my ear.

“I checked.”

So what did he check? With a puzzled expression, I looked at Sun Woo who had a face that was neither happy nor unhappy.

“Checked what you did for those 30 minutes.”

Sun Woo spoke without a subject, as if playing 20 questions, and went inside. His nonchalant attitude made me wonder if he was really the same person who kissed me indulgently just now.

What is this... so he thought I stayed in the car for 30 minutes without getting out and was kissing with Kim Shin? No, more importantly, can you tell if someone has kissed just by kissing them? Does he have a detector on his tongue?

It was hard to keep up with Sun Woo’s radical actions.

#030

Somehow, it turned into a strange combination of people gathering. Was this going to be like a time where the model student tries to reform two troublemakers? Kim Shin was busy looking around everywhere, while Sun Woo sat at the table, not even glancing in Kim Shin’s direction, focused on copying notes from papers he had brought onto his laptop. As for me, the other troublemaker, I watched Kim Shin with a tired face.

“Then I’ll go wash up.”

“Oh? Me too, me too. Ha Jin, give me any of your clothes. I want to shower and change too. These clothes are uncomfortable.”

Even though Kim Shin wasn’t wearing his usual suit today because of the shooting gathering, he still claimed his casual clothes were uncomfortable and asked for my clothes. When I hesitated, Kim Shin reached out and put his arm around my shoulder.

“Come on. You used to wear my clothes often when you came to my house too.”

“To shower?”

“Yeah. Why, want to shower together?”

I jumped away from his side, startled by Kim Shin’s words.

“Now I’m hurt, Ha Jin. You don’t have to react like that.”

With a sly face, Kim Shin approached me again, trying to reach out, but his arm was suddenly caught by Sun Woo’s hand.

“Follow me. I’ll give you clothes.”

“You, Sun Woo? Did you bring clothes too?”

Sun Woo naturally led Kim Shin to my dressing room. On the way, he didn’t forget to turn back and tell me:

“Ha Jin, go shower. I’ll take care of Kim Shin.”

“Oh? Oh. Then I’ll leave it to you.”

Leave it to you? Who’s leaving who to whom?

I tilted my head in confusion at my own response. Sun Woo, who had so naturally snatched Kim Shin away, disappeared into the dressing room.

I quickly showered and headed to the living room. Since I felt uneasy leaving those two alone, I came out with just a towel on my head, not even drying my hair. Kim Shin wasn’t visible, presumably in the shower, and only Sun Woo was at the kitchen table.

“Sun Woo, did you give Kim Shin clothes?”

“Kim Shin was helping himself to clothes. More importantly, why didn’t you dry your hair?”

“I came out right after showering.”

“You’ll catch a cold. Come here.”

Sun Woo called me while pulling out the chair next to him at the dining table. A cold in this weather? I could somewhat predict what would happen if I sat there. But I told myself not to expect anything, dismissing it as my excessive imagination, and sat in the chair he pulled out.

Sun Woo stood up and moved behind me.

‘No way... no way?’

My imagination became reality. He grabbed the towel and started drying my hair from behind.

What’s going on now? Ha Jin, what exactly is happening to you... Is this some kind of reward for almost dying today?

While Sun Woo was drying my hair, I saw Kim Shin coming out of the guest room through my messy bangs. The moment I saw him in a white short-sleeve t-shirt and shorts, I jumped up from my seat and ran to him.

“You!”

“Ha Jin, did you miss me that much? Running to me just because you haven’t seen me for a bit? I think I might cry.”

Kim Shin hugged me without even asking why I came over, swaying side to side happily. I immediately broke free from his embrace and looked at the t-shirt he was wearing. The pure white t-shirt had a sea turtle embroidered on it.

Crazy... That was the shirt I was saving untouched for meeting grandmother.

“Take that off.”

“Take it off here? Ha Jin, shouldn’t we do that when we’re alone? Sun Woo is watching us intensely.”

“I’ll give you something else. Take it off quickly.”

“Okay, okay. You’re in such a hurry.”

Kim Shin immediately took off the shirt right there. As the white t-shirt rode up along his arms, his well-defined abs appeared before my eyes, followed by his perfectly proportioned chest. Kim Shin, with his slightly tanned skin, had a firm physique that matched his fierce face well. I briefly admired his good build before taking the shirt he handed over.

“Should I have this dry cleaned...”

“What, is it such a precious shirt?”

“It was a gift. I’ll bring you another shirt.”

I went to the dressing room, carefully hung up the t-shirt, and came out with another random shirt I grabbed. I handed it to Kim Shin, who was still shirtless, telling him to put it on quickly, then headed to the kitchen.

“Should we make some ramen?”

“Ramen?”

I had asked Sun Woo, but Kim Shin, following me into the kitchen while putting on the shirt, was the one who responded.

“You can’t eat spicy food.”

Ha Jin the spice wimp...

“I have the mildest kind.”

Unable to give up ramen completely, I occasionally made the kind known to be the mildest. Kim Shin sat down next to Sun Woo with an amused smile. It was the same spot where I had just been sitting, letting Sun Woo dry my hair.

“I remember when you wanted ramen before, I used to rinse it in water for you.”

Kim Shin closed his eyes and smiled, curling up the corners of his mouth as if reminiscing. Ironically, these memories Kim Shin had with Ha Jin were ones I didn’t possess.

“Want me to make it?”

Sun Woo asked as I was taking out the ramen.

“It’s okay. I’ll make it.”

“Ha Jin, you couldn’t use the induction stove before, but I guess you can now?”

Sun Woo said this while looking at Kim Shin. What... are you tattling to Kim Shin about me not being able to use the induction stove?

Kim Shin just smiled gently at Sun Woo’s gaze.

“Ha Jin, sit down. I’ll just make it. Seeing you in the kitchen makes me nervous. You used to get small injuries all the time because of how careless you were.”

Kim Shin got up, made me sit down, and filled a pot with water.

“Ha Jin, want me to put the egg in without breaking it?”

...Ha Jin and I have exactly the same taste in this one thing. Not breaking the egg when cooking ramen.

“Yeah.”

Kim Shin opened the refrigerator, seemingly looking for eggs, but pulled out some beer cans instead.

“Ha Jin, this is surprising. You actually have beer in your fridge. I’m going to have this. Sun Woo, want one too?”

“Just give me one can.”

“Oh, I’m happy to drink together.”

Kim Shin came over with beer cans and eggs in his arms, smiling. While the ramen with eggs was cooking, Kim Shin opened the beer and held it out to Sun Woo for a toast. Sun Woo reluctantly clinked cans and drank. After taking a sip, Kim Shin gave me an apologetic look.

“Sorry for drinking just between us. Maybe I should’ve gone to the convenience store to get non-alcoholic beer.”

“It’s fine.”

“Or Ha Jin, want to try a sip?”

I narrowed my eyes at Kim Shin’s playful suggestion. He responded with a handsome smile.

“Ah, drunk Ha Jin is really pretty. Too bad I don’t get to see that anymore.”

“The ramen’s boiling.”

I cut off Kim Shin’s unnecessary comments by mentioning the ramen. Soon the bubbling ramen was served at the table, and we each silently served ourselves portions. Despite being an odd combination, the three of us shared a comfortable meal without any awkwardness.

It’s been a series of strange events.

To see these three people together in one scene.

Kim Shin was good at cooking ramen, and the three hungry young people quickly emptied the pot.

Since the study desk in the library was too small for three people, we sat at the dining table to organize the exam papers. Unlike during midterms, I was now able to contribute some opinions. Though compared to Sun Woo, my input was still minimal.

Without Sun Woo's help during midterms, I would have certainly had something broken by my father as soon as the test results came out.

Kim Shin lazily skimmed through what we were organizing. When I shot him disapproving looks for his clear lack of interest in studying, he would finally brighten up and smile at me with sparkling eyes.

As much as I wanted to tell him not to spoil the mood and leave my house immediately... the exam papers he'd provided held me back.

Kim Shin folded his eyes into crescents as he smiled at me, then clapped his hands.

"Ah! Ha Jin, you need to take your medicine. I almost forgot."

"Did you leave it in the car?"

"I brought it down with me."

Kim Shin handed me the medicine bag he'd left on the living room table. He even brought me a cup of water and quietly watched as I took the medicine. Sun Woo gave me a questioning look at my sudden medicine-taking.

"Are you sick?"

In response to Sun Woo's question, Kim Shin gestured towards my left arm.

"There was an incident today where Ha Jin hurt their arm."

"What incident?"

"Ah, well. Ha Jin, should I tell?"

Kim Shin asked if it was okay to tell.

"Sun Woo, I'll tell you about it later."

Just then, Kim Shin's phone rang loudly. He excused himself to take the call, then returned with a deeply frowning face.

"Damn. I need to go. Seems they heard about today's incident. Given who the people involved are, rumors spread instantly. These kids all have such loose lips. Father wants me to come and explain everything... Is it okay if I tell them?"

“Just tell them exactly what you saw.”

Kim Shin sat with a blank expression, fiddling with his phone. Then he examined the clothes of mine he was wearing, lifting the fabric to sniff it.

“Can I keep wearing this? I love that it smells like Ha Jin.”

“Keep it.”

“Really? Then I’ll wash it and return it later.”

“No need. Throw it away.”

“Nah. I’ll treasure it as my precious possession.”

Kim Shin showed a sly smile, clearly pleased. Soon he got another call, and he said his driver had arrived to pick him up and bid farewell before leaving. After Kim Shin left, we continued studying in the now calmer atmosphere. Between the effects of the medicine and Sun Woo’s deep voice, my eyes began to close slowly.

“Sleepy?”

“Ah, sorry. Let’s continue.”

“Go to sleep if you’re tired.”

“But you made time to come, and we hardly got anything done.”

“Well, this wasn’t supposed to be a study day anyway. Let’s go in.”

“Huh?”

“I’ll watch you fall asleep before I leave.”

Sun Woo helped me up from the chair with his strong arm. When he said he’d clean up and follow after, telling me to go ahead, I walked to my room as if in a trance. Only after entering the room did I wonder whether I should lie down on the bed or tell Sun Woo it was fine and that he could leave.

My deliberation became meaningless when Sun Woo opened the door and came in, his presence alone making me decide to fall asleep under his care. Yes, I admit it. I was captivated by his handsome face.

“Lie down.”

Though it was a simple command, coming from Sun Woo's lips it sounded so pleasant – seems the Ha Jin demon still hasn't been exorcised. In my sleepy state, I obediently climbed onto the bed as Sun Woo instructed. Sitting at the headboard, Sun Woo even personally covered me with the blanket.

"What's this about getting hurt?"

At Sun Woo's question, I told him about today's incident with Jung Woo. A very sanitized version. Omitting the part about him pointing the gun, just saying he swung it and hit me. After listening quietly, Sun Woo suddenly expressed concern about Ha Jin's relationships.

"Do you really need to meet those people? If you want to hang out, the school kids are fine too."

"I only need to go to the regular meetings."

"Ha Jin. Be selective about who you associate with."

"Mmhmm."

What's with this guardian-like statement?

He used his fingers to fix my hair that had fallen onto my face. Pleased by his gentle touch, I smiled slightly, which made Sun Woo's hand pause for a moment.

Wanting more attention, I nuzzled my head against his hand, and his fingers resumed playing with my hair.

"Sun Woo. Want to sleep together?"

Late at night, drunk with sleep, I blurted out words without realizing their meaning, only understanding their implications belatedly. Just as I was sinking into sleep, those words I spoke forcefully pulled me back to the surface.