

Placing the Displaced:

Translating the North Korean Characters in *Sister Mok-rahn*
for an American Audience

Dayoung Lee
(Dayoung Jeong)
정다영

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FOREWORD

“I have become intrigued with displaced things—things that are wrong.
And translation is in a perpetual state of being wrong.”
- Don Mee Choi

The translator is the secret master of the difference of languages, a difference he is not out to abolish, but rather one he puts to use as he brings violent or subtle changes to bear on his own language, thus awakening within it the presence of that which is at origin different in the original.

- Maurice Blanchot (trans. Richard Sieburth)

I think most authors, if asked, would say, ‘Be faithful to the spirit of my book, not its letter.’ Conjuring that spirit is an exercise in magic, a magic more potent because most of its operations are hidden.

- Hilary Mantel

No two languages are more different from each other than American English and Korean spoken in the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (North Korea). It goes the same for their speakers. Average theatergoers in New York in 2017 share little with the average North Koreans or North Korean refugees scattered around the world. So how should a translator present North Korean characters for an American audience? This was one of the biggest challenges for me as I was translating *Sister Mok-rahn* (목란 언니) by South Korean playwright, Eunsung Kim (김은성).

North Koreans have an unusual status in South Korea. Since the South Korean law does not recognize the legitimacy of the North Korean government, refugees who are accepted into the country are, by law, immediately and automatically considered as citizens. They more or less look the same albeit their fashion style might indicate that they are not as urban as South Koreans living in a metropolitan city. They use the same writing system, *Hangul*. And yet, they are shrouded by the air of foreignness. One factor that contributes to their *otherness* is none other than how they speak. North

Korean dialects are so foreign to South Koreans that while the defectors are trained at Hanawon, a resettlement support center run by the Ministry of Unification, they can take an elective course which teaches them to speak like South Koreans. This way, North Korean defectors can blend in easier to the South Korean mainstream society.

However, it seems like none of the North Korean characters in *Sister Mok-rahn* has taken the language course. When they speak, it is obvious that they are not from South Korea. Their dialect gives an excuse to South Korean characters as well as the South Korean audience to *otherize* them. It seems that the playwright intended the North Korean characters to be linguistically displaced in this play set in South Korea.

As I was translating the play for the staged reading at the 2017 PEN World Voices International Play Festival, I had to walk a tightrope between domestication and foreignization of the source text. This paper reflects upon how I have attempted to align my intent to introduce a South Korean play to New York audience to share a story that probably was never heard before with my translation strategy and effects.

SISTER MOK-RAHN

Written by Eunsung Kim, *Sister Mok-rahn* premiered at the Doosan Art Center in Seoul, South Korea in 2012. With critical acclaim¹ and popularity among theatergoers in Seoul, it has been programmed in three seasons at the Doosan Art Center in 2012, 2013, and 2017.

¹ In 2012, Eunsung Kim's *Sister Mok-rahn* won Dong-ah Theater Award for the Best Play and the First Prize in the Korea Theater Award.

At the heart of the story is a North Korean defector--named Jo Mok-rahn--currently living in South Korea. She has recently fallen into a fraudulent scheme when she tried to rescue her family out of North Korea and has lost all of her money, including the resettlement fund provided by the South Korean government. When her consequent suicide attempt fails, she wishes nothing but to go back to North Korea and live with her family. The broker who had helped her escaping from North Korea--another North Korean defector who renamed himself "Kim Jong-il," after the deceased former dictator--tells Jo Mok-rahn that there is a way to go back to Pyongyang. However, it will come at a steep price: 50 million won. It is more or less equivalent to 50,000 U.S. dollars. It is a considerable amount of money in the United States; it is even more so in South Korea,² let alone how exorbitant it is for North Korean defectors who have limited employment options.

To make 50 million won, Mok-rahn attempts to utilize her musical talent. When she visits a business thinking that it is a bar with an opening for musicians, she learns that it is a "*room-salon*": an upscale bar with private rooms where escorts entertain male clients by talking to them, singing, dancing, and playing drinking games, with a possible option to go for a "second round" at a nearby hotel for sexual intercourse at an additional fee. As much as she is desperate to go back to Pyongyang, Mok-rahn refuses to engage in anything remotely close to sex work. However, Jo Dae-jah, the madam who owns the *room-salon* has a need for a musician. Her eldest son, Huh Tae-sahn may recover from his severe depression if he has more music in his life--or so his psychiatrist advised. So Jo Dae-jah decides to hire Jo Mok-rahn as his music tutor.

² In 2013, the average yearly income of recent college graduates was 22,080,000 KRW which is equivalent to 19547 USD (MBC News). In a survey done in 2016, college graduates responded that they wish to earn 26,130,000 KRW per year (Asia Today). According to the World Bank, South Korea's GDP per capita in 2015 was 27,221.5 USD; the United States' GDP per capita of the same year was 56,115.7 USD.

Thus Mok-rahn's life is interwoven with that of Jo Dae-jah and her three children. None of Jo Dae-jah's children seem to be free of woes. Huh Tae-sahn is a highly educated man with a Ph. D. in Korean history but he is incapable of doing anything due to his depression. Huh Tae-gahng, the middle child, is another scholarly type. He used to teach philosophy at a university but has been laid off when the university administration decides to stop offering any philosophy course to the students. The youngest, Huh Tae-yang is a struggling novelist whose only viable source of income is ghostwriting autobiographies.

Mok-rahn's presence fills the house with music and hope. With Mok-rahn's help, Tae-sahn recuperates from his depression little by little. While Tae-gahng had been shrouded by the air of defeatism, Mok-rahn's guitar lessons breathe in vitality in Tae-gahng's life. Inspired by Mok-rahn's account of her grandmother who fought in the Vietnamese War, Tae-yang starts co-writing a film script about a North Korean spy in the Vietnamese War falling in love with a South Korean soldier, with a film director.

As time goes by, Tae-sahn bonds so much with Mok-rahn that Jo Dae-jah coerces her to marry him. When faced with a decision between having to marry Tae-sahn and losing everything she has worked for, Mok-rahn concedes on a condition that she will still be paid 50 million won so that she can help her family in North Korea. The deal is struck. Meanwhile, Tae-gahng who knows all too well about the impending marriage professes his attraction for Mok-rahn.

When it rains, it indeed pours; Jo Dae-jah is deceived by a Korean American client who suggested her to join in a risky and secretive enterprise. She loses all of her fortune and becomes a fugitive. As a result, Mok-rahn who was waiting to be paid 50 million won by the end of the year can no longer be paid. Mok-rahn turns to her fiancé, only to find that Tae-sahn is incapacitated by the

absence of his mother. He does not even know when Jo Dae-jah might return. Mok-rahn then turns to Tae-yang who gloated that she will be paid 50 million won for writing the film script; Mok-rahn feels that she can claim the fee herself since Tae-yang stole her grandmother's story to write the script. However, Tae-yang has also been deceived by her collaborator who never gives her credit for co-writing the script although he wins a major award with the movie. Having no other choice, Mok-rahn turns to Tae-gahng. She tells him why she was forced to leave North Korea. Some time ago, Mok-rahn was tricked by a treasure smuggler who disguised as a family friend and took care of his cargo for a few days. When tipped by her friend that the cargo included national treasures and that her entire family might be punished for her injudicious behavior, Mok-rahn decided to defect North Korea in order to save her family. One thing Mok-rahn does not tell Tae-gahng is why she really needs the money. Instead of telling him the truth that she would like to return to Pyongyang, she merely tells him that her family is in predicament and that she needs 50 million won to help them. Pitying her circumstances, Tae-gahng suggests that Mok-rahn should send his money to her family and that they should leave the peninsula for good.

The next thing we learn is that Mok-rahn has betrayed Tae-gahng too. Instead of leaving the peninsula with him, she brings his money to the broker. She hops on Kim Jong-il's car, believing that she has paid for her ticket back to Pyongyang. In the meantime, Tae-sahn and Jo Dae-jah are still on the run. Tae-yang goes back to ghostwriting autobiographies to make ends meet. Tae-gahng manages to immigrate to Canada by himself. Tragically, once again, deception changes the course of future; instead of reuniting with her family in North Korea, Mok-rahn is stranded in a red-light district somewhere in China.

It is a dog-eat-dog world. Or as Kim Jong-il puts it, South Korean capitalism portrayed in the play can be summarized by a North Korean saying: “You know what bites a swordfish’s tail? Another swordfish” (I. i.). In this world, to survive, one should outsmart the others and never hesitate to deceive them. It is brutal yet, sadly, a truthful portrait of capitalist South Korea. This critical view of South Korean society is what distinguishes *Sister Mok-rahn* from other South Korean literature centered around diaspora of North Koreans. Other Korean writers have written about the identity of North Korean defectors and oppression they face. Instead of focusing on an individual’s psyche, *Sister Mok-rahn* holds a mirror up to the realities of South Korean capitalism by observing South Korean society through a marginalized North Korean defector’s perspective. Characters in *Sister Mok-rahn* miserably fail in living in a symbiosis with one another. Worse than that, South Korean capitalism corrupts even those who used to be the furthest from it. It is an irony that one of those few who survive in this system is Kim Jong-il who was a shoe-factory worker in North Korea. He used to be at a lowly position in a “communist” country but is now fully capable of steering his way in the survival-of-the-fittest South Korean capitalism.

Another aspect of *Sister Mok-rahn* that makes it stand out among many works on North Korean diaspora is its usage of language. Not all works before *Sister Mok-rahn* gave distinctive and realistic voice to North Korean characters. In some novels such as *The Ghost* (유령) by Heejin Kang (강희진) and the *DMZ* by Sahngyeon Park (박상연) have North Korean characters whose speech and thoughts are expressed in Seoul dialect which is the standard language of South Korea. However, in *Sister Mok-rahn*, North Korean characters speak in Pyongyang, Hahmbook, and Hahmnam dialects. It should be noted that North Korean dialects often sound foreign to South Koreans. In other words, when the North Korean characters appear on stage and open their mouth, South Korean audience can

immediately tell that they are from North Korea although most of them may not be able to tell where in North Korea they are from.

As hinted in the summary of the plot, *Sister Mok-rahn* has an epic scale. The dramatis personae includes twenty-six characters who are from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds. None of the adult characters has the same occupation; what they do to make the ends meet ranges from working as a pizza delivery guy in Seoul to choreographing group gymnastics for the North Korean regime. They are also scattered around the Korean Peninsula, from Pyongyang to Seoul. However, this play was not written with a hope that twenty-six actors would be cast for each character. Although Kim often writes plays with a large number of characters, many theaters cannot afford to cast more than ten actors. Moreover, casting child actors is only occasionally done in South Korea. In fact, in some of Kim's other plays, including *Sunshine Warriors* (2016), adult actors with younger looks played children's parts. Thus, it is reasonable to assume that when Kim wrote such a large number of diverse characters, he probably thought that the theater would cast around ten adult actors to play all the parts. In other words, except for the leads, actors would come in and out of a few characters including the children's parts. In the 2013 production of *Sister Mok-rahn* at the Doosan Art Center the cast included no more than twelve actors³. When considering that the number of seats at most theaters would be equivalent to that of Off-Broadway or Off-Off-Broadway theaters, including Space III at the Doosan Art Center, it would be impossible for the audience not to notice that the same actor is playing multiple roles. Still, they would suspend their disbelief, unconsciously thinking that this practice is common in the theater.

In the prologue and the last scene, the "theater montage" sweeps across the peninsula and China, showing how the people's lives are ironically similar and dissimilar at the same time. Eunsung

³ In this production, Yoo Mok-rahn was played by two child-actors in rotation.

Kim also did not shy away from experimenting with the passage of time. The periodic setting of the play is “Today. Winter, spring, summer, autumn, winter, and until another spring comes.” Between each scene, around a month passes. This swift passing of time and change of location also gives the play a cinematic quality.

WHY IN AMERICA AND NOW

North Korea has never fascinated the outside world more than it does now. However, the focus is mainly on its nuclear missile launches and the Kim Family. On top of that, through mass media, North Korea has been consumed as if it were the weirdest creature at a freak show. Take *The Interview* written by Seth Rogen and Dan Sterling as an example. Granted, it is a comedy film. However, when put into the context that North Koreans are mostly portrayed as freakish people living under an authoritarian and communist regime--that is, if represented at all--it is just another cultural product that echoes stereotypes of North Koreans and caricatures them rather than painting a complex portrait. A. O. Scott concurs:

the stereotyping of Asians and Asian-Americans flourishes even in supposedly liberal Hollywood. It's unlikely that the filmmakers would have felt as sanguine about holding an African, Latin American or even a Middle Eastern dictator up to the same kind of ridicule. [...] The movie's King Jong-un is really just another dude, although one with nuclear weapons and genocidal inclinations. He worries that drinking margaritas means he's gay and is embarrassed to admit that he likes Katy Perry's "Firework." (New York Times)

On the other hand, depiction of North Koreans in *Sister Mok-rahn* is more kaleidoscopic. Nahm Geum-jah and Jo Sun-ho, the titular character's parents, are victims of the oppressive regime. As artists, they are not free to create whatever kind of art they want to create but are forced to produce creative works in service of the regime's propaganda; Nahm Geum-jah choreographs group gymnastics in praise

of the Kim family and Jo Sun-ho paints the portrait of Kim Il-sung. Their child, Jo Mok-rahn, was an elite living in Pyongyang where only people chosen by the regime can reside in. But since she was swept away by a mishap, she has fallen far away from her privileged life. Although she has saved her own and family's life by defecting her motherland, she fails to find a fulfilling life in South Korea. Ri Myung-cheol who had escaped North Korea goes back and hails the Kim Family at the top of his lungs at squares. Kim Jong-il who was once a laborer in North Korea and a refugee himself now preys on other North Korean refugees in South Korea for his survival. Living with Kim Jong-il, Bae Myung-hee turns a blind eye to his ruthlessness for her own survival, even when her friend, Jo Mok-rahn, needs her the most. They are not flat, cartoonish characters but but real people with real problems. In this country where Asians from countries other than North Korea *and* even Asian Americans are often generalized or stereotyped, *Sister Mok-rahn* offers a more realistic and specific array of humans from North Korea.

Sister Mok-rahn is also resonant with the turbulent political times in the United States. In the fiscal year ending in September 2016, the United States accepted 84,995 refugees, the most in any year during the Obama administration (Krogstad). Reversing such a record, under Trump administration, a smaller number of refugees are being admitted; since March 1, only 6,213 refugees have been allowed in, a drastic decrease, considering Trump's brief time in office; just a few days since Trump's inauguration, the Department of Homeland Security stopped sending investigators overseas to interview refugees seeking asylum in the United States (L.A. Times). This has practically stopped processing new applications. At the same time, there is no guarantee that the refugees who were accepted would feel welcomed in their new home. During the presidential election campaign in 2016, 54% of the registered voters responded that the U.S. does not have a responsibility to accept refugees from Syria whereas 41%

responded that the U.S. should share the responsibility (Krogstad). Not surprisingly, there was a wide partisan gap. 87% of Trump supporters said the U.S. does not have a responsibility to accept Syrians, compared with only 27% of Clinton supporters who said the same (Krogstad). Rather than observing the North Korean society through a South Korean's perspective, *Sister Mok-rahn* offers a glimpse into South Korea through a North Korean refugee's perspective. As much as the play is about Jo Mok-rahn, it is also about how inhumane and brutal South Korean capitalist system is. This play will make Americans think about how they can contribute to the resettlement of those who have come from afar for their safety and hopes for a new life. What would make us better neighbors? How do we live together in a symbiosis with others who seem different from us? These are the questions, I hope, that audience would think about.

LANGUAGE DIVERGENCE IN THE KOREAN PENINSULA

In the North-South talks initiated by the Red Cross Association in 1971, twenty-six years after the post-war partition of the Korean peninsula, South Koreans came *vis-a-vis* into contact with North Koreans for the first time. It startled them to learn that North Koreans used different words and expressions. The purpose of the talk was to arrange meetings of families separated in North and South Korea. However, misunderstandings arose. Even a basic word for "family (*gah-jok*)"--which was at the center of the talk's agenda--had different connotations in the two countries. While the North Korean representatives argued that the members of a family should include all the members of the Workers' Party, South Korean representatives maintained on limiting the scope of family to members of nuclear families (Hong 140). At first, this hindrance in communication was attributed to dialectal differences;

soon it became apparent that it was not just a simple dialectal differences but a “result of systematic innovations introduced into the North Korean language” (140).

On 14 May 1966, North Korea’s Premier Kim Il-sung criticized the then standard language based on Seoul dialect and proposed a new standard language in North Korea named *Munhwaŏ*, meaning “cultured language” (Hong 138). In *Hyondae Joseonmal Sajon (Modern Joseon Language Dictionary)* published by the Academy of Science in North Korea, *Munhwaŏ* is defined with elaborate and politically charged language:

It is the language that is cultivated and refined to fit the feelings of the working class centering around the revolutionary capital city under the great leadership of the Labor Party that took over the sovereignty during the reconstruction period of socialism; all Korean people regard it as their standard speech; our *Munhwaŏ* was developed by our Party ideas and furthered by our Party’s proper language policy after the Korean Liberation [from Japanese occupation in 1945]; it is based on the Pyongyang speech which is an independently promoted beautiful Korean cast in nationalistic speech. (1007)

Under ideological influence clearly demonstrated in its definition, Hong analyzes that *Munhwaŏ* created a large number of words of “violence, hostility, and vulgarity” which have even “infiltrated” into elementary school textbooks (146). This tendency seems more evident in any discourse about the United States.⁴ Hong gives examples such as “놈들이 비행기와 대포로 지랄을 부릴 때 (When the dirty bastards were having a fit with airplanes and artilleries)” and “미국 놈들을 까놉혔습니다 (we beat the shit out of the American bastards)” (146, my translation). In the official newspaper published by the Workers’ Party, *Rodong Shinmun*, similar expressions are used such as “미제의 각을 뜨자 (Let’s chop off the limbs of the Americans)” (146).

As early as 1949, North Korea had also replaced Sino-Korean vocabulary and other loanwords with pure Korean words when South Korea was still using both *Hangul*-Korean alphabets--and

⁴ This is due to the fact that North Korea challenges the legitimacy of South Korea which was backed by the United States during the Korean War.

Chinese characters (Hong 147). Its ideological preference of socialism and antipathy towards the United States also influenced the language to be culturally similar to Russian and Chinese, rather than American English. In comparison with the language spoken in South Korea, North Korean language is characterized by modifiers such as “prescriptive (in grammar), unilateral (in planning), uniformitarian (in practice), realistic (in pronunciation), and practical (in contrast to theoretical)” (138).

Meanwhile, in South Korea, rather than systematic linguistic measures preceding the linguistic changes, they normally ensued the changes of the spoken language (Hong 144). Hong even claims that language policies in South Korea were “considerably slow and ineffective” (142). There was *1933 Unified Spelling System of Korean* which allowed both *Hangul* and Chinese characters to be used in Korean writing. Only more than half a decade later in 1988, the Academy of Arts and Sciences (학술원) announced *1988 Revised Spelling and Pronunciation Systems of Korean* (143). It was only in 1988 that South Korea adopted Seoul dialect which is also known as Gyonggi dialect as the standard language. While linguistic purism is not foreign to South Korea, it also embraced many foreign words in daily vocabularies and still uses more Sino-Korean words than North Koreans do.

As a result of such different trajectory in linguistic policies, today, it came to a point that South Koreans and North Koreans cannot understand each other completely although they use the same writing system and technically speak the same language. In fact, in 2015, an app that *translates* South Korean into North Korean was developed for young North Korean defectors whose school education is often hindered by the language divergence. To give some examples, North Koreans nativized the foreign word “ice cream” as “얼음보숭이 (*uh-reum-bo-soong-yi*)” of which literal translation is “shaved ice” while South Koreans use the English word as a loanword. For South Koreans, sterilization is a Sino-Korean word, “멸균 (*myul-gyun*)” whereas for North Koreans, they have purified it into

“균깡그리죽이기 (*gyoon-kkang-gri-joo-gi-gi*)” which would sound like “exterminating all germs” to South Koreans.

OTHERNESS IN SISTER MOK-RAHN

Going back to the play, such linguistic difference is also reflected in *Sister Mok-rahn* and it is one of the main markers of *otherness* of North Koreans. It is so palpable that when Mok-rahn interacts with a South Korean character for the first time in the play, it causes an inaccurate assumption about her:

Character	Source Text	English Translation
JO DAE-JAH	이름.	Name.
JO MOK-RAHN	조목란입니다.	It is Jo Mok-rahn, ma'am.
JO DAE-JAH	목란이. 딱 기생 이름이네. 연변 어디서 왔니?	Mok-rahn--a wild magnolia--hmm? A name fitting for a courtesan. Where in Yanbian, China, are you from?
JO MOK-RAHN평양서 왔습니다.	... I am from Pyongyang, ma'am. (I. v.)

There can be two reasons why Jo Dae-jah assumes that Mok-rahn is from Yanbian, China. One might be because of her name which means magnolia, quite a common flower in South Korea but rarely used as a name; however, it is a common name in North Korea since it is the national flower. But it is not so likely that Jo Dae-jah would be familiar with North Korean names. A more likely explanation has to do with the different intonation in Pyongyang dialect Mok-rahn speaks. It is not everyday that South Koreans interact with North Korean defectors. Moreover, many Korean Chinese from Yanbian whose accent sound very similar to that of North Koreans move to South Korea for work. For this reason, it is

more reasonable to assume that somebody whose accent sounds like a North Korean accent might be from Yanbian rather than North Korea. What should be noted is that South Korean audience would have had similar reaction to that of Jo Dae-jah. Once hearing the different intonation in Mok-rahn's speech, they can easily guess that she is not from South Korea.

The play also reflects the linguistic divergence in terms of the word choice. While writing a scenario, Huh Tae-yang has to ask Jo Mok-rahn to figure out how to write a realistic North Korean dialogue: "Mok-rahn, could you do me a little favor? [...] How would North Koreans say 'You underestimated me, didn't you?'" (III. xiv.) In a way, Tae-yang needs Mok-rahn as an interpreter because she is aware of how different colloquialism is in North Korea.

While it may not be obvious to those who do not speak the source language, even the idioms and proverbs that are quoted by North Korean characters are unfamiliar to South Koreans. While they can be understood in context, even for South Korean ears, it requires active deduction as they listen. In fact, concerned that the audience may not understand all of its idiosyncratic expressions, Doosan Art Center included the North Korean glossary in their playbill of *Sister Mok-rahn's* world premiere in 2012. The examples in the glossary include:

Source Text	Definition	Translation in the Target Language
구운 게도 다리를 떼고 먹어라	계획하던 일이 차질 없이 잘 진행된다. Look before you leap.	Even if a crab is grilled, remove its claw first.
찌수라우!	(찢어!) 조선식 "건배" 표현 ("Rip it!") North Korean way of saying "Cheers!"	"Rip it!" (I. i. of my translation)
영화문학	시나리오 Film script (15)	"Film literature" (III. xiv. of my translation)

As shown here, the examples of expressions that South Korean audience may not understand range from a commonly used noun, “시나리오 (film script)” which is nativized as “영화 문학 (film literature),” to North Korean proverbs.

Indeed, the Doosan Art Center’s concern was not unreasonable. During the talkback on April 2, 2017, one of the audience members asked a question about how long Jo Mok-rahn has lived in South Korea⁵. He may have not understood Mok-rahn perfectly when she said “Nothing makes your heart ache more than longing for someone you can’t see. / It’s been one year for me but it feels like it’s already been ten years” (II. ix.). Alternatively, it may also have been because of her intonation. In fact, another member of the audience at the talkback asked if the last song sung by Mok-rahn was in North Korean dialect when in fact it was in Chinese. Therefore it is not an exaggeration to say that language is one of the things that can easily make South Koreans consider North Koreans as *the other*.

North Koreans’ *otherness* would not have been this apparent if they were not compared to the South Korean characters in the play. Simply put, their *otherness* largely springs *in relation to* the South Korean characters. When these North Korean characters are brought to an American stage, they are *doubly otherized*. They are first *otherized* since they are not the racial majority; then they are *otherized* once more since they are refugees from the most vilified country in the world. The first layer of *otherization* is done to South Korean characters too. However, the *otherness* of South Koreans should be minimized as much as possible since it was not the playwright’s intent to *otherize* them in the source culture.

⁵ Doosan Art Center records all of its talkbacks and releases them as podcasts on iTunes. This talkback was uploaded under the title, [작가x연출x프로듀서] 관객과의 대화, 연극 ‘목란언니.’

TRANSLATION STRATEGY

“Translators, like playwrights, should write for actors.”

- Zatlin

i) General Issues in Translating from Korean to English

It would be easier to count the number of similarities between English and Korean than to count the number of common features of the two languages; while there are a few, nothing is relevant to the challenges in translating *Sister Mok-rahn*. But when it comes to dissimilarities, they are far too many to name all of them. But to give a few examples, a translator needs to decide what to do with Korean familial terms used to refer to people who are not family members but emotionally close to the speaker. While the Korean language draws its elegance from repetition and ambiguity, the English language tends to be more concise and precise; so translators should find a way to improve clarity for the English speakers without losing the integrity in aesthetics.

However, more than any other features, the Korean language's usage of honorific endings is the most significant obstacle in translating Korean to English. Korean uses sentence endings to denote varying levels of intimacy, formality, and deference. Unfortunately, there is no exact equivalent in English. If English were the source language and Korean were the target language, the translator should culturally interpret the relationship between characters and decide how sentence-ending honorifics should be used in translation and add this feature which does not exist in the English language. In the Korean language, if all characters speak without proper sentence-ending honorifics, everybody would sound either rude or friendly depending on the context; if they all speak with sentence-ending honorifics, everybody would sound polite or distant. This feature of sentence-ending honorifics is crucial in *Sister Mok-rahn* because as power dynamics and relationships change among characters,

characters change the way they speak to each other. For instance, in the source text, Jo Dae-jah always uses sentence-ending honorifics such as *-까* and *-다* when talking to her client, Gahng Gook-shik, to convey her respect for him. However, when she talks to her employees or her children, she speaks casually without such sentence endings. In the target language, English, deference or politeness is expressed largely through using titles, utilizing modal verbs such as “would” and “could,” and adding “please” in a sentence. Thus, even though Jo Dae-jah does not use any title to address Gahng Gook-shik when she says “어떠십니까,” the translation needs to include an honorific in the target language: “How does it feel, sir?” (I. v.). It is easier to translate the usage of honorifics for a relationship of which change does not appear on pages, including that of Jo Dae-jah and Gahng Gook-shik for Gahng appears only in one scene. On the other hand, if relationship changes, register should also change accordingly. For instance, the change in Jo Mok-rahn’s relationship with Huh Tae-yang is reflected in how she speaks to her, too. Earlier in the play, Jo Mok-rahn only speaks to her with honorifics, even when she is supposed to just say yes: “네.” Hence, in my translation into the target language, she says “Yes, ma’am,” instead of simply saying “yes.” Towards the end of the play, however, when she has an outburst about 50 million won she was supposed to be paid, she switches the tone in the source text: “방이라도 빼라. 전세 갑시라두 빼달라” (IV. xvii.). In translation, I have intentionally omitted English honorifics and preserved the imperative mood: “Move out of this apartment. And give me the deposit.” As shown in this example, since dialogue is imbued with the characteristics of relationship between speakers, when translating Korean plays into English, it is crucial to consider ways to translate presence or lack of sentence-ending honorifics. Without such consideration, the relationship between characters can be distorted.

ii) Scholarly Text vs. Literary Text vs. Theatre Text

In recent years, some started to draw a dichotomy between “academic” (bad) translation and “playwright” (good) translation. No matter what the reviewers seem to think, theaters certainly seem to believe that commissioning playwrights to “translate” or “adapt” plays is a good idea. To give examples from recent years, David Harrower “spruced up” the translation of *Public Enemy* by Henrik Ibsen (Vincentelli). Christopher Hampton has done a “seamless” (Donadio) and “fluid” (Brantley) translation of Florian Zeller’s *The Father* for the Manhattan Theater Company. Stephen Karam’s “oddly tin-eared” (Brantley) or less “fust[y]” (Green) translation of the *Cherry Orchard* for the Roundabout Theater was based on Allison Horsley’s “literal translation.” For marketing purposes, it cannot get better: a double act of a beloved classic or a commercially proved foreign play and a renowned playwright--or two playwrights, if you will. During an interview with Brian Logan at the Guardian, Philippe Le Moine who runs the National Theatre Studio's translation arm, Channels, admitted that there is commercial pressure:

Translators feel spurned, and ask us: 'Why do we work with playwrights who don't speak the language, when there are trained professional translators who could do the work themselves? [...] [T]heatres need to have something sellable.

It is true that commissioning a playwright to translate might promise more commercial viability. It can also bring in different crowds. Those who consider Moliere’s plays moldy might flood into the theater if it is Taylor Mac who translated it. But does this mean that “academic” translation is obsolete?

While Logan’s premise in his article, *Whose Play Is It Anyway*, is that scholarly text is a text translated by academics and theater text is a text translated by playwrights, I would argue that what defines whether a translated play is a scholarly text or a theater text lies in the intent and its translation

process.⁶ A text becomes scholarly when its primary purpose is research rather than a potential production. For academic or scholarly purposes, a translation that preserves integrity to each and every syllable of the source text could be more useful. For instance, *Romeo + Juliet* directed by Baz Luhrman may be used by teachers to introduce Shakespeare to secondary school students, in a hope that it will make *Romeo and Juliet* even more relatable and intriguing than it already is. But at a collegiate level, if only one version of the play is to be introduced to the students, it is unlikely that Baz Luhrman's adaptation, *No Fear Shakespeare* translation, or a "contemporary modern English" translation commissioned by the Oregon Shakespeare Festival will be chosen. This applies to other forms of literature too. Take Columbia University's Common Core Literature Humanities reading list as an example. It requires students to read Dante's *Inferno* translated by Allen Mandelbaum rather than "a new translation" by Mary Jo Bang which includes contemporary references to Pink Floyd, *South Park*, Donald Rumsfeld, and *Star Trek* and still "honors this eccentricity with a living English that refreshes Dante's living Italian" (Lazar).

Another factor that distinguishes a theatre text from a scholarly text or a literary text is extratextual gloss. When readers are reading a foreign literary work translated from one language to another, they should have no problem finding more about another culture in footnotes or on the Internet. Especially with modern devices like Kindle e-book readers, information is just at the tip of your finger. Press hard on a word of which cultural reference you do not understand and Wikipedia's definition will pop up. We need not go that far. To facilitate readers' understanding, a scholarly or literary translation usually provides thorough annotation by researchers. Had Deborah Smith wished to make such a choice when she translated Han Kang's *Human Acts*, she would have translated "유과"

⁶ A good counter-example to this idea that academics create "academic" translation or scholarly text is Anne Carson who belongs to academia and yet often translates plays that tickle the fancy of theater directors.

as “*yoo-gwah*” and provided a footnote saying something in the line of “Yoo-gwa (유과): a variety of *han-gwa*, or Korean traditional confectionery, made by deep-frying a mixture of grain flour and honey.” But Smith opted for an immediate effect rather than scholarly accuracy and translated it as “oil-and-honey pastry.” Korean readers with reading knowledge of English most likely will not conjure up 유과 in their mind when they come across this translation. But for the speakers of the target language, “oil-and-honey pastry” is more intuitive than “*yoo-gwah*.” While translators of novels have a choice, translators of theater texts do not have one. Spectators in the theater cannot and should not check the definition of *yoo-gwah* on their iPhones while they see a play. As Zuber posits, a “play is dependent on the immediacy of the impact on the audience” (92). A theater translation should have the same effect. While stage direction may rely on an extratextual gloss, the lines spoken by the characters should attempt to have an immediate impact on the audience.

Moreover, “speakability” or “playability” also differentiates theatre texts from scholarly or literary texts. It is a unique aspect of theater translation that does not exist in other forms of literary translation. Actors must be able to speak the lines comfortably while moving around the stage. This is where collaboration with actors in translation process is especially useful. Alternatively, a translator may read the lines out loud to see if the text is playable.

Most of the translation from Korean to English done in South Korea can be considered as scholarly texts rather than theater texts. While South Korean playwrights and directors often translate or adapt foreign plays, they almost never translate Korean plays into English. Instead, it is scholars or “professional translators” who translate plays and get them published. The most influential institutions for transmission of Korean literature are the Literature Translation Institute of Korea and Daesan Foundation which only support researching and publishing of Korean literature. The founder

of Daesan foundation, Yong-ho Shin, has also founded the biggest bookstore company in South Korea, Kyobo Bookstore. This explains why the Foundation is so passionate about publishing. However, as a consequence, plays that were translated with the grant awarded by Daesan have been published but they have never been produced in the anglophone world. The last play that was awarded the Daesan grant in 2010, *The Clowns* (오) written by Kim Tae-woong (김태웅) and translated by Will Kern, was published by the Hollym International Group in 2013. Unfortunately, it does not seem like it was ever produced or presented in any form in the United States. Other plays published with Daesan's support shared the same fate. A lot of them were published by university presses with an "anthropological interest" as Deborah Smith put it "for students to 'learn about Korean culture'" ("The Under-translated Language"). This begs the question of why a play should be translated. Is it to be circulated among scholars in paper form and studied? Or is it eventually to be shared with an audience? Ironically, because Daesan's vision is centered around bringing Korean *literary* works to bookshelves around the world⁷, Korean plays have seldom left the bookshelves.

iii) Translation Process

Going against the mainstream translation approach in South Korea, I have strived to translate *Sister Mok-rahn* as a theater text. My first draft was translated as close to the source text as possible. Then, without referring to the source text, I tried to make it stand on its own in the target language. Revision was never done without reading the draft out loud. Once I started to feel comfortable with the quality of the translation, I requested the help of actors to read the script for me. On purpose, I had asked for help from actors with diverse levels of Korean proficiency. Some of them including Sun Hye

⁷ http://www.daesan.or.kr/intro.html?etc_uid=2

Park and Sohee Yun were native speakers of Korean while Jae Woo is Korean New Zealander whose Korean was not sufficient to understand the source text. I have provided the source text prior to the read-through for these actors in case they might want to refer to it; they were able to point out a mistake I have made in the translation. Sun Hye Park questioned if I translated “배 구네” correctly; I had thought that it was a proper noun which nativized a theme park ride, the Pirate Ship, and had transcribed it as “Bae-goo-neh.” She suggested that it may be a transcription of “배 그네” in a North Korean dialect. Indeed it made perfect sense since the first syllable of the word means “boat” and the last two means “swing.” When I consulted the playwright, he confirmed that Sun Hye Park was right. Thus, I was able to revise it to “Swing-boat” and amend the mistake. But more than anything else, during the read-throughs, I was able to make sure that the lines were speakable for actors. Finally, Kate Leary and Aileen Lambert who do not have any knowledge of Korean but are native speakers with a masterful command of the target language read the script for me. My main request to them was to highlight any part that seemed stilted or difficult to understand. While some of the slangs they could not understand were not completely understandable in the source text for me either--and that was the intended effect on the audience--it opened up a discussion about how digestible a script should be, especially if it is a work of translation.

iv) Translating *Sister Mok-rahn* for a Contemporary American Audience

When I first started translating *Sister Mok-rahn* in 2016, I knew that I wanted to bring this play to an audience, although I did not know it would be presented at the PEN World Voices International Play Festival. My primary aim was to create a theatre translation for an audience, ideally in New York. As discussed earlier, Korean plays have seldom been introduced to the New York audience. There were

a few theater companies that were invited by La Mama Experimental Theatre Club, including Mokwha Repertory Company from Seoul which performed its adaptation of *The Tempest* in 2014. But the play did not stray far away from Shakespeare and was performed in Korean with an English subtitle. While there are many Korean-American playwrights including Hansol Jung, Young Jean Lee, Jiehae Park, and Lloyd Suh whose works are produced around the country, it seems like contemporary Korean plays have never been produced in New York and performed by local actors. The closest thing would be Geun-Hyung Park (박근형)'s *Don't Be Too Surprised* (너무 놀라지 마라) which was translated by Kee-Yoon Nahm and performed at the Yale Cabaret in 2014. So while it was not a full production, it was an exciting opportunity to introduce a contemporary Korean play to the audience in New York.

Since this is the very first time *Sister Mok-rahn* was introduced to the New York audience, I did not want to change the spatiotemporal setting of the play and preserved its integrity. The universality of *Sister Mok-rahn*, I believe, comes from its specificity. The temporal setting of the play is “Today. Winter, spring, summer, fall, winter, and until another spring comes.” To make the action of the play feel like it is happening today, I aimed to incorporate the target language’s contemporary colloquialism. Here, I have to clarify that from this point and on, the target language refers to “General American English.” Since English has become lingua franca spoken in so many countries and cultures, I have to narrow it down for the specific audience in mind. But what does it mean for some, if not all, characters to sound American? Does it not erase them of their “Koreanness”? David Bellos captures this issue perfectly:

If a detective novel set in Paris makes its characters speak and think in entirely fluent English, even while they plod along the Boulevard Saint-Germain, drink Pernod, and scoff a *jarret de porc aux lentilles*--then something must be wrong. Where’s the bonus in having a French detective novel for bedtime reading unless there is something French about it? Don’t we want our French detectives to sound French? Domesticating translation styles that eradicate the

Frenchness of Gallic thugs have been attacked by some critics for committing “ethnocentric violence.” An ethics of translation, such critics say, should restrain translators from erasing all that is foreign about works translated from a foreign tongue. (35)

Then he asks, “Why should we want or need Kafka to sound German, in any case? In German, Kafka doesn’t sound ‘German’ at all--he sounds like Kafka” (36). In the end, what he advocates for is selective or decorative foreignism: leaving some such as everyday expressions or titles in the source language (36). Movies and TV series featuring characters from different cultural backgrounds such as *The Man in the High Castle* employ this tactic. To give some “foreignness” to Japanese and German characters, expressions such as “Konnichiwa,” “chi,” “Fuhrer,” and “Reich” are used occasionally although they mainly speak in English. However, this strategy does not work unless the audience is familiar with the source language or source culture.

The alternative would be to domesticate the source text for the target language. However, this tactic may also lead to “ethnocentric violence.” In *The Translator’s Invisibility*, Lawrence Venuti defines domestication as a strategy aiming to assimilate the source text to the target culture and argues that it is an exercise of ethnocentric violence through the suppression of the source culture’s uniqueness (5). The alternative approach is paying respect to the source by signaling the text’s foreignness to the readers who are encouraged to embrace its peculiarities rather than providing them with something supposedly in a more palatable form (20). Patrice Pavis also comments that “[t]otal adaptation to the target culture can betray a condescending attitude to the source text and culture (38). On the other hand, Tarek Shamma who studied nineteenth-century English translation of Arabic literature analyzed that outlandish and literal translation can “exoticize” rather than “foreignize” the original, whereas severely domesticated translation can conversely create a text that resists imperialist domination. Shamma compares Richard Burton’s 1885 *Arabian Nights* which adopted Venuti’s

description of foreignization with the translator's linguistic innovation, archaism, and simulation of Arabic sentence structure to give an impression of the exotic source culture (67). In this example, foreignization underscores the *otherness* of the Arab. In contrast, according to Shamma, Wilfred Blunt's "domesticated" translation of Arab poems, with its sympathy for Islam, can be taken as a form of resistance (107). Thus, Shamma concludes that Venuti "confuses the *strategy* of translation (which is confined to the textual level) with its *effect*, which is realized only in its socio-political and intertextual dimension (80).

One might ask if normalization of a source text by a translator born and raised in the source culture may also be considered as such violence. Edward Said who came up with the concept of Orientalism theorized translation as follows:

The relation between Orientalist and Orient was essentially hermeneutical: standing before a distant, barely intelligible civilization or cultural monument, the Orientalist scholar reduced the obscurity by *translating*, sympathetically portraying, inwardly grasping the hard-to-reach object. Yet the Orientalist remained outside the Orient, which, however much it was made to appear intelligible, remained beyond the Occident (222, my emphasis)

According to Said, in the hermeneutic process of translation, there is a sense of tension between the act of "inwardly grasping" and remaining outside the Orient. Here is where one of the differences between me as a translator and many other translators lies. Whereas most translators, at least according to the translation theorists, are outsiders trying to grasp the "hard-to-reach object" from inside the Orient, I am a translator who is from the Orient, trying to take something from inside and bring it to the West. This, however, does not free me from the aesthetic and ethical complications. Since the play evokes *otherness* of North Koreans in South Korea, the question of what foreignization or domestication can do remains the same. In fact, one could even argue that by writing about and transcribing the *otherness* of North Koreans, the playwright was also "inwardly grasping" while standing from the outside. The

difference between Kim's playwriting and my translation is the distance; Kim was inwardly grasping within the Korean peninsula but I am re-grasping what Kim did, only to transpose it in the United States.

While the intent and dynamic may be different, to an audience who most likely will not have any knowledge about the translator or the translator's intent, the only thing that matters is the effect and result. Trying to align my intent and strategy with the effect on the audience was like walking on a tightrope. In the end, I have chosen to translate the lines spoken by the South Korean characters in a way that they can easily blend into the American urbanites. But to capture the equivalent effect on the audience, I have left North Koreans' lines somewhat idiosyncratic. Manuela Preteghella suggested five possible strategies for transposing dialect:

- 1) Dialect compilation which retains the original setting and milieu of the play but incorporates a mixture of target dialects,
- 2) Pseudo-dialect compilation which retains names and cultural references; translator creates a fictitious, non-specific dialect that will be widely accessible,
- 3) Parallel dialect translation which maintains names and cultural references from the original but deliberately uses a specific target dialect, normally one with similar connotations to that of the source text and the actors speak in their regional accents,
- 4) Dialect localization which domesticates or acculturates the source text by changing the names and setting to that of the target culture, and
- 5) Standardization which preserves occasional colloquialisms and eliminates the use of dialect completely. (50-51)

I did not wish to create a fictitious dialect for the North Korean characters in the target language since I was fearful of *otherizing* them even more by giving them an imaginary dialect. Translating their lines with stilted grammar as English language learners from South Korea or North Korean refugees who moved to the West recently would also be a grave mistake since the characters do not speak in

grammatically incorrect sentences in the source text. On top of that, being grammatically or phonetically incorrect as some North Korean defectors such as Park Yeon-mi does has a different implication from North Korean defectors speaking in their dialect in South Korea. Some even suggested that I take the approach of parallel dialect translation and make Jo Mok-rahn sound like a Scot since she is geographically from the northern part of the peninsula and Pyongyang dialect sounds somewhat rougher than South Korean dialects do in the source text.

In fact, a similar approach had been taken by a translator who translated *Sister Mok-rahn* into Japanese for the reading in 2015. Hong-yi Lee, a Korean Ph. D. student at Ochanomizu University in Tokyo, reviewed the Japanese translation and complimented it for its creative usage of Japanese dialects:

Since the language was not supposed to represent a specific region to begin with, the lines by Jo Dae-jah who jumps from Jeollah dialect to Gyungshang dialect have been translated into Kansai dialect and Hakata dialect. I witnessed an agreeable solution to the biggest stumbling block for *Sister Mok-rahn* to be performed in another country. (Lee 154, my translation)

The reviewer, unfortunately, did not say anything about the North Korean dialects but South Korean dialects spoken by Jo Dae-jah. Perhaps the way Kansai dialect sounds to the Tokyo audience may be similar to how Mokpoh dialect sounds to Seoul audience in terms of its intonation and rhythm. However, Clifford E. Landers argues that dialects do not travel well in translation:

However reluctantly, the translator must recognize that dialect, at least at the level of one-to-one transference, is untranslatable. [...] [D]ialect is always tied, geographically and culturally, to a milieu that does not exist in the target-language setting. Substitution of an 'equivalent' dialect is foredoomed to failure. (117)

Landers is right in that transferring the cultural significance of a dialect into a dialect of another language is impossible. For this reason, Landers gives this piece of advice to those who attempt to translate a dialect: “[D]on’t” (117). The language we speak in is a loaded signifier. It represents where

we come from geographically and listeners often make an assumption about the speaker based on what they hear. It contains and reflects our personal history. Nothing can distill our identity better than the language we speak.

In the end, I have opted to take the route of standardization for the South Korean characters. For the North Korean characters, rather than trying to translate how their intonation and pronunciation sound different from those of the South Koreans, I have attempted to distinguish their lines by preserving the old-fashioned feel in the source text. Due to the movement towards linguistic purism in the 1960s, North Korean dialects not only sounds foreign to South Koreans but also antiquated. Since the playwright's language was already so vibrant, I did not have to *add* or *change* anything. All I needed to do was to let Kim's words shine.

However, for items such as proverbs and mimetic words used by the North Korean characters, I have resisted against domesticating the source text by translating them while being faithful to the lexical arrangement. For instance, instead of translating “군 게도 다리를 떼고 먹으랬어” as “You should have looked before you leaped,” I have translated it as “A crab is a crab. Even if it's grilled, you take its claws off before you bring it to your mouth” (I. i.). If the line were spoken by a South Korean character, I may have translated it as the former to normalize it. But since the line is spoken by Kim Jong-il, it befits his character to foreignize the line. Another aspect unique to the North Korean dialects is the richness of mimetic words; they are similar to onomatopoeia but differs from it in that the words mimic the action, not the sound. In Act II Scene 9, when Jo Mok-rahm converses with Huh Tae-sahn for the first time and learns about the cause of his heartbreak and depression, she uses mimetic words to describe the intensity of her longing for the family:

JO MOK-RAHN

[...] A day can't feel longer when you are yearning for someone.

Your heart feels like it's been tripped by a stone, again and again--*took, took*.

You feel like you are sinking under the ground, deeper and deeper--*pook, pook*.

Until she used these mimetic words, Huh Tae-sahn had refused talking to her. However, it is the mimetic words that open up his heart:

HUH TAE-SAHN

You know that feeling?

The feeling that your heart is being tripped again and again--*took, took*. Your heart sinking under the ground deeper and deeper--*poook, poook*.

You know that?

The length of vowels and harshness of consonants creates a difference in the intensity. The longer the vowel and the harsher the consonant, the more powerful the action feels. By echoing Jo Mok-rahn's words, Huh Tae-sahn exhibits his empathy. Some of the mimetic words that Mok-rahn uses later such as "*wha-lahng wha-lahng*" for mimicking the throbbing of one's heart are not as commonly used in South Korea. Yet these are the words that make the North Korean woman and South Korean man empathize with each other. Although I was clearly aware that mimetic words do not exist in English, I did not want to take this tender moment away from the play. It was also an opportune moment for me to foreignize Mok-rahn while also showing that her words are heard, understood, and empathized.

v) Assessment

One complication that I have not been able to find a satisfying solution to was translating Jo Dae-jah's accents. In the source text, Jo Dae-jah never speaks in the same accent twice. She switches her accent in every scene. As a result, the audience cannot tell where she is from. Although she is from Busan, she never uses Busan accent. The closest accent she speaks in is Mokpoh accent. To be completely fair, not many people who were born and raised in Seoul would be able to distinguish

Busan accent from Mokpoh accent due to their proximity. For them, they will just sound like southern accents. It goes the same for conveying different North Korean dialects. While one of the North Koreans, Ri Myung-cheol, is supposed to speak in a different dialect--Hahmnahm dialect--from other North Korean characters who speak Pyongyang dialect, the difference was not transferred to my translation; in the source text, it was hard to detect any linguistic difference between the two dialects. The key difference probably lies in the intonation. However, finding an equivalent or parallel in the English language seemed impossible. Thus, in the translation, in terms of intonation, Ri Myung-cheol does not sound more like a “country bumpkin” compared to the other elites from Pyongyang or those who aspire to sound like them. The hackneyed phrase, “lost in translation,” proves to be true in this case.

Although the difference between how the North Koreans and South Koreans speak may not be as startlingly different as it is in the source text, my translation still makes it possible to distinguish them, mainly through the word choice and idioms. The contrast between “How do you do, ma’am?” and “How are you?” may not be as stark as “안녕하십니까” and “잘 지내셨어요.” But in 2017 New York, one rarely hears “How do you do, ma’am.” It might be easier to stream *My Fair Lady* on Amazon and hear Eliza Doolittle practicing speaking like a proper English lady. Moreover, by refusing to normalize the North Korean idioms, I have made Kim Jong-il and Bae Myung-hee sound distinctively different from the South Korean characters do. Such a contrast is especially striking when Jo Mok-rahn is talking to Huh Tae-yang, translating South Korean into North Korean for her film script.

CONCLUSION

Very seldom have North Koreans taken center stage in American media. If they ever did, the characters were painted with very broad strokes without much consideration about their representation. *Sister Mok-rahn* does not only bring North Korean characters under the spotlight, it also paints a more complicated and three-dimensional portrayal of them. Still, Mok-rahn is the *other* in South Korea as much as she would be in New York because of how she speaks. What *Sister Mok-rahn* asks of the audience is to look beyond how she speaks, see the world through her eyes, and reflect upon how we are treating our new neighbors.

By acculturating the South Korean characters' lines with the 21st century "General American English" and resisting domestication of the North Korean characters' lines, initially, the audience would identify more with the South Korean characters. However, by observing how Jo Dae-jah's family and South Korean capitalist system influence and change Mok-rahn, I hope that the audience would think about how they are treating their own neighbors.

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SISTER MOK-RAHN

Written by Eun-sung Kim
Translated by Dayoung Jeong

About the Play and Playwright

Written by Eun-sung Kim, *Sister Mok-rahn* (목란 언니) had a premier at Doosan Art Center in Seoul, South Korea, in 2012. It won two Best Play Awards awarded by the Korean Association of Theater and the Dong-ah Foundation in the same year.

Eun-sung Kim is a playwright who considers theater as a form of art that never lies. For him, the stage is a space to share and reflect upon the uncomfortable and sometimes even revolting facts of our lives. In college, he studied North Korean studies at Dong-guk University where he started writing radio plays for his university's radio programs. He eventually went to the Korea National University of the Arts to train as a director. Upon graduation he started a theater company named Dalnara Dongbaekkot (Camelia Blossoms on the Moon) and became its Executive Director.

Eun-sung Kim is often hailed as a writer who not only is a master of savoring the texture and poetry of Korean language but also a testifier with a strong affection for those who live at the fringe. He dreams of a day that he will no longer have to write a play about political or historical issues but write about philosophy or nature.

Translator's Note

Names

In Korea, the first name comes after the last name. For instance, Kim Jong-un's last name is not Jong-un but Kim. The names of notable North and South Korean figures are often perceived in such fashion, (last name + first name), as it also does in the play. All names in this play have been translated accordingly to avoid confusion. To give another example, the titular character's last name is Jo and her first name is Mok-rahn. However, in the translation, her full name appears as Jo Mok-rahn.

Another thing to note is that Jo Mok-rahn's name is pronounced as "Jo Mong-nahn." This is due to reciprocal assimilation of the last consonant in "Mok" and the first consonant in "rahn."

Finally, women do not change their family name after they are married. Children usually get the father's last name. This is why, for instance, Jo Dae-jah's children are named Huh Tae-sahn, Huh Tae-gahng, and Huh Tae-yang. Due to the same reason, the titular character's family name--Jo--differs from her mother's--Nahm.

Text stylization

The lines by South Koreans are typed in Calibri and aligned to the left.

The lines by North Koreans in North Korea are typed in EB Garamond and aligned to the right.

The lines by North Koreans in South Korea are typed in EB Garamond but aligned to the left.

All the rest is typed in Gentium Basic.

Time

Today. Winter, spring, summer, fall, winter, and until another spring comes.

Space

Centered around studio apartments in Gangnam, Seoul, we visit various corners in the Republic of Korea (South Korea) and the Democratic Republic of Korea (North Korea)

Characters

JO MOK-RAHN

North Korean female, 26, accordion player from Pyongyang.

NAHM GEUM-JAH

North Korean female, 55, group gymnastics choreographer, Jo Mok-rahn's mother.

JO SUN-HO

North Korean male, 55, painter, Jo Mok-rahn's father.

JO DAE-JAH

South Korean female, 55, "room-salon" owner in Seoul.

HUH TAE-SAHN

South Korean male, 36, Ph.D. in Korean History, unemployed, Jo Dae-jah's eldest son.

HUH TAE-GAHNG

South Korean male, 33, college professor, Jo Dae-jah's younger son.

HUH TAE-YANG

South Korean female, 30, novelist, Jo Dae-jah's youngest child.

KIM JONG-IL

North Korean male, 41, member of an anti-North Korean organization and North Korean refugee broker living in South Korea.

BAE MYUNG-HEE

North Korean female, 30, member of an organization for reunification, folk song singer living in South Korea.

YOOK SUN-YOUNG

South Korean female, 33, elementary school teacher.

CHA YOUNG-MI

South Korean female, 29, graduate school student.

OH YOUNG-WHAN

South Korean male, 48, film director.

GAHNG GOOK-SHIK

Korean American male born in Tokyo, 66, businessman living in L.A.

RI MYUNG-CHEOL

North Korean male, 32, North Korean defector who returned to North Korea.

GOOK SAHNG-CHEOL

South Korean male, 32, assistant to a congressman.

HYUN SUNG-WOOK

South Korean male, 34, secretary of a South Korean conglomerate company.

YANG MOON-HO

North Korean male, 15, middle school student.

NAH NOO-RI

South Korean male, 9, elementary school student.

JEONG SHIN-GYUN

South Korean male, 34, doctor.

SUH HIN-DOL

South Korean male, 25, college student.

CHUN WON-SAHNG

South Korean male, 20, pizza deliver guy.

SONG HONG-YEON

North Korean female, 15, middle school student.

HUH SAE-BYUL

South Korean female, 9, elementary school student.

NO MI-RAE

South Korean female, 21, room-salon escort.

KWON DOO-SUN

South Korean female, 23, college student.

YOO MOK-RAHN

North Korean female, 10.

Prologue. Pandemonium in the Korean Peninsula

When the curtain opens, the prologue should sweep away the audience without giving them any time to process it.

This chaotic scene is a “theater montage.”

It should feel like a continuum of a cut--, cut--, and cut--, in which several characters appear.

However, silence should be preserved by two characters: JO SUN-HO who is drawing a portrait of Kim Il-sung upstage, with his back towards the audience, and HUH TAE-SAHN downstage, staring blankly at the audience.

The air of silence between the two should create a stark contrast with the chaotic whirlwind created by the others.

This balance is the underlying structure of the play.

1) Seoul, South Korea / Auditorium

[Festival for the Union of the Displaced Parents ⁸] ⁹ : Jo Mok-ran, Bae Myung-hee

Uproarious music.

JO MOK-RAHN and BAE MYUNG-HEE in thick makeup and colorful hanbok sing a North Korean pop song, “Nice to Meet You.” ¹⁰

Over-the-top eye-contact and facial expressions. Cutesy movements. They are so hammy that they make the spectators cringe with embarrassment.

BAE MYUNG-HEE

Comrades, Brothers, let us grab our cordial hands.

JO MOK-RAHN

With our steadfast yearning, the reunification draws nigh.

⁸ A fictional conservative organization that the playwright made up. It is hostile to North Korea.

⁹ Names that are stated inside [] in the prologue should be signified by signs, placards, or images on the stage.

¹⁰ Translator’s note: “Nice to Meet You” is a North Korean song that is often sang when a show starts, especially when North Korean performers are visiting South Korea or other foreign countries. It is also the most well-known North Korean song in South Korea for that reason.

BAE MYUNG-HEE

(Singing) Nice to meet you. Nice to meet you.

JO MOK-RAHN

(Singing) Nice to meet you. Nice to meet you.

**2) Daegu, South Korea / Church chapel : Kim Jong-il +
Hae-joo, North Korea / Square: Ri Myung-chul**

KIM JONG-IL

That was the moment. That was the moment of horror.

In the land of darkness without a glimpse of moonlight, suddenly there shone a bright light.

Go. Follow the light.

Thunder roared and a path was revealed to me. (*"Amen!" from the worshippers.*)

RI MYUNG-CHUL

I betrayed my country and dreamed a treacherous dream to find a better life only for myself.

Yes, I chose a traitor's path for rice and roses.

But roses? What roses?

Cruel South Josun didn't even let me touch a grain of rice.

It fed me nothing but desperation, anxiety, shame, and mortification.

KIM JONG-IL

To the Republic of Korea, will I go. I will get there and one day, I will testify why I chose this path and how my father risked his life for me. (*"Amen!"*)

RI MYUNG-CHUL

I was interrogated again and again by the puppets of the South Korean regime.

In that process, many defectors were butchered like dogs.

KIM JONG-IL

Our Heavenly Father saved me from the miserable pit of fire; He sustained my life throughout the perilous journey, through the Doo-man River, China, Mongolia, Thailand, and all the way to the Republic of Korea.

RI MYUNG-CHUL

Friends! Comrades! Even a feast can't fill your stomach if your heart is not pure.
 But if your heart is pure,
 even a gruel and straw-shoes will content your heart.

KIM JONG-IL

(*Sniveling*) If it were not for the love of Jesus, I wouldn't be standing here today. (“*Amen!*”)

(*With clenched fists*) From today and until the end of my days, I will follow Jesus and praise only his name. (“*Hallelujah!*”)

RI MYUNG-CHUL

(*Referring to himself*) This traitor of the revolution who deserves nothing but being hung, drawn, and quartered... Has been embraced back into the loving arms of the Republic again, by Our Great Leader... (*He cannot finish the sentence, choked up with emotion*)
 All hail, Our Exalted Commander-in-Chief!

RI MYUNG-CHUL wails and cries, “All hail, Our Commander-in-Chief!”

KIM JONG-IL fanatically sings a hymn.

3) Seoul, South Korea / [Room Salon¹¹ named “K-Wave”]: Jo Dae-jah

JO DAE-JAH is checking out the girls working for her. The girls are from various countries across the globe.

JO DAE-JAH

What the fuck is wrong with your game these days? You all lack the juice.

How the hell are you gonna reel in a husband and have children, hmm?

Peaches, even when you're shitting, don't just sit on your ass. Study English words.

How many times do I gotta tell you to read newspapers? I ain't telling you to read fancy magazines. Just read the goddamn papers.

Your heads are full of shit because all you're reading is *Cosmo*.

If you're shitty at your job, you're not *leaning in*, then your life's *fucked*. F-u-c-k-e-d: *fucked*.

¹¹ Translator's note: A room salon is an upscale brothel. It often takes a form of private karaoke rooms. (No open stage.) Men bring in their business clients for a treat. “Round 1” involves drinking, chatting, singing, and partying. “Round 2”--which is optional--may involve prostitution. Somewhat similar to American call girls, the escorts working at a *room salon* are expected not only to be beautiful but also intelligent enough to have a conversation with clients.

The girls at Venus are taking their clients out for gymnastics under the moonlight. They are blowing the fuck out of their minds with a full course: handsie, footsie, sensual massage, girlfriend experience, Blue Dragon Roller Coaster, and shabang.

And what have you been doing?

Peaches, the reviews say that we are serving *boneless pork*.

From now on, you'd better not get kicked out during half-time. If you notice any cheap John who might not close his tab, hit up the manager.

Pull a sickie and I'll skin you.

Viper Mama Jo Dae-jah ain't dead yet.

200 miles per hour. 70 times more toxic than a king cobra.

When I spot a prey, I eat it for my dinner.

Player, Manager, Senior Manager, Madame, Queen Madame, Mama, and Big Mama.

I am Jo Dae-jah who became the Grand Mama all on her own, got it?

4) Seoul, South Korea / Huh Tae-sahn's studio: Huh Tae-sahn

HUH TAE-SAHN gobbles up a pizza. He has already finished a box of pizza by himself and has moved on to the second box. There is a pile of empty boxes of pizza and fried chicken and bottles of coke. He gulps down a whole bottle of coke and burps loudly. He gazes at the audience with an empty look. It seems as if he is gazing at himself in the mirror. He is so disgusted at himself that he cannot stand it.

HUH TAE-SAHN

(Referring to himself) Fucking swine, was it finger-lickin'?

HUH TAE-SAHN shoves a finger down his throat. He gags and vomits. He looks as if he is staring at the mirror again.

HUH TAE-SAHN

(Referring to himself) Fucking rat. I'm hungry.

HUH TAE-SAHN eats a pizza again.

Chomp chomp chomp.

Munch munch munch.

Chomp chomp chomp.

Munch munch munch.

5) Seoul, South Korea / Office of a congressman: Huh Tae-yang and Gook Sahng-cheol

HUH TAE-YANG

(With anger) You think this is a novel? Would you commission a painter to paint a painting without a paint? Would you ask a chef to prepare a feast without fresh produce?

GOOK SAHNG-CHEOL

There is no need to be so emotional here. Just spice it up. Give it more drama and pizzazz.

HUH TAE-YANG

Give me some notes or at least a voice recording.

GOOK SAHNG-CHEOL

The congressman doesn't have any time for that. I believe I've given you enough source material.

HUH TAE-YANG

It's not enough. How am I supposed to ghostwrite an autobiography with that?

GOOK SAHNG-CHEOL

You're a novelist right? Write a novel.

HUH TAE-YANG

Sorry?

GOOK SAHNG-CHEOL

It isn't easy to write something that didn't happen as if it happened. It isn't easy to write something that didn't take place as if it took place. Writing something that did happen, something that did take place--who doesn't know how to do that? You said you're a novelist. So write a novel.

HUH TAE-YANG

(Enraged) You think an autobiography is a novel?

GOOK SAHNG-CHEOL

(Smiling) You're not getting any of this, are you?

HUH TAE-YANG

Why are you smirking? What's so funny?

GOOK SAHNG-CHEOL

(Smiling) What's there not to smile about?

HUH TAE-YANG

Why did you hire me? Because I wasn't asking for a blank check? Because I come cheap? Because I'm a fucking bargain?

GOOK SAHNG-CHEOL

(Smiling) Please.

HUH TAE-YANG

You think an autobiography is a novel? Sure. Great. Let's say it's a novel. You still can't have a novel. You know why? Because your characters don't want anything. A want. You know what a want is? You don't, do you? It's quite expensive. That check you gave me can't buy it. Check on Amazon if you can fucking order it for Prime shipping.

6) Chung-jin, North Korea / A school yard : Nahm Geum-jah, Song Jong-yeon, Yang Moon-ho

NAHM GEUM-JAH assertively strut onto the stage, leading SONG HONG-YEON and YANG MOON-HO.

NAHM GEUM-JAH

Comrades, today we are going to master a highly technical collective move, "Collectively circling forward with your hands on your comrade's waist."¹²

This is a very complex gymnastic move.

But I believe that my comrades can do it.

First, let me explain the significance of this move.

This move symbolizes the satellites circling around the Sun.

Comrades, what does the Sun represent?

Yes, that's right. It is Our Father, Our General.

Therefore you student-comrades are baby-satellites circling around Our Father, Our General.

Alright, now watch and follow me. Ready, set, go.

¹² This lines in this part was mostly borrowed from a North Korean movie, *On the Blue Silk*.

One two three four five six seven eight. Two two three four five six seven eight...

*Following SONG HONG-YEON and YANG MOON-HO, NAHM GEUM-JAH
whisks off the stage.*

**7) In-cheon / Elementary school classroom: Yook Sun-young, Nah Noo-ri, Huh Sae-byul,
Yoo Mok-rahn**

*YOOK SUN-YOUNG and her students walk in as they sing “School Bells
Ring Ding Dong” in English.¹³ The children are learning English.*

YOOK SUN-YOUNG

(Singing) School bells ding ding dong.

NAH NOO-RI

(Singing) Let’s ol gedder

HUH SAE-BYUL

(Singing) Tea--chuls waiting in duh class

YOOK SUN-YOUNG

(Singing) Tea--chers

NAH NOO-RI

(Singing) Waiting

HUH SAE-BYUL

(Singing) In duh class

Students line up.

*One by one, like a game of charades, they answer YOOK SUN-YOUNG’s
question and go to the end of the line.*

YOOK SUN-YOUNG

Are you looking for something?

¹³ The lyrics of the nursery rhymes in this scene are not grammatically correct. The playwright has intentionally and wildly modified the lyrics.

NAH NOO-RI

Es. Ah im rooking pole mai glah-siz.

YOOK SUN-YOUNG.

Good job.

HUH SAE-BYUL

Ah im rooking pole mai o-ringe.

YOOK SUN-YOUNG

So good.

YOO MOK-RAHN

.....

YOOK SUN-YOUNG

Pass.

Two times one equals two. Two nine?

NAH NOO-RI

Eiy-teen.

YOOK SUN-YOUNG

Three times one equals three. Three six?

HUH SAE-BYUL

Eiy-teen.

YOOK SUN-YOUNG

Four times one equals four. Four seven?

YOO MOK-RAHN

.....

NAH NOO-RI

Tweny-eiyt.

YOOK SUN-YOUNG

Wow! Fantastic!

YOOK SUN-YOUNG and her students march off as they sing “Twinkle Twinkle Little Star”¹⁴ in English.

YOO MOK-RAHN falls behind the others and chases after them in confusion.

YOOK SUN-YOUNG

Twinkle, twinkle little star.

NAH NOO-RI

How I wonder waht you ah.

HUH SAE-BYUL

Up abobe duh world so high.

YOOK SUN-YOUNG

Like a diamond in the sky.

8) Won-joo / College classroom: Huh Tae-gahng

HUH TAE-GAHNG is standing at a podium, lecturing with a serious look.

HUH TAE GAHNG

Thus spoke Ingeborg Bachmann.

*To avoid separation, each of us should sense the schism.*¹⁵

In a shared void, we should feel the same slash.

We talk of the boundaries.

Boundaries drawn by each and every word.

¹⁴ Translator’s note: Another Korean nursery rhyme. *Gae-nah-ri* is a Korean word for forsythia. The line-by-line translation of the original lyrics would go, “Thia, thia, forsythia / I cut it and hold it in my lips. / Little chicks hop hop hop / They go on a spring picnic.”

¹⁵ It is modified from a poem by Ingeborg Bachmann, “Von einem Land, einem Fluss und den Seen.”

Translator’s note: it is not clear which Korean translation the playwright used; when asked, he responded that he does not remember. Thus this is a my translation of a Korean translation of which source I could not clarify.

*Possessed by nostalgia, we will cross over the boundary
And we will create one harmony with all places.*

What does this mean? What do these words mean?

You don't understand what it means, do you?

Right. I'm not sure either. (*Sigh*)

That's it for the class today.

I've heard rumors that the department is gonna be shut down but how would that even happen?

I'll do what I can to prevent that. So don't worry too much. Keep your chin up.

What's wrong? Why are you crying? Don't cry. Don't.

This isn't Alphonse Daudet's story. This won't be the *Last Lesson*.

What kind of university fucking tosses out the Department of Philosophy?

Can you still call that a university? A school? A country?

Let's just go get drunk. Oh come on, stop crying. (*Shouting*) Stop it!

**9) Seoul / Auditorium [Youth Convention for the Union for Democratic Reunification¹⁶]:
Jo Mok-rahn, Bae Myung-hee**

BAE MYUNG-HEE weeps as she recites a poem¹⁷.

JO MOK-RAHN solemnly plays her accordion to the poem recitation.

BAE MYUNG-HEE

This year, I will return to Pyongyang.

No matter what, I will go.

I'm not talking nonsense, I'm not being silly, I'm serious.

Even if I have to walk,

Even if I have to swim across the Im-jin River, I will go.

BAE MYUNG-HEE wails.

Even as she is wailing, she looks at JO MOK-RAHN and gives her a cue.

JO MOK-RAHN switches the music to "From Seoul to Pyongyang."

BAE MYUNG-HEE changes the mood completely; with a smile, she dances and sings.

¹⁶ A fictional progressive organization that supports reunification of South Korea and North Korea made up by the playwright.

¹⁷ The first and the last stanza of "Nonsense But Not Nonsense (잡꼬대 아닌 잡꼬대)" by Pastor Moon Ik-hwan.

BAE MYUNG-HEE

From Seoul to Pyonyang, cab fare is just 50,000 won
You can go to the Soviet Union
You can go to the moon
Nowhere is unreachable
So why can't we go to Pyonyang
It's closer than Gwang-joo
It's our people, our land
So why can't we go to Pyongyang

10) Pandemonium Medley

Words, chants, songs, and movements erupt violently.

RI MYUNG-CHUL

All hail, Undying and Eternal Great Leader Kim Il-sung, Our Comrade!

All hail, Great Leader Kim Jong-il, Our General!

All hail, Commander-in-Chief of Joseon People's Army, Our Comrade, Kim Jong-un!

Hail, hail, all hail!

KIM JONG-IL

Smash the third-generation dictatorship!
Execute the Kim family!
Butcher the little pig and exterminate the monarchy!

HUH TAE-GAHNG

*To avoid separation, each of us should sense the schism.
In a shared void, we should feel the same slash.*

HUH TAE-YANG

You still can't have a novel. You know why?
Because your characters don't have a want. A want.

JO DAE-JAH

Peaches, finish them with your hello.
Give them the happy ending, right there and then.
Don't whine that they won't put the rubber on.

Be French and (*in French accent*) take it with your pie hole!

(*With SONG HONG-YEON and YANG MOON-HO following NAHM GRUM-JAH's lead*)

NAHM GEUM-JAH

One two three four five six seven eight

Two two three four five six seven eight

YUK SUN-YOUNG

Row row row your boat gently down the stream

Merrily merrily merrily merrily life is but a dream. (*With NAH NOO-RI and HUH SAE-BYUL's dance*)

BAE MYUNG-HEE

Even if it's a dream, I'm gonna drive,

Honking from Seoul to Pyongyang..... (*With JO MOK-RAHN's dance*)

*While the Pandemonium Medley reaches the climax,
JO SUN-HO stays in the same place, still drawing Kim Il-sung's portrait.
HUH TAE-SAHN stares at the audience, with his lifeless eyes.
YOO MOK-RAHN is in a corner, crouching.*

*When the rowdy crowd goes off
Emptiness ambushes the stage.
There are only four left.
Far away, JO SUN-HO's silhouette,
Within reach, HUH TAE-SAHN's gaze,
In between the two,
JO MOK-RAHN plays the accordion, trembling,
And YOO MOK-RAHN browses the stage with a blank look.
When YOO MOK-RAHN steps closer to JO MOK-RAHN,
The light is dimmed
And JO MOK-RAHN's shadow is elongated.*

I. Winter

1. Kim Jong-il's subleased apartment
Yong-in, South Korea / December

JO MOK-RAHN is laid down, with a blanket covering all her body, all the way to her face.

KIM JONG-IL chides JO MOK-RAHN like a thunder.

KIM JONG-IL

Wake up! Right now! And leave!

JO MOK-RAHN does not budge an inch.

BAE MYUNG-HEE tries to calm KIM JONG-IL down and leads him to a table set with drinks.

KIM JONG-IL pours a shot of vodka down his throat.

KIM JONG-IL

My entrail boils! It boils! You halfwit.

You offered up your security deposit, on top of the resettlement funds?

BAE MYUNG-HEE

It's not her fault. That scoundrel should be gutted like a fish.

KIM JONG-IL

What, she took pills? Why did you pick her up? She should have been fucking left to die.

BAE MYUNG-HEE

She's been completely cleaned out. She doesn't have a single coin in her pocket. Pyongyang riches to Seoul rags.

KIM JONG-IL

Geum-sung Academy? Elite? What good is being an elite when her wits aren't in her brain but in her toe nails? You simpleton.

A crab is a crab. Even if it's grilled, you take its claws off before you bring it to your mouth.¹⁸

BAE MYUNG-HEE

Bloodsuckers. Those curs would suck the blood from a mosquito's neck. They should be burned to death.

¹⁸ North Korean proverb for "look before you leap."

KIM JONG-IL

You know what bites a swordfish's tail? Another swordfish.¹⁹

You should have alerted me right away when it happened, you toad.

BAE MYUNG-HEE

I didn't know. How should I have known? I'm not a psychic!

KIM JONG-IL

She should have hired a reliable broker.

50 million²⁰ is more than enough to bring somebody from the North to Seoul.

With 50 million, you can even go back and live in Pyongyang.

You know Ri Myung-cheol, right? The country bumpkin from Hwe-ryung who used to come to our meetings?

The guy who got wasted and sobered up only when he got a taste of my fist?

That fool took 50 million and returned to Josun.

What the fuck in the world. Crazy bastard.

BAE MYUNG-HEE

Really?

KIM JONG-IL

Yes. He bundled up his money and crossed the Dooman River once again.

BAE MYUNG-HEE

And? He didn't die?

KIM JONG-IL

Die? He became a hero for bringing all that money.

BAE MYUNG-HEE

No, I can't believe you.

KIM JONG-IL

Woman, why can't you believe your husband's words?

It's not just him.

There are at least 100 people who went back.

¹⁹ North Korean proverb describing how people in similarly difficult circumstances betray each other.

²⁰ Translator's note: It is approximately \$50,000.

You bring the money and you're forgiven! Crazy fuckers.
Pour me another.

JO MOK-RAHN
Is that true?

KIM JONG-IL and BAE MYUNG-HEE are startled.

JO MOK-RAHN
Is it really possible to cross over to Josun again?
(*Holding JONG-IL's hand*) Is it true? Is it indeed true? Did I hear it right?

KIM JONG-IL
Why do you ask?

JO MOK-RAHN
Is it really true? You shouldn't bluff!

KIM JONG-IL
Why would I bluff?

JO MOK-RAHN
So is there really a way to go back to Josun?

KIM JONG-IL
You wanna go back?

JO MOK-RAHN
.....

KIM JONG-IL
Why?

JO MOK-RAHN
..... I want to live with my mother.

KIM JONG-IL
Yeah? Then you can rescue her out of North Korea.

JO MOK-RAHN

.....

KIM JONG-IL

Is that all? Tell me the real reason.

JO MOK-RAHN

I do not want to spend another day in this mucky shithole.

KIM JONG-IL

Yeah? Tell me more.

JO MOK-RAHN

Nobody is more patriotic than my mother.

I want to live in my motherland with her.

KIM JONG-IL slaps JO MOK-RAHN's face.

KIM JONG-IL cracks up.

KIM JONG-IL

Look, Pyongyang Elite Jo Mok-rah. You trust me?

JO MOK-RAHN

..... Can you send me back to Josun?

KIM JONG-IL

You have the money?

JO MOK-RAHN

How much will it take, sir? Will 50 million won do? How much will it cost?

If only I can go back to Josun, I will build a bridge to the heaven.

(Straightening her face) Are you sure you are not bluffing?

KIM JONG-IL thumps the table.

KIM JONG-IL

You know what my name is? Hear my name clearly, once and for all.

I am Kim Jong-il. Kim Jong-il.

(Taking his ID out of his pocket and showing it to her) Look at this ID.

Look closer. Kim. Jong. Il.

I am not a shoe factory worker, Kim Pyong-seok.

I am no longer Kim Pyong-seok who had to live in the gutter.

I am a citizen of the Republic of Korea. Kim Jong-il.

You know why I changed my name so?

Changing is one thing, but changing it to the name that makes you shudder in fear--the name of the Great General--is completely another.

I changed it, yeah, but why change it to the name that makes you quiver with anger--

The motherfucking dick asshole's name that makes your limbs quake in your sleep?

I put my life on the line. I'm ready to die any day.

All the brokers who claim to be the best have nothing on me.

Why? Because I am Kim Jong-il.

You wanna go back to Josun? Just bring me the money.

JO MOK-RAHN pours a drink in his glass.

KIM JONG-IL

Yes, yes. Pour it to the top.

You know what they say, put three blind comrades together and they can see the whole elephant.

Take a shot and let's gather our collective wisdom. Real Josun style.

Raise your glass. All together.

Rip it!

KIM JONG-IL empties the glass in a second and laughs haughtily.

JO MOK-RAHN glares at the audience.

2. Huh Tae-sahn's studio apartment

Seoul, South Korea / January

HUH TAE-SAHN is laid down, with his comforter over him. He has dressings on his wrist. JO DAE-JAH talks to JEONG SHIN-GYUN who came for a house call.

JEONG SHIN-GYUN

When did he break up with her?

JO DAE-JAH

Five years ago.

JEONG SHIN-GYUN

He must have loved her very much. How long were they together?

JO DAE-JAH

How long, ha. He was dumped after dating her for 100 days.
And before they started dating, he followed her around for 10 years.

JEONG SHIN-GYUN

He doesn't have a job?

JO DAE-JAH

Does it look like he has one?

JEONG SHIN-GYUN

What about school, does he have any degree?

JO DAE-JAH

A Ph. D.

JEONG SHIN-GYUN

Sorry? A Ph. D.?

JO DAE-JAH

Why? You can't believe it?

JEONG SHIN-GYUN

Umm, in what?

JO DAE-JAH

Korean history.

JEONG SHIN-GYUN

I see.....

JO DAE-JAH

Why? It doesn't make any sense for you?

JEONG SHIN-GYUN

Oh well..... I think it would be best to hospitalize him.

JO DAE-JAH

He said he'd rather die than to be hospitalized.

Why else would I bring you here?

I thought a shrink trained in the U.S. might be different.

JEONG SHIN-GYUN

It's not like I have a magic potion from the States.

It's important that he wants to get better. Make sure he doesn't forget his prescriptions.

JO DAE-JAH

I could say that myself.

JEONG SHIN-GYUN

(*Coughs*) Hmm..... He has a severe case of *psychosomatic inordinatio*.

In other words, psychosomatic disorder.

It would be an understatement to say that the chances of him committing a suicide is well above the normal range.

JO DAE-JAH

(*Desperate*) What should I do? Please save my boy.

JEONG SHIN-GYUN

First, he should take his prescriptions regularly.....

JO DAE-JAH

(*Outraged*) First! Prescription! Determination! Attention! Affection! None of those clichés you tell all your patients!

What's your professional opinion as a doctor? What's the fix?

JEONG SHIN-GYUN

There's nothing like that.....

JO DAE-JAH

Anything experimental?

JEONG SHIN-GYUN

Hmm..... Let him be loved.

JO DAE-JAH

Give me more!

JEONG SHIN-GYUN

Umm... Make the depressed sing.

A positive prognosis depends on whether he can be moved to sing or not.

JO DAE-JAH

Sing?

JEONG SHIN-GYUN

Yes, play some good tunes for him.

(Checking the time) Oh, I'm running late. Time for me to head out.

JO DAE-JAH

You're playing expensive, huh? *(Handing him an envelope with money)* Come to the salon some time. I'll pick the creamiest peach for you.

JEONG SHIN-GYUN exits.

JO DAE-JAH sighs.

HUH TAE-SAHN opens his eyes and sees JO DAE-JAH.

HUH TAE-SAHN

Mom...

JO DAE-JAH

Yes, my baby.

HUH TAE-SAHN

Mom, when I was seven--

JO DAE-JAH

Yes, my baby.

HUH TAE-SAHN

You said we should just kill ourselves.

JO DAE-JAH

..... No.

HUH TAE-SAHN
Come on, you did.

JO DAE-JAH
No. I didn't.

HUH TAE-SAHN
Under the comforter.

JO DAE-JAH
No.

HUH TAE-SAHN
“Sahn-ah, would you like to die with your mommy?”

JO DAE-JAH
No.

HUH TAE-SAHN
Why are you crying? It's okay. Life is supposed to be painful.

JO DAE-JAH
No, no.....

3. Huh Tae-gahng's studio apartment **Seoul / January**

*HUH TAE-GAHNG is still hungover. He sits up with a blank face.
CHA YOUNG-MI is looking for something in the drawers. She goes about
it in a glacial manner.*

CHA YOUNG-MI
You haven't deleted my number?

HUH TAE-GAHNG
.....

CHA YOUNG-MI

Do you still act like that when you get drunk?

HUH TAE-GAHNG

.....

CHA YOUNG-MI

You don't even remember, do you?

HUH TAE-GAHNG

.....

CHA YOUNG-MI

Aren't you even curious?

HUH TAE-GAHNG

About what?

CHA YOUNG-MI

(Holding out TAE-GAHNG's cellphone) The reason why I have this.

HUH TAE-GAHNG

Oh, I dunno. Give it back to me.

CHA YOUNG-MI

(Handing him the cellphone) Give me the cab fare. 9,400 won.

HUH TAE-GAHNG goes through his pocket.

HUH TAE-GAHNG

I don't have any cash on me. What do you want me to do?

CHA YOUNG-MI

Wire it to me.

HUH TAE-GAHNG

Okay, text me your account number.

CHA YOUNG-MI takes a brown photo album from the drawers.

HUH TAE-GAHNG

What's that?

CHA YOUNG-MI

My old photos. I've always felt so uncomfortable about this.

CHA YOUNG-MI takes her photos out of the album.

HUH TAE-GAHNG

We kept a photo album?

CHA YOUNG-MI

(With a smile) We once thought we'd live happily ever after.

CHA YOUNG-MI leaves.

HUH TAE-GAHNG checks his cellphone and then stares at the brown photo album on the floor.

4. Huh Tae-yang's studio apartment

Seoul, South Korea / January

HUH TAE-YANG is naked under the comforter.

OH YOUNG-HWAN is wearing nothing except for his shorts. He drinks his coffee as he reads a magazine.

HUH TAE-YANG

Can you hand me my clothes over there?

OH YOUNG-HWAN

You're up?

OH YOUNG-HWAN picks up the clothes strewn about around the bed.

HUH TAE-YANG dresses under the comforter.

HUH TAE-YANG

What happened last night?

OH YOUNG-WHAN
You don't remember?

HUH TAE-YANG
No... It's a bit blurry... I was totally wasted.

OH YOUNG-WHAN
Don't worry. I took precaution.

HUH TAE-YANG
Did I lead you here?

OH YOUNG-WHAN
Yes.

HUH TAE-YANG
Fuck, in the end, this is how I get fucked.

OH YOUNG-WHAN
(*With a straightened face*) Watch your language.

HUH TAE-YANG
Ha, you pounded me once, yeah? But you don't own me. Not a chance.
How old are you now?

OH YOUNG-WHAN
As old as a 4th grader... Times five, plus three.

HUH TAE-YANG
You're ancient.

OH YOUNG-WHAN
Uh, somebody said the lines on my face are sexy. You remember that?

HUH TAE-YANG
(*Sigh*) So we were talking about the screenplay.....
Oh right, the war movie. About the Vietnamese War..... Right? Then I blacked out.

OH YOUNG-WHAN

You don't remember the pinky promise?

HUH TAE-YANG

What was that for?

OH YOUNG-WHAN

Forget about it.

HUH TAE-YANG

Sorry. You're the one who has photographic memories, aren't you? Alright, print 'em out and let me see.

Are you really shooting this time?

OH YOUNG-WHAN

Not yet. I'm working on my seventh draft.

HUH TAE-YANG

So why are you writing about the Vietnamese War? It's all been done before. What's the plot?

OH YOUNG-WHAN

A Korean soldier falls in love with a Viet Cong guerilla in a battle field.

HUH TAE-YANG

What a cliché. That's why the only thing on your IMDB page is your debut film.

OH YOUNG-WHAN

Don't laugh. I'm this close to getting it produced.

Hey, would you like to co-write the screenplay with me?

HUH TAE-YANG

A screenplay? You know I don't know a thing about the craft.

OH YOUNG-WHAN

You're gonna do great. I bet you can structure a really tight plot.

I can write dialogues fine but structuring the plot isn't my forté.

HUH TAE-YANG

Hmm.....

OH YOUNG-WHAN

You said you're sick and tired of being a cheap obscure writer. You said you were disillusioned about the whole thing.

HUH TAE-YANG

(Beat) Poor fucker. You've got no car, no money, no wife. You have only one thing in plenty. Your age.

..... Why are you following me around?

OH YOUNG-WHAN

Because I love you.

HUH TAE-YANG

Liar.

(Beat) Hey, Mr. Sexy Wrinkles, get over here.

HUH TAE-YANG pulls OH YOUNG-WHAN's face closer and kisses him.

5. Jo Dae-jah's room-salon

Seoul / February

On a sofa, GAHNG GOOK-SHIK is lying on his stomach.

JO DAE-JAH hops on GAHNG GOOK-SHIK's back and massages him, giving it her heart and soul.

JO DAE-JAH

How does it feel, sir?

GAHNG GOOK-SHIK

It finally feels like I'm back in Korea.

JO DAE-JAH

How long are you staying this time?

GAHNG GOOK-SHIK

(In Japanese accent) Three months.

JO DAE-JAH

Three months? What's keeping you for so long this time, sir?

GAHNG GOOK-SHIK

(In Japanese accent) English Town.

JO DAE-JAH

Wouldn't that be too risky?

GAHNG GOOK-SHIK

(In Japanese) Sho--men-tot-pah. Den-ko--set-ka²¹.

JO DAE-JAH

(In Japanese) Mah-eh-ni! Mah-eh-ni!²²

GAHNG GOOK-SHIK

You should play a part too.

JO DAE-JAH

Me, sir? How dare I?

GAHNG GOOK-SHIK

Money management. Recruiting the ants.

JO DAE-JAH

Yes, sir.

GAHNG GOOK-SHIK

If things go well, you'll get an aquarium.

JO DAE-JAH

Thank you, sir.

GAHNG GOOK-SHIK

How's your business? Is there any problem? *(In Japanese) O-kkah-neh? Yu-do-ri?²³*

JO DAE-JAH

²¹ Breakthrough, head-on. Like a flash of lightning.

²² Go! Go!

²³ Money? Enough?

*(In Japanese) Dai-jo-bu-deh-ssu.*²⁴

GAHNG GOOK-SHIK

Good. Money? Sponsor? *(In Japanese accent)* I got your back!

JO DAE-JAH

*(In Japanese) Sumimasen*²⁵. *(Cries with her back towards him)*

GAHNG GOOK-SHIK

Why are you crying?

JO DAE-JAH

I have no one but you, Mr. Chairman.

GAHNG GOOK-SHIK

You know I can't deal with sentimentality.

JO DAE-JAH

I apologize, sir.

GAHNG GOOK-SHIK

Your Japanese has improved a lot by the way.

JO DAE-JAH

*(In Japanese) Domo arigatogozaimashita.*²⁶

GAHNG GOOK-SHIK

Health is the most important thing in life.

I haven't gone peach-picking in a while.

JO DAE-JAH

Oh, yes sir. No Mi-rae!

GHANG GOOK-SHIK

Mi-rae--meaning future--right?

²⁴ It's okay.

²⁵ I'm sorry.

²⁶ Translator's note: "Thank you very much." in Japanese.

NO MI-RAE walks in, takes GAHNG GOOK-SHIK by his arm, and heads out with him.

JO DAE-JAH

Yoo-ri! Send in the new recruit!

JO MOK-RAHN walks in with an accordion.

JO DAE-JAH examines JO MOK-RAHN meticulously.

JO DAE-JAH

Name.

JO MOK-RAHN

It is Jo Mok-rah, ma'am.

JO DAE-JAH

Mok-rah--a wild magnolia--hmm? A name fitting for a courtesan.

Where in Yanbian, China,²⁷ are you from?

JO MOK-RAHN

... I am from Pyongyang, ma'am.

I heard that there is an opening for a pianist.

I saw the advertisement.

Have I found the right place?

JO DAE-JAH

How do you expect to make 5 million won a month by playing the piano?

JO MOK-RAHN

Is this a house of adult entertainers?

JO DAE-JAH nods.

JO MOK-RAHN

... I understand. I will leave presently.

²⁷ Translator's note: a region in China where many Korean Chinese people settled since the 19th century and especially from around the Japanese occupation of the Korean peninsula.

JO DAE-JAH

Are you any good with it? The accordion?

JO MOK-RAHN

It's no matter now. I will see myself out immediately.

JO MOK-RAHN leaves.

JO DAE-JAH puts an enigmatic smiles on her face.

II. Spring

6. Huh Tae-sahn's studio apartment

Seoul / March

HUH TAE-SAHN is sleeping with his comforter over him.

JO DAE-JAH pours mahk-gol-li (Korean traditional rice wine) in a bowl all the way to the top and drinks it up.

There are mahk-gol-li bottles lying around on the floor.

She is already quite drunk.

JO DAE-JAH burps unapologetically.

HUH TAE-GAHNG and HUH TAE-YANG enter through the door.

JO DAE-JAH

You're here. Oh sweet babies, my babies.

JO DAE-JAH hugs HUH TAE-GAHNG and HUH TAE-YANG and kisses them on their cheeks.

HUH TAE-YANG

You stink.

HUH TAE-GAHNG

Sun's not down yet and you're drinking already?

JO DAE-JAH

I've never seen you two coming together. Look how lovely it is to see you two together.

HUH TAE-GAHNG

We just met around the corner.

HUH TAE-YANG

Mom, you gotta think of your health. Think of your age.

JO DAE-JAH

It's alright, it's alright. It's been a while and I had just one drink.

Here, here, take one, both of you.

HUH TAE-GAHNG

Out of my mom's all different personas, I get to see the drunkard the most often. She's got swag.

JO DAE-JAH

Sarcastic, huh. Fucking educators.

College professors are at the top of my salon's black list, you know that?

HUH TAE-GAHNG

You gotta understand. It's a stressful job. No worries though, the world is changing and our bunch might go extinct soon.

JO DAE-JAH

Why? Don't tell me you got drunk and got yourself in a trouble. Did you screw a girl in your class?

HUH TAE-GAHNG

Please!

HUH TAE-YANG

You called us at the crack of dawn for drunken shenanigans?

JO DAE-JAH

(Looking at HUH TAE-SAHN) I had to butter him up again and again to make him take the pills and get some sleep. Don't you pity him?

HUH TAE-YANG

That's the routine, so what's new?

JO DAE-JAH

Yang, what did I tell you?

HUH TAE-YANG

What?

JO DAE-JAH

What's your eldest brother's name?

HUH TAE-YANG

Oh, here we go.

JO DAE-JAH

You want me to take the hammer out, huh? Come on, tell me.

HUH TAE-YANG

Huh Tae-sahn. The mountain.

JO DAE-JAH

What's your elder brother's name?

HUH TAE-YANG

Huh Tae-gahng. The river.

JO DAE-JAH

And you?

HUH TAE-YANG

Huh Tae-yang. The sun.

JO DAE-JAH

That's right, Tae-yang. There's a mountain. There's a river.

But no matter how high the mountain is, no matter how deep the river runs, they are nothing without "*tae-yang*," the sun.

You know what I mean?

You are the light and warmth for your brothers. Got it?

You have to cuddle these poor man-babies.
Got it?

JO DAE-JAH suddenly slaps HUH TAE-GAHNG's face.

JO DAE-JAH
How did I raise you?

HUH TAE-GAHNG
Fuck.

JO DAE-JAH
Say it.

HUH TAE-GAHNG
(Pouring a bowl of mahk-gol-li down his throat) Selling booze. Are you satisfied?

JO DAE-JAH
And?

HUH TAE-GAHNG
That's enough.

JO DAE-JAH
I whored myself out.

*She takes out a hammer and puts it down on the floor.
The old hammer shines brightly.*

What's this hammer?

This is the one thing that your father left when he died at the age of 26, working shitty manual labor. It's the last thing your father left when he went thousands of miles away to Saudi Arabia so that he could work himself to death. Literally.

I started a trashy pub with nothing. Just with the money from your father's life insurance which didn't worth a shit.

For what? Huh? To raise my babies. My babies!

You, Huh Tae-gahng, is this all you can do for your brother?

You didn't visit him until it got this bad for him?

The hammer shudders with anger, you motherfucker.

If Tae-sahn dies like that, we're all gonna die together.

We're gonna smash our heads with the hammer and die. Got it?

(Holding TAE-YANG's hand) Don't cry, my baby.
You two should look after him. Come by, talk to him, and sing together, yeah?
The doctor says that he needs love. You heard that? Love! True love!
Look at his face. It's a mess. A complete mess.

HUH TAE-SAHN gets up and grabs his chest.

JO DAE-JAH
What is it? What's wrong?

HUH TAE-SAHN
It hurts.

JO DAE-JAH
Where? Your chest?

HUH TAE-SAHN
Inside. My insides are breaking apart.

HUH TAE-YANG
He must have dreamt again.

JO DAE-JAH
Dream? What dream?

HUH TAE-SAHN
.....

HUH TAE-YANG
Dream of that woman, what else.

HUH TAE-SAHN lies down again. He sobs violently.

HUH TAE-GAHNG
It's unbearable to watch him. Crazy fucker. Get it together.
You fucking loser. Stop all this for god's sake.

JO DAE-JAH hits HUH TAE-GAHNG's back mercilessly.

HUH TAE-GAHNG

Ah fuck, what did I do?

Mom, you're spoiling him.

Look at this. Look at us. Look at our life.

You don't like this and you don't like that, huh? If you don't wanna live, let's just end everything!

What the fuck are we waiting for?

JO DAE-JAH grabs her chest. She picks up the hammer and stands up.

JO DAE-JAH

Alright. Let's all die here. Now.

JO DAE-JAH targets HUH TAE-GAHNG with the hammer.

HUH TAE-YANG tries to stop her.

HUH TAE-GAHNG dodges it and steals the hammer.

HUH TAE-GAHNG

Alright, this fucking family. Let's die, all die.

HUH TAE-GAHNG smashes his own head with the hammer as he screams.

JO DAE-JAH and HUH TAE-YANG try to stop him.

In the midst of all this, doorbell rings.

JO DAE-JAH, HUH TAE-GAHNG, and HUH TAE-YANG all wrestle and HUH TAE-SAHN is about to run away, crying.

JO DAE-JAH

Where is he going? Get him!

Right that moment, JO MOK-RAHN with her accordion enters through the door.

Everybody freeze.

HUH TAE-GAHNG

Do we know you?

JO MOK-RAHN

My contract begins today.

JO MOK-RAHN bows to JO DAE-JAH.

JO MOK-RAHN

How do you do, ma'am?

7. Huh Tae-gahng's studio apartment **Seoul / April**

HUH TAE-GAHNG, GWON DOO-SUN, and SUH HIN-DOL are drinking.
They are all very drunk.

SUH HIN-DOL

Professor Huh, I really wasn't gonna say this.

GWON DOO-SUN

(To SUH HIN-DOL) You're drunk.

SUH HIN-DOL

You can't do that. I heard you got a job at another university..... Everybody knows.

HUH TAE-GAHNG

Just drink.

SUH HIN-DOL

What are you? Huh? You're a fucking coward.

HUH TAE-GAHNG

Shut up and drink. *(Drinking up another shot.)*

SUH HIN-DOL

Don't live like that. Why do you live like that?

GWON DOO-SUN

(To SUH HIN-DOL) Pull yourself together.

HUH TAE-GAHNG

Suh Hin-dol. Why are you studying philosophy? Tell me.

Gwon Doo-sun, you? Why are you so silent?

You want me to spell it out for you? It's because that's the only department your grades allowed you to apply for.

You wanted to get into a reputable college but you couldn't choose a popular department.

No? You're gonna say I got that wrong?

GWON DOO-SUN

That's not true. You can't say that.

SUH HIN-DOL

For fuck's sake.

HUH TAE-GAHNG

Not true? I can't say that? Why? You're happy, aren't you?

It's so hard to get transferred to another department and the university administration says that you can choose whichever department you want. Wonderful. Isn't it?

It's so much better than graduating with a degree in philosophy that will get you nowhere.

Woohoo, it just can't get better. What a serendipity.

No? Don't indulge yourself by playing a martyr.

GWON DOO-SUN

Professor Huh, I'm really disappointed in you.

(To SUH HIN-DOL) Come on, let's go. Oh, stand up! You're not coming? I'm leaving.

SUH HIN-DOL

Sit down.

I haven't finished.

You're a philosopher? You ain't a philosopher. You're just an impostor.

HUH TAE-GAHNG

So? Can you philosophize? Hey, you, philosophy major from a shithole college.

Immanuel Kant the shit out of this drink.

SUH HIN-DOL gets up and tries to swing his fist at HUH TAE-GAHNG.

GWON DOO-SUN stops him.

SUH HIN-DOL shivers and then cries.

HUH TAE-GAHNG gives SUH HIN-DOL a hug.

HUH TAE-GAHNG

Don't cry. Have another drink.

8. Huh Tae-yang's studio apartment

Seoul / April

OH YOUNG-WHAN

(Anxiously pacing back and forth) Let's go over it one more time.

Platoon Commander Cha Min-hyuk who was ambushed during a search mission is left all alone in a jungle.

When he opens his eyes, he is at a peaceful village in a forest and finds a Vietnamese maiden named Ssu-ahn taking care of him.

When the village is about to be mercilessly attacked by the U.S. army, Cha Min-hyuk prevents it. Through this incident, Min-hyuk and Ssu-ahn fall in love. Even after Min-hyuk returns to his platoon, their romance continues.

But, it turns out that Ssu-ahn is a secret Viet Cong agent. Cha Min-hyuk's platoon is ambushed by the villagers who turn out to be guerillas.

Even in the midst of this, Min-hyuk tries to save Ssu-ahn. But Ssu-ahn heartlessly pulls the trigger at Min-hyuk.

Ssu-ahn is then shot to death by a Korean soldier. It isn't too bad..... It's alright, right?

HUH TAE-YANG

It's alright..... But it's doesn't have that final punch.

Didn't you say that the producer said the same thing?

OH YOUNG-WHAN

What could we do? So..... Let's say I'm Cha Min-hyuk and you are Ssu-ahn.

Did you even love me? Or is it that you loved me but your patriotism made you pull the trigger?

Or did you take an advantage of me, pretending as if you loved me? How do we make this convincing?

HUH TAE-YANG

You know, sometime you can't figure out your own feelings. She won Min-hyuk's heart to manipulate him but as time goes by, she starts having feelings for him too. Maybe she kills Min-hyuk because she wants to rein in her feelings for him.

But at the last moment, Min-hyuk doesn't shoot her even though he can.

She looks into his eyes and then realizes.

Oh, I've been in love with this man.

OH YOUNG-WHAN

So? She takes Min-hyuk's hand and disappears into a secret forest, a jungle where elephants roam around, as you said? That's ridiculous. Anticlimactic.

HUH TAE-YANG

We can still think about the ending.

OH YOUNG-WHAN

That fucking producer doesn't understand tragedy. In war films, everybody dies, that's the formula. You gotta die.

HUH TAE-YANG

Got it. Don't get all worked up. But it's definitely a cliché.

No offence but I feel like I've heard this story before.

OH YOUNG-WHAN

(Angered) What did you just say?

(Squatting on the floor and sighing) What do I know about films.....

HUH TAE-YANG

What if we change the genre?

What about an action? Or thriller.

OH YOUNG-WHAN

I've spent years doing research, investigating, and interviewing.

HUH TAE-YANG

I can write a fabulous melodrama. A mystery melodrama!

OH YOUNG-WHAN

(Sigh) Leave me alone. I need some space.

HUH TAE-YANG

This is my place. This is my room.

OH YOUNG-WHAN gets up to leave.

HUH TAE-YANG

Where are you going now?

Alright. Alright.

9. Huh Tae-sahn's studio
Seoul / April

HUH TAE-SAHN is sleeping under his comforter.
JO MOK-RAHN plays "The Labyrinth of Love" by Choi Jin-hee on her
guitar, singing quietly.

JO MOK-RAHN

(Singing) Wondering where the morning begins

I climbed the Mountain Baek-doo.

At wat'rfall opening heaven and earth,

I saw sunrise and realized.

Oh the glorious sun igniting my spirit

Shall inspire our hearts forever more.

Oh Mountain Baek-doo lit up with Our Sun, Our Exalted Leader.

HUH TAE-SAHN opens his eyes and looks at JO MOK-RAHN.

HUH TAE-SAHN

You're a good singer.

Startled, JO MOK-RAHN stops singing.

HUH TAE-SAHN

Did I scare you?

HUH TAE-SAHN sits up.

JO MOK-RAHN stares at HUH TAE-SAHN.

HUH TAE-SAHN

What?

JO MOK-RAHN

Did you just wake up, sir? You surprised me.

HUH TAE-SAHN

Why?

JO MOK-RAHN

It's been 15 days.

HUH TAE-SAHN

What?

JO MOK-RAHN

You haven't said a word, sir.

HUH TAE-SAHN

Yeah? I didn't talk for that long?

Sing it again.

JO MOK-RAHN

Pardon?

HUH TAE-SAHN

The song you were singing. Sing it again.

JO MOK-RAHN

*(Strumming her guitar) Wondering where the morning begins
I climbed the Mountain Baek-doo.*

HUH TAE-SAHN

You know, you should never mess around with music.

JO MOK-RAHN

Pardon?

HUH TAE-SAHN

You got the lyrics all wrong.

You've turned the greatest hit into the greatest shit.

Do you even know the title of the song?

JO MOK-RAHN

“Mountain Baek-doo Where the Sun Rises.”

HUH TAE-SAHN

North Koreans, seriously.

It's “The Labyrinth of Love.” “The Labyrinth of Love.”

Repeat after me.

HUH TAE-SAHN recites the lyrics.

HUH TAE-SAHN

No matter how much I try

JO MOK-RAHN

No matter how much I try

HUH TAE-SAHN

I just can't grasp love.

JO MOK-RAHN

I just can't grasp love.

HUH TAE-SAHN

My heart blinded by love

JO MOK-RAHN

My heart blinded by love

HUH TAE-SAHN

Cries because of the truth.

Never mind, just write it down.

JO MOK-RAHN writes down the lyrics on a piece of paper.

HUH TAE-SAHN

In a corner of your heart

I plant all my love for you

Please don't ever hurt me, never ever.

With no end or beginning--infinite,

Oh the labyrinth of love.

Done? Sing it like that from now on.

Don't make a love song political. Where's the fun in that?

JO MOK-RAHN

You must love this song very much, sir.

HUH TAE-SAHN

Of course. It's Young-ae's favorite tune.

HUH TAE-SAHN suddenly gets irritated and lies down with his back towards JO MOK-RAHN.

JO MOK-RAHN

... Sir, I know you are not just acting out.

... You must have loved her very much.

... It must have been a sorrowful parting.

... How long has it been since the last time you saw her?

Nothing makes your heart ache more than longing for someone you can't see.

It's been one year for me but it feels like it's already been ten years.

A day can't feel longer when you are yearning for someone.

Your heart feels like it's been tripped by a stone, again and again--*took, took*.

You feel like you are sinking under the ground, deeper and deeper--*pook, pook*.

HUH TAE-SAHN turns around and looks at JO MOK-RAHN.

HUH TAE-SAHN

Hey.

JO MOK-RAHN

I understand..... Please forgive me for rambling, sir.

HUH TAE-SAHN

You know that feeling?

The feeling that your heart is being tripped again and again--*took, took*. Your heart sinking under the ground deeper and deeper--*poook, poook*.

You know that?

JO MOK-RAHN

(Nodding the head)

Even when you are still, your heart throbs--*wha-lahng wha-lahng*--and your breath is stopped--*tuck, tuck*.

You walk and walk but you circle around--*mamm mamm*--in the field of gravels.

Even if you lie down to sleep, you feel like you are standing all by yourself in an empty lawn.

And then, all of sudden, all the way down the cliff,

You feel like you are falling *jjwa-ahk*.

HUH TAE-SAHN

Yeah... *(Sitting closer)* Have you ever been on a pirate ship ride?

JO MOK-RAHN

What is that?

HUH TAE-SAHN

What about the Blue Dragon Rollercoaster?

JO MOK-RAHN

...

HUH TAE-SAHN

You guys don't even have a theme park? You don't know rollercoasters?

JO MOK-RAHN

Hmm... Are you talking about Gwan-song Serial Cars?

HUH TAE-SAHN

What cars?

JO MOK-RAHN

(*With hand gestures*) Do you mean the one that falls from a high place like this--*hook*?

HUH TAE-SAHN

Yes.

JO MOK-RAHN

Ah, you can ride that in Gae-sung Youth Park, sir.

HUH TAE-SAHN

Do you have that thing which goes back and forth like this? *Hook, hook*?

JO MOK-RAHN

Are you talking about the Swing-boat? We have that too. I have tried it once.

HUH TAE-SAHN

Yeah? How did that feel?

JO MOK-RAHN

It was fun but, phew, it felt so weird.

I felt like my body was falling *jjook, jjook*.

HUH TAE-SAHN

Yes. The fall that feels endless without a bottom.

What do you think? Doesn't that feel similar? To the feeling that your heart is sinking under the ground, *poook, poook*.

JO MOK-RAHN

Err... That sounds right.

Come to think of it, it does feel like when you are on the Swing-boat.

HUH TAE-SAHN

(Sighs) Glad we're on the same boat.

You know that feeling too.

Breathing is like a surge.

Living is like being on a pirate ship. *(With hand gestures)* *hook-- hook--*.

JO MOK-RAHN

(With hand gestures) *hook-- hook--*.

Even when I lie down to go to sleep, I can't, and I just wrestle with the night.

HUH TAE-SAHN examines JO MOK-RAHN.

He hesitates and then grabs his chest as he frowns.

JO MOK-RAHN

What's the matter, sir?

HUH TAE-SAHN

It's coming again. Coming again. Ow. Ow.

HUH TAE-SAHN shudders as if he is on the Viking Ship, feeling the influence of the gravity, and then he sinks.

He turns his back again.

JO MOK-RAHN

Are you feeling alright, sir?

JO MOK-RAHN looks at HUH TAE-SAHN with pity and then takes a memo out of her pocket.

JO MOK-RAHN

(Looking at the memo) Do you know what we call light bulbs in Joseon..... In North Korea?

HUH TAE-SAHN

.....

JO MOK-RAHN

We call the light bulbs the “balls.” (*Giggles*)

And do you know what we call tubular bulbs? Tubular bulbs are long balls.

Chandelier is a commune of balls. Candle bulbs are peanut balls.

(*Laughing*) Isn't it funny?

HUH TAE-SAHN rises, stares blankly at JO MOK-RAHN, and then hands her a packet of gums.

HUH TAE-SAHN

Open it.

JO MOK-RAHN opens the wrapping and hands a gum to HUH TAE-SAHN. HUH TAE-SAHN does not accept it but opens his mouth.

HUH TAE-SAHN

In my mouth.

JO MOK-RAHN puts the gum down in front of HUH TAE-SAHN.

HUH TAE-SAHN

What? Are you kidding me?

JO MOK-RAHN

I refuse to do such a thing, sir.

*There is tension between the two.
HUH TAE-SAHN chews the gum like a thug.*

HUH TAE-SAHN

How much are you getting paid to do this? Shouldn't you do what you're paid to do?

HUH TAE-SAHN takes his pants off.

HUH TAE-SAHN

Suck it.

JO MOK-RAHN

Umm.....

You would like me to soak your pants in detergent?

JO MOK-RAHN awkwardly picks up the pants and stands up.

HUH TAE-SAHN cracks up.

HUH TAE-SAHN

(Laughing) Never mind. Here. Give it back to me.

HUH TAE-SAHN retrieves the pants and puts it back on as he chews the gum.

JO MOK-RAHN

I..... I can't seem to understand your meaning, sir.

HUH TAE-SAHN continues laughing.

JO MOK-RAHN

Thank you, sir.

HUH TAE-SAHN

For what?

JO MOK-RAHN

Madame Jo said that I will get paid 1,000,000 won every time you laugh. What do you call it, "bbo-nah-su"?

HUH TAE-SAHN

Yeah? I can put in a good word for you.

But you're really funny.

JO MOK-RAHN

Aren't you glad that I am?

HUH TAE-SAHN yawns.

JO MOK-RAHN

How can you feel so tired after so much sleep?

HUH TAE-SAHN

I wish I could sleep properly for once. Deep and sound.

HUH TAE-SAHN takes the pills, puts the pill box near his head, and lies down.

HUH TAE-SAHN

Aren't you gonna sleep?

JO MOK-RAHN

I will, soon.

JO MOK-RAHN heads to her sleeping spot away from HUH TAE-SAHN's. She takes her pills and lies down. Silence.

HUH TAE-SAHN

You wanna sleep next to me tonight? Please? We'll just cuddle.

JO MOK-RAHN

I have a third-degree black belt in taekwondo.

You have been warned, sir.

Silence.

HUH TAE-SAHN

Look, I really can't sleep. Please?

JO MOK-RAHN approaches him and sits by him.

JO MOK-RAHN

Stop whining. This will make it easier for you to fall asleep.

Hands on your belly, legs straight, eyes shut, lips closed, empty the mind. And tell yourself, everything is fine, everything is fine, everything is fine.

JO MOK-RAHN returns to her place and lies down.

*HUH TAE-SAHN sighs and turns away.
Silence between the two.
JO MOK-RAHN stares at HUH TAE-SAHN's back.
She quietly rises and then sits up. Looking at the piece of paper, she
sings.*

JO MOK-RAHN
*(Singing) No matter how much I try
I just can't grasp love.
My heart blinded by love
Cries because of the truth.*

HUH TAE-SAHN's arched back trembles.

10. Bae Myung-hee's subleased apartment **Seoul / May**

*JO MOK-RAHN, BAE MYUNG-HEE, and KIM JONG-IL are in the middle of
a conversation.*

KIM JONG-IL
So? You are getting paid 3 million per month?
Let's see, then you gotta save every penny for at least a year and half to make 50 million.

JO MOK-RAHN
On a condition that I'll get paid in lump sum at the end of the year, I will be paid 50 million.

KIM JONG-IL
Yeah? Can you rely on them?

JO MOK-RAHN
They are not the kind of people who would fool around with money.

BAE MYUNG-HEE
Oh you have hit the jackpot.

JO MOK-RAHN

About the thing that you promised to look into--how is that going?

KIM JONG-IL

Are you determined to do it, on you life?

JO MOK-RAHN

Yes, I am.

KIM JONG-IL

Right. This Kim Jong-il has found a fail-safe route.

JO MOK-RAHN

Are you absolutely sure about it?

KIM JONG-IL

One person each in In-cheon, Shim-yang, Yun-gil, and North Korea. It's a team of four brokers. It's quite a project.

It's twice, thrice harder than taking somebody out of North Korea. You should never think that 50 million is too much.

JO MOK-RAHN

I understand.

KIM JONG-IL

So, you'll be prepared with the money before the end of the year?

Everything else will be taken care of by then. So don't worry about anything other than the money.

I'll let you eat the new year's rice cake soup in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea.

BAE MYUNG-HEE

You are so fortunate. Things are working out so smoothly.

KIM JONG-IL

(Coughs) Everything should be fine. But if you wanna take a carriage to the wedding²⁸, if you want things to go smooth, watch your mouth.

Anyway, why isn't it here yet? No one expects a voyager with an empty stomach to appreciate the majesty of Mountain Geungahng.

(Checking the time on and pointing at the TV) Oh, turn it on now.

²⁸ "To go to the wedding in a carriage" is a North Korean saying meaning that things go as they are planned.

It's time for the lottery.

BAE MYUNG-HEE

Oh right.

BAE MYUNG-HEE turns the TV on.

The doorbell rings.

KIM JONG-IL opens the door.

CHUN WON-SAHNG comes in with a pizza.

KIM JONG-IL

What took you so long?

CHUN WON-SAHNG

I'm sorry. It's 15,900 won.

KIM JONG-IL takes the pizza and hands him the money.

CHUN WON-SAHNG

Excuse me, I said it's 15,900 won.

KIM JONG-IL

I know.

CHUN WON-SAHNG

You still need to pay 900 won.

KIM JONG-IL

You know how many minutes you are late?

CHUN WON-SAHNG

I'm sorry. I got lost.....

KIM JONG-IL

You got lost?

CHUN WON-SAHNG

I'm new to this job..... I'm sorry.

KIM JONG-IL

Listen to me. That 15,900 won includes the price for the promise that you will deliver it on time. You are fifteen minutes late. So should I pay you the 900 won or not?

CHUN WON-SAHNG

I'm sorry.

KIM JONG-IL

I won't pay.

CHUN WON-SAHNG

I sincerely apologize, sir.

KIM JONG-IL

Where is your work ethic? Huh?

CHUN WON-SAHNG

I..... apologize, sir.

KIM JONG-IL

(Handing him 1,000 won) Work hard, got it? Keep the change.

CHUN WON-SAHNG

Yes, sir..... Thank you, sir.

KIM JONG-IL

You may leave.

CHUN WON-SAHNG bows and leaves.

KIM JONG-IL

(Laughing) Barbarian! He was lucky that I was in the mood for mercy.

BAE MYUNG-HEE

(Chuckling) It's starting.

KIM JONG-IL

Yeah?

KIM JONG-IL and BAE MYUNG-HEE hold the lottery ticket and watch the TV.

BAE MYUNG-HEE

8. Yes, I got it.

KIM JONG-IL

15..... Why can't I get one right?

BAE MYUNG-HEE

6. Hmm, no.

KIM JONG-IL

25..... Damn it.....

BAE MYUNG-HEE

7. Let's see.....

KIM JONG-IL

17.

Why can't these numbers be in unison--they are all dodging.

Ha, they are communally fucking me.

JO MOK-RAHN stares at them.

III. Summer and autumn

11. Huh Tae-sahn's studio apartment

Seoul / July

HUH TAE-YANG is watching "Platoon."

JO MOK-RAHN is teaching HUH TAE-SAHN how to play accordion.

JO MOK-RAHN

Pay attention to the bean sprouts.

See how the bean sprouts are divided in different sections.
Feel the colors of the bean sprouts.

*HUH TAE-SAHN tries his best but it is difficult for him.
He puts the accordion down.*

HUH TAE-SAHN
I can't do it.

JO MOK-RAHN
One can't achieve anything at the first step, sir.
Okay, let's try again.

HUH TAE-YANG
(*Looking at MOK-RAHN*) Yo, North Korean.

JO MOK-RAHN
Yes, ma'am?

HUH TAE-YANG
Come over here for a sec.

*JO MOK-RAHN approaches HUH TAE-YANG.
HUH TAE-YANG sits JO MOK-RAHN right next to her.
HUH TAE-SAHN practices accordion by himself.*

HUH TAE-YANG
So, North Korean.

JO MOK-RAHN
..... Yes, ma'am.

HUH TAE-YANG
I'm just really curious. The TV presenter in the North Korean news, you know? The older woman who is always in the traditional *hanbok* with a resolute face? Why did she disappear? Huh? I just wanna know what happened to her. Like, why the hell are there so many secrets? And you know, the new one, what's wrong with her? Those ladies gotta do something about their hair.

Like, is the hairstyle handed down from one generation to the next too? What the heck is wrong with you guys?

JO MOK-RAHN

Once something is done, things rarely change, ma'am.

HUH TAE-YANG

Dictatorship must be in your nature. It must be.

You know, air can't come in unless there's a hole for it to get out.

Your country seriously needs some ventilation. You need fresh air.

What did you do on the day when Kim Jong-il died?

You cried in a corner, didn't you?

JO MOK-RAHN

.....

HUH TAE-YANG

(Smirking) Say something.

North Korean, you cried when Kim Il-sung died, didn't you?

JO MOK-RAHN

..... I don't remember that well, ma'am.

HUH TAE-YANG

Liar. You sobbed. Right in front of the statue of Kim Il-sung, you boo-hoed "Oh my dearest leader--." I can tell you're lying.

JO MOK-RAHN

Have you seen the statue?

HUH TAE-YANG

Of course. On TV. It disgusts me. It's so tacky. I mean, what the? A statue slathered with gold?

JO MOK-RAHN

If you behold it, you will be moved and tears will well up.

You shouldn't judge until you see it for yourself, ma'am.

HUH TAE-YANG

What?

JO MOK-RAHN

How can human hands create something like that?

Is it really possible to make something like that with human hands? It is truly moving, ma'am.

HUH TAE-YANG

(Tut tut) You are so naive.

It's not that you can't make it. You just don't make it.

JO MOK-RAHN

When I first came to Seoul, the statue of General Yi Soon-shin startled me.

There it was at the center of the city, like a dwarf. Black. Frowning. I thought it was a Jap.

We wouldn't have made any if that's all we could do, ma'am.

HUH TAE-YANG

If you like North Korea that much, go back! Just cross the border again.

JO MOK-RAHN

.....

HUH TAE-YANG

Why did you run away?

JO MOK-RAHN

(Sternly) I did not run away, ma'am.

HUH TAE-YANG

Then what?

JO MOK-RAHN

.....

HUH TAE-YANG

What? Why can't you speak? You got into a trouble, didn't you? You're quite pretty. Did you hit on a married man? You know. Somebody high up in the Labor Party, yeah?

Ha, you're frowning? Whoa, you look scary. You're gonna light a sea of flames, huh?

(Sniggering) What? You're gonna start a military provocation?

Hah, I like it. I really like it. I like you.

You're not too bad, you know? My mom likes you.

(Whispering) Are you gonna marry my brother?

JO MOK-RAHN

No, ma'am.

HUH TAE-YANG

How long are you staying then?

JO MOK-RAHN

I'll be here just until the winter comes.

HUH TAE-YANG

Until the winter? If you're gonna leave, just leave.

Don't go breaking his heart.

JO MOK-RAHN

.....

HUH TAE-YANG

(Whispering) You slept with him, didn't you?

JO MOK-RAHN

(Sternly) No, I did not.

HUH TAE-YANG

Oh, you totally did, didn't you?

JO MOK-RAHN

(Furious) Why do you treat people like that?

You should not taunt others, ma'am.

Why do you speak of such nonsense? Please don't blow the bullshit-trumpet.

HUH TAE-SAHN

What's going on?

HUH TAE-YANG

Hahaha. *(After a good laugh)* Okay, I'm sorry.

(Mimicking MOK-RAHN) Please don't blow the bullshit-trumpet. *(Laughing)* Hahaha.

I like you. Come over here.

HUH TAE-YANG makes JO MOK-RAHN sit more comfortably.

HUH TAE-YANG

Let's chill and watch this together.

Let it go, North Korean.

You've never seen this film, have ya?

This is an American film. Titled *Platoon*. It's a pretty decent war film.

JO MOK-RAHN

Hmm..... I think I might have seen it, ma'am.

HUH TAE-YANG

No shit. You can watch American films in the north?

JO MOK-RAHN

Why not? We have everything except for the things we don't have, ma'am.

HUH TAE-YANG.

Oh well, I heard that you guys can even watch Korean TV shows.

JO MOK-RAHN

..... In North Korea, all American films have the same title.

HUH TAE-YANG

Yeah? What are they called?

JO MOK-RAHN

Fucking Bastards.

HUH TAE-YANG and JO MOK-RAHN laugh. HUH TAE-SAHN laughs too.

JO MOK-RAHN

(*Watching the film*) Isn't that Wen-nahm?

HUH TAE-YANG

Wen-nahm? Ah, yes. Wet-nahm. Vietnam.

Huh? You know the Vietnamese War?

JO MOK-RAHN

Why wouldn't I know, ma'am?

HUH TAE-YANG

Oh right. I guess you guys also take a course on world history or something.

JO MOK-RAHN

My grandmother was an Wen-nahm War hero.

HUH TAE-YANG

(Distracted) Right.

..... Hold on..... That doesn't make any sense.

JO MOK-RAHN

How do you mean, ma'am?

HUH TAE-YANG

Your grandmother is a Vietnamese?

JO MOK-RAHN

No, she is not, ma'am.

HUH TAE-YANG

Then? How? How can a North Korean woman be a hero of the Vietnamese War?

JO MOK-RAHN

Because she was. She was a war hero, ma'am. What's so strange about it?

HUH TAE-YANG

(Thinking for a while) Really? Did the North Koreans participate in the Vietnamese War? I don't think you guys did.

JO MOK-RAHN

I merely told you what I have been told, ma'am.
I've heard the story many times since I was a child.
I have seen my grandmother's medallions too.

HUH TAE-YANG

(Searching for information on her smartphone) Oh, wow, it's for real.

(Reading an article) North Korean government admitted that they have dispatched platoons to Vietnam, only when memorials were found in the country.....

HUH TAE-GAHNG walks in through the door. He has a book.

HUH TAE-GAHNG

(With exaggeration) Look at you! Looking cozy!

HUH TAE-SAHN

Hey.

HUH TAE-GAHNG

Yup, this looks like home.

(To HUH TAE-YANG) You're the one who invited me and you don't even say hello?

HUH TAE-YANG

Hold on, I'm in the middle of somethin'.

HUH TAE-GAHNG

Look at this novelist who can't take her hands off a smartphone. If a novelist is like this, who would appreciate the beauty of slowness?

HUH TAE-YANG

I don't write novels any more.

HUH TAE-GAHNG

(Looking at HUH TAE-SAHN's face) Whoa, look at that handsome face. Huh? Looking good. Lookin' good.

(Bowing to JO MOK-RAHN) How have you been?

JO MOK-RAHN

(Responding to his bow) Sir.

JO MOK-RAHN goes next to HUH TAE-SAHN and teaches him.

HUH TAE-YANG

You really came? You don't have lectures today?

HUH TAE-GAHNG

Nope. I've got nothing for a while.

HUH TAE-YANG

Why?

HUH TAE-GAHNG

You don't wanna know.

What happened? Why did you summon me?

HUH TAE-YANG

If we don't take care of him, mom's gonna cut off our monthly allowances.

HUH TAE-GAHNG

I knew it. You'd never do anything for free.

(*To JO MOK-RAHN*) Is he catching up fine?

JO MOK-RAHN

He is good. He has been working hard, sir.

HUH TAE-GAHNG

That's great. Really. (*To JO MOK-RAHN*) Thank you.

JO MOK-RAHN

(*Blushing*) It is my pleasure, sir.

HUH TAE-GAHNG

(*To HUH TAE-SAHN*) If you get bored, read this. The title is filthy but it's a fun read.

HUH TAE-SAHN

Alright, thanks.

HUH TAE-GAHNG

You know a bit about history, don't you?

HUH TAE-SAHN

The History of Shit and Piss.

HUH TAE-GAHNG

It's much better than Korean history.

I mean, how do you call that history? It's so pathetic.

HUH TAE-YANG

Even the title stinks so much. I wouldn't even use that as a coaster.

HUH TAE-GAHNG

You think you're so much better than that?

It's published by the publisher that boycotted your novel.

HUH TAE-YANG

(Checking the publisher on the book cover) Fuck. I told you I'm done with novels.

HUH TAE-GAHNG

Why? You remember the pretty girl in your university, one of the younger ones? She's become a big shot. She came on TV the other day.

HUH TAE-YANG

Ha, that's ridiculous. You know how her novel got so popular?

There was a TV show with Won Bin--you know the hottest male actor--and her book was on his desk. It's ludicrous.

HUH TAE-GAHNG

(Teasing) Somebody's jealous.

HUH TAE-YANG

(Straight face) Don't.

HUH TAE-GAHNG

Tae-yang, history is dying. Literature is dying. And philosophy is dying. We can't let this happen.

I will philosophize until the end of my days. You do the same with your novels.

I know things are difficult but we should be the watchers of the age.

HUH TAE-YANG

Words, pretty words.

(Laughing) You're such a cliché.

Stop pretending. Just stop.

You think I can't see that you are the phoniest hypocrite?

Sometimes people fool themselves. But when it becomes a habit, you get fooled by yourself.

You are kinda like that. You're on the brink of fooling yourself.

The way I see it, there's no one more conservative than you. You are no progressive.

HUH TAE-YANG's cellphone rings.

HUH TAE-YANG

Yeah, yeah, right, did you take a look at it? Yes. I said yes. They did send the platoons. Yes. I know, right? (*Heads out as she speaks*)

HUH TAE-SAHN succeeds in playing one section with the accordion.

JO MOK-RAHN

(*Clapping*) You've done it! As I have promised, here is your reward, sir.

JO MOK-RAHN plays a guitar and sings.

HUH TAE-GAHNG intently looks at JO MOK-RAHN.

JO MOK-RAHN

Women are flowers. Flowers of life. Flowers for the family.

Affectionate wives and sisters, without you, our lives will be empty.

Women are flowers. Flowers of life. Flowers for the family.

HUH TAE-YANG returns and listens to the song.

HUH TAE-SAHN and HUH TAE-GAHNG claps.

HUH TAE-SAHN

Wonderful.

HUH TAE-GAHNG

Brava! You're a wonderful singer.

JO MOK-RAHN

Thank you, sir.

HUH TAE-GAHNG

It's so nice to hear the sound of guitar. It's been a while.

Maybe I should take guitar lessons.

HUH TAE-YANG

I thought you were pretty decent.

HUH TAE-GAHNG

..... No. I can't. I've tried playing C and then gave up.

HUH TAE-YANG

Did you?

Mok-rahn, can we talk for a sec?

HUH TAE-YANG sits JO MOK-RAHN next to her.

HUH TAE-YANG

So..... Your grandmother fought in the Vietnamese--no--Wen-nahm? Yes. Your grandmother fought in the Wen-nahm War?

JO MOK-RAHN

(Nodding her head) Yes, ma'am.....

*HUH TAE-GAHNG fidgets with the guitar as he looks at JO MOK-RAHN.
HUH TAE-SAHN stares at HUH TAE-GAHNG and HUH TAE-YANG as he
caresses the accordion.*

12. Huh Tae-Yang's studio apartment

Seoul / September

HUH TAE-YANG and OH YOUNG-WHAN toast with beer cans.

OH YOUNG-WHAN

Let's go over it once more.

HUH TAE-YANG

Platoon leader Cha Min-hyuk is ambushed during a search mission and is left alone in a jungle.

OH YOUNG-WHAN

When he opens his eyes, he is at a peaceful village in a forest and finds a Vietnamese maiden Ssu-ahn treating him.

HUH TAE-YANG

Suddenly, the village is about to be mercilessly attacked by the American troops but Cha Min-hyuk and Ssu-ahn save the day.

OH YOUNG-WHAN

Through this incident, Min-hyuk and Ssu-ahn fall in love.....

But!

HUH TAE-YANG

But! Ssu-ahn whom Min-hyuk believed to be Vietnamese turns out to be Ryuh Mok-rahn, a North Korean soldier.

OH YOUNG-WHAN

Hold on..... I wanted to bring this up for a while but don't you think the name is a bit weird? Mok-rahn.....

HUH TAE-YANG

Why? I'm feeling it. You know mok-rahn--wild magnolia--is North Korea's national flower? It's symbolic.

OH YOUNG-WHAN

Really? That makes sense. Great.

Cha Min-hyuk learns that Ssu-ahn is not Vietnamese but Ryuh Mok-rahn, North Korean woman.

HUH TAE-YANG

Min-hyuk conceals the fact and returns to the platoon. Soon, American troops request a mission.

OH YOUNG-WHAN

Obliterate the village.

HUH TAE-YANG

Min-hyuk volunteers as an advance guard to inform Mok-rahn and rushes to the village!

OH YOUNG-WHAN

But, under Mok-rahn's leadership, the guerillas in the village have already commenced an attack.

HUH TAE-YANG

In the middle of a Vietnamese jungle,

OH YOUNG-WHAN

Cha Min-hyuk, a South Korean man, and

HUH TAE-YANG

Ryuh Mok-rahn, a North Korean woman

OH YOUNG-WHAN

Point a gun at each other.

Oh, who will pull the trigger first?

HUH TAE-YANG

Or, can these star-cross'd lovers overcome their fate with love?

OH YOUNG-WHAN

Oh, ideology or love?

HUH TAE-YANG

Oh, war or bloodline?

13. Huh Tae-gahng's studio apartment

Seoul / September

*HUH TAE-GAHNG AND JO DAE-JAH are sitting across from each other.
There is a hammer placed between them.*

HUH TAE-GAHNG

Alright!

JO DAE-JAH

Alright? Alright, huh?

HUH TAE-GAHNG

What do you want me to do? The whole department has been shut down.

JO DAE-JAH

So how are you gonna pay the bills?

HUH TAE-GAHNG

..... I'm leaving this country.

JO DAE-JAH

(Enraged) You son of a... Leave? To where?

(Raising the hammer) Alright. Go to Saudi Arabia like your father and fucking die there.

HUH TAE-GAHNG

I'm not my father.

JO DAE-JAH

You're not going out of this country. It's not happening, got it?

HUH TAE-GAHNG

..... Okay. I'll just take some time off and think.

And recharge.

JO DAE-JAH

Snap out of it. If you take some time off, you will be off forever.

You wanna sit on your ass when you gotta do everything you can to catch up with the guys running ahead of you?

The guys running behind you will kick your ass and step all over you.

Have you seen a marathoner who fell down, rose back up, and won a gold medal, huh?

Recharge? Successful people don't even know what that means.

They've made that up so that people behind them will slack off.

(Holding TAE-GAHNG's hand) Gahng, having a son who is a professor. That's the silver lining in my life. That's my pride.

HUH TAE-GAHNG

Ah, alright. I'll see.

JO DAE-JAH

..... Professor Kim dropped by. I heard that there will be a job opening at the end of the year.

Go get it.

50 million and all that? It's not bad.

HUH TAE-GAHNG

Argh, why did he say that?

What? Why are you staring at me like that? *(Waving his hands)* I didn't tell him about the salon.

JO DAE-JAH

The university isn't in Seoul but I heard that it's more prestigious than the university you taught at. With a rich history.

HUH TAE-GAHNG

Oh, stop it.

JO DAE-JAH

Listen to me.

HUH TAE-GAHNG

Seriously. I don't wanna do it. I can find something else on my own.
I'd rather be a fish merchant.

JO DAE-JAH

Just do as I say.

(Standing up) You cleaned your house?

And you're all dressed up. Are you going somewhere?

HUH TAE-GAHNG

No, just..... Just for a change.

JO DAE-JAH

Strike the iron while it's hot and stay right there no matter what. Alright?

HUH TAE-GAHNG

I'll do what I can, so..... No more intervention, please.

What about you, mom? You look pale. Rough days?

JO DAE-JAH

When was it not rough?

HUH TAE-GAHNG

Why? Mr. America isn't helping you out these days?

JO DAE-JAH

He's in a crisis too. Ashita wa nazodesu.²⁹ Tomorrow is a mystery.

HUH TAE-GAHNG

Really?

JO DAE-JAH

(As if making a speech) Only those who survive the inciting incident and exposition get to experience the crisis.

Should you wish to stay alive as a protagonist through the climax and until the end, you have to spin the crisis into an opportunity.

HUH TAE-GAHNG

Happy ending is not the only sort of ending.

JO DAE-JAH

Don't jinx it.

HUH TAE-GAHNG

Just take a good care of yourself.

I heard that Tae-sahn is getting better.

JO DAE-JAH

Yes, I can finally breathe.

HUH TAE-GAHNG

That North Korean maiden, she's gonna be my sister-in-law one day, huh?

JO DAE-JAH

Young, healthy, wholesome, with common sense.

It's hard to find a girl like that these days.

(Hitting Tae-gahng's stomach and smirking) Why? You wanna have a taste?

HUH TAE-GAHNG

Mom!

JO DAE-JAH

I'm heading out.

²⁹ Japanese for "Tomorrow is a mystery."

*JO DAE-JAH takes a step but returns and embraces HUH TAE-GAHNG.
She strokes his face.*

JO DAE-JAH

Did you really come out of my womb? My handsome baby.

JO DAE-JAH and HUH TAE-GAHNG leave.

HUH TAE-GAHNG returns and looks at the clock.

Looking in the mirror, he grooms himself.

He takes a bottle of wine and glasses from a bookshelf and places them on a table.

He plays classical music on a record player.

Bell rings.

HUH TAE-GAHNG opens the door.

JO MOK-RAHN walks in. She has put on a make-up and is wearing a skirt.

HUH TAE-GAHNG

Hi.

With shyness, JO MOK-RAHN greets back.

HUH TAE-GAHNG

Wow, you look breathtaking in purple.

JO MOK-RAHN

.....

HUH TAE-GAHNG

(Escorting her to the table) Please, take a seat.

It's September and it's still hot. Seoul is hotter than Pyongyang, right?

JO MOK-RAHN

Did you practice, sir?

HUH TAE-GAHNG opens the wine bottle with no trouble.

He pours the wine into two glasses.

JO MOK-RAHN

If you haven't practiced, I'm never coming back.

HUH TAE-GAHNG

I heard you like wine. We should celebrate. It's been one month since you started teaching me.

JO MOK-RAHN

Yes, it's been a month and you still can't play chords, sir.

Where is your guitar?

HUH TAE-GAHNG

You're making me nervous. Let me just finish this glass.

HUH TAE-GAHNG raises his glass to propose a toast.

JO MOK-RAHN raises her glass too as if she doesn't have any other choice.

Clink.

HUH TAE-GAHNG gulps down the whole glass.

JO MOK-RAHN doesn't drink a drop.

HUH TAE-GAHNG brings his guitar.

He plays basic chords. There's nothing right about the melody or rhythm.

JO MOK-RAHN

Have you really practiced, sir?

HUH TAE-GAHNG

Yes, of course.

JO MOK-RAHN

Those marvelous fingers are wasted on you.

JO MOK-RAHN takes the guitar and demonstrates how to play the chords.

JO MOK-RAHN

Do it like this.

Alright? Try again.

HUH TAE-GAHNG holds the guitar.

JO MOK-RAHN

No. I told you not to hold it like that.

JO MOK-RAHN corrects him.

Their hands touch.

They feel awkward.

HUH TAE-GAHNG

Would you sing a song for me?

JO MOK-RAHN

No.

HUH TAE-GAHNG

(Turning off the record player) If you'd sing me a song, I would really be inspired.....

(With a funny face) If you'd sing me a song, my hidden talent might start to shine.....

JO MOK-RAHN

(Laughing) What am I supposed to do with you, sir?

JO MOK-RAHN plays guitar as she sings a song.

JO MOK-RAHN

(Singing) Mother wants to set me up with a man but how should I tell her what's in my heart?

I like the comrade working at the gold mine, not the city lad.

But I can't tell, I can't tell yet.

Oh I can't tell, lu-lu-lu-lu-lu-lu-lu oh, I can't tell.

HUH TAE-GAHNG claps his hands.

JO MOK-RAHN hands over the guitar.

HUH TAE-GAHNG

(Laughing) Do you really prefer a country bumpkin over a city lad?

JO MOK-RAHN

Now, let's practice.

HUH TAE-GAHNG

What's your type? Are you seeing someone? I feel like you might have a secret boyfriend.

JO MOK-RAHN

(*With a serious face*) Please!

HUH TAE-GAHNG

Okay, I'll stop.

HUH TAE-GAHNG plays the guitar. It sounds funny.

JO MOK-RAHN shakes her head.

HUH TAE-GAHNG smiles at JO MOK-RAHN.

He suddenly holds the guitar like a professional musician.

The tunes sound proper too.

HUH TAE-GAHNG plays guitar wonderfully.

JO MOK-RAHN is surprised. Her eyes are wide-open. She hides her gasp with her hand.

HUH TAE-GAHNG starts singing "Famous Blue Raincoat."

JO MOK-RAHN

My goodness. You gave me goose bumps.

HUH TAE-GAHNG

How did you like the song?

JO MOK-RAHN

It sounded lonesome, sir.

HUH TAE-GAHNG

..... That's how I feel.

JO MOK-RAHN

(*Avoiding TAE-GAHNG's eyes*) Then why did you sing a lonely song?

When you feel blue, you tame your heart and sing an invigorating song.

But..... Why did you lie, sir?

You're such a wonderful musician.... Why did you lie all this time?

How could you do that to me?

HUH TAE-GAHNG
..... You know why.

*HUH TAE-GAHNG pulls JO MOK-RAHN in and kisses her.
JO MOK-RAHN struggles to get away from him.
HUH TAE-GAHNG gazes into JO MOK-RAHN's eyes.
He tries to hug her again.
JO MOK-RAHN slaps his face.*

14. Huh Tae-sahn' studio apartment
Seoul / October

HUH TAE-SAHN and JO MOK-RAHN are sitting with a big box in between them.

JO MOK-RAHN
You can't open it, sir?

*HUH TAE-SAHN sits with his back against the box.
He tries to breathe.*

JO MOK-RAHN
Would you like me to put it back in?

HUH TAE-SAHN stands up.

HUH TAE-SAHN
Just throw it away.

JO MOK-RAHN
No.
If you've made up your mind, open it. With your own hands, sir.

*HUH TAE-SAHN sighs. He stares at the box.
JO MOK-RAHN stands up and holds his hand.
She leads his hand to the box so that he can open it.
HUH TAE-SAHN opens the box.*

JO MOK-RAHN

Great job.

There are various things inside the box including gifts and letters.

JO MOK-RAHN

(Holding two empty cans in her hands) What are these?

Why are you keeping empty cans?

HUH TAE-SAHN

We drank from them, the first time we had a date by the Han River.

JO MOK-RAHN

What in the world..... You didn't throw them away?

(Holding empty lunch boxes) And what are these?

HUH TAE-SAHN

She gave me some kimchi in those tupperwares.

JO MOK-RAHN

What in the world..... Does she even know that you've kept all these?

JO MOK-RAHN takes shopping bag handles that are cut from the shopping bags.

JO MOK-RAHN

Umm, what are these?

HUH TAE-SAHN

Shopping bags she gave me.

JO MOK-RAHN

And..... Where are the shopping bags?

HUH TAE-SAHN

Young-ae was holding them in her hands..... I just couldn't throw them away.

JO MOK-RAHN

What in the world..... Oh my.....

HUH TAE-SAHN

Can we stop this please?

It feels like my guts are being ripped away from me.

JO MOK-RAHN

How will you throw them all away if you are not resolute, sir?

JO MOK-RAHN brings in a garbage bag.

JO MOK-RAHN

Are you going to throw them away?

HUH TAE-SAHN wipes away his tears.

He takes the items in the box and puts them into the garbage bag.

JO MOK-RAHN

Good riddance!

JO DAE-JAH walks through the front door.

She is touched by seeing HUH TAE-SAHN.

JO DAE-JAH

Great job, my son. Bravo, my son.

Mok-rahn, play some music.

JO MOK-RAHN plays the accordion.

JO DAE-JAH dances ridiculously.

HUH TAE-SAHN

(Chuckling) Oh mom, it's disturbing.

JO DAE-JAH

You're laughing? You're laughing!

JO DAE-JAH holds HUH TAE-SAHN and dances blues.

HUH TAE-YANG walks through the front door, sees the two, and smiles.

JO DAE-JAH tries to kiss HUH TAE-SAHN on his lips.

HUH TAE-SAHN

(Getting away from JO DAE-JAH) Mom, what are you doing? It's embarrassing.

HUH TAE-SAHN takes the garbage bag out.

JO DAE-JAH

You came to see your brother? Good girl.

HUH TAE-YANG

No, I came to see our Mok-rahn.

HUH TAE-YANG sits next to JO MOK-RAHN, with her hands over her shoulders.

HUH TAE-YANG

Mok-rahn, could you do me a little favor?

HUH TAE-YANG takes a script out of her bag and holds a pen.

HUH TAE-YANG

(Reading from the script) How would North Koreans say "You underestimated me, didn't you?"
"You underestimated me, didn't you?"

JO MOK-RAHN

..... "Comrade, you gave me a cursory glance, didn't you?"

HUH TAE-YANG

(Laughs and takes notes) Right, great.
What about "I regret the day I met you"?

JO MOK-RAHN

..... "Meeting you, comrade, was an error."

HUH TAE-YANG

Great, great.....

JO MOK-RAHN

Is this the film literature you were talking about?

HUH TAE-YANG

Yes.

JO MOK-RAHN

What is it about?

HUH TAE-YANG

Umm..... It's a war movie.

JO MOK-RAHN

Did you..... Did you use the story about my grandmother?

HUH TAE-YANG

(Hesitating) Why?

JO MOK-RAHN

..... Nothing.

How much are you getting paid to write this?

HUH TAE-YANG

How much? 50 million.

JO MOK-RAHN

(Surprised) 50 million won?

HUH TAE-YANG

It's nothing. You can't call yourself a successful writer unless you write a hit that pays you at least a hundred million.

So, how should I say "My fist is shuddering and bellowing"?

How can I make it sound more aggressive?

JO MOK-RAHN

... Well... "My fist is a burning flame"?

HUH TAE-YANG

(With a smile) That's right. Great.

What about "My fist is crying that I should beat you down"?

JO MOK-RAHN

Umm... “My fist commands me to knock you bastard down”?

HUH TAE-YANG

Good! (*Highfives Mok-rahn*)

(*Standing up*) Mom, see you later. My deadline is coming up real soon.

HUH TAE-YANG rushes out.

JO DAE-JAH makes JO MOK-RAHN sit down.

JO DAE-JAH

How does he sleep these days?

JO MOK-RAHN

He still needs his pills.

JO DAE-JAH

He needs to get off his pills. You’re the only one who can do it.

JO MOK-RAHN

I’ll make it happen by the end of the year, ma’am.

JO DAE-JAH

By the end of the year? Why? Are you going somewhere next year?

JO MOK-RAHN

I beg your pardon?

JO DAE-JAH

(*Gazing into JO MOK-RAHN’s eyes*) Look into my eyes. Look. Are you seeing someone?

JO MOK-RAHN

Pardon? No, I’m not, ma’am.

JO DAE-JAH

Then where are you going?

JO MOK-RAHN

I just have somewhere to go.

JO DAE-JAH

I'll ask you just one more time. Are you seeing someone or not?

JO MOK-RAHN

No, I'm not.

JO DAE-JAH

Are you sure? I will take your word.

I'll make a proposal. Make your decision swiftly but with consideration.

Do you wanna live with Tae-sahn for the rest of your life? Or do you wanna pack up and leave today?

JO MOK-RAHN

Pardon? Why, out of blue...

JO DAE-JAH

This can't go on. Tae-sahn shouldn't develop feelings for you any more.

If you two are gonna bond, be committed. If you can't commit yourself to him, get out. Right now.

JO MOK-RAHN

.....

JO DAE-JAH

Tough, right? Some call this a crisis of lifetime and others call it a chance that you'll never get again in your life.

Do you want this to be your crisis? Or do you wanna grab this chance and put a silver spoon in your mouth?

JO DAE-JAH stares at JO MOK-RAHN

JO MOK-RAHN looks down and stays silent.

JO DAE-JAH

(Standing up) Pack up your things.

JO MOK-RAHN

...

JO DAE-JAH
(Roaring) Go pack!

JO MOK-RAHN
... I'll--I'll stay.

JO DAE-JAH
If you are gonna have a second thought, take it back now. It's not too late.

JO MOK-RAHN
No. I'll stay with him.

JO DAE-JAH
(Sitting down and holding MOK-RAHN's hand) I'm glad you made the choice.
(With tears) Thank you. Thank you, Mok-rahn.
(Laughing) Let's set the wedding date to some time in spring.
At Shilla Hotel. Let's book the biggest hall there. The Grand Ballroom!

JO MOK-RAHN
But... Umm... Madame Jo...

JO DAE-JAH
(With a straight face) Madame? Call me mom. Try it. Mom. Haha, come on!

JO MOK-RAHN
Uh... Mom.

JO DAE-JAH
That's right.

JO MOK-RAHN
Umm... Ma-mom. I hope you will still pay me the salary in December.

JO DAE-JAH
50 million? Sure, what do you plan to do with that?

JO MOK-RAHN
... I really need to send the money somewhere.

JO DAE-JAH

Where?

JO MOK-RAHN

To the North..... My families.....

JO DAE-JAH

Alright. I won't ask the details.

50 million? That's your problem? That's nothing.

(Stroking MOK-RAHN's hands)

Mok-rahn, our Sahn is old, short, and ugly. I know.

But as you know, he has a heart of gold.

His eyes won't stray away from you. Once he falls in love, that's it.

JO MOK-RAHN

I know.

JO DAE-JAH

So what do you have to do now?

JO MOK-RAHN

.....

JO DAE-JAH

(Determined) Make a baby.

JO DAE-JAH takes the hammer out.

JO DAE-JAH

This hammer is the keepsake left by your grandfather-in-law, Huh Mahn-woo, who fought for independence in Manchuria during the Japanese occupation.

With this hammer, Huh Man-woo built the safe house for our founding father, Kim Goo.

With this hammer, he smashed the head of the fucking Japanese colonizers.

This hammer was then handed down to his son, Huh Poong-gul.

And then I have been keeping it.

This historical hammer which traveled from Manchuria to Saudi Arabia is yours now.

Mok-rahn. Take this hammer.

JO MOK-RAHN

...But... Why... Why are you giving this to me...?

JO DAE-JAH

Mok-rahn, use this hammer only for the family.

JO MOK-RAHN takes the hammer.

Her hand shivers.

15. Huh Tae-gahng's studio apartment

Seoul / November

JO DAE-JAH has a baseball cap and sunglasses on.

She holds a wine glass, looking out the window.

HUH TAE-GAHNG

(Pouring wine in JO DAE-JAH's glass) You like her that much?

JO DAE-JAH

That girl has a sound mind.

HUH TAE-GAHNG

Mom.

JO DAE-JAH

What?

HUH TAE-GAHNG

What about me?

JO DAE-JAH

You what?

HUH TAE-GAHNG

Do you think she'd have been a good match for me?

JO DAE-JAH

Are you fucking crazy? You can do so much better than that.

(Piercing into HUH TAE-GAHNG's eyes) Are you.....

HUH TAE-GAHNG

I was joking, just joking.

What's happening today by the way? Something's up?

You haven't taken your hammer out but I can see that you're this close to doing that.

What's up? Everything alright?

Tae-yang said that something's funny with you.

JO DAE-JAH

(Sigh) You got a cigarette?

HUH TAE-GAHNG lights up a cigarette and hands it to JO DAE-JAH.

JO DAE-JAH

I've been fucked big time.

HUH TAE-GAHNG

By who? Mr. America?

JO DAE-JAH puffs the smoke out. A long sigh.

HUH TAE-GAHNG

How bad is it?

JO DAE-JAH

Air-raid-siren bad.

HUH TAE-GAHNG

It's got to do with that English Town or something?

JO DAE-JAH

He stole from the ants sideways and dove into the Pacific Ocean.

He stole from me too. I've been cleaned out.

HUH TAE-GAHNG

Oh shit. That son of a bitch. We should find him.

JO DAE-JAH

I might get arrested. I'm gonna be a wanted woman very soon.

HUH TAE-GAHNG

Are you serious?

(Enraged) How did you let things come to this?

JO DAE-JAH

I'm gonna lie low for a while and be out of reach.

We should go separate ways and look out for ourselves.

Tae-sahn's gonna be fine with Mok-rahn. So please take a good care of Tae-yang.

*JO DAE-JAH puts out the cigarette, takes an envelope out, and gives it to
HUH TAE-GAHNG.*

HUH TAE-GAHNG

What's this?

JO DAE-JAH

50 million.

HUH TAE-GAHNG

Forget about it. We have a bigger fish to fry.

JO DAE-JAH

I scrimped and saved everything I have left. Take it.

HUH TAE-GAHNG

Come on, mom!

JO DAE-JAH

I'm going to the safe house. So let me have peace of mind.

HUH TAE-GAHNG reluctantly receives the envelope.

HUH TAE-GAHNG

How long do you think it will take?

JO DAE-JAH

I dunno.

..... Spring will come.

*JO DAE-JAH and HUH TAE-GAHNG sigh and fret for a long time.
HUH TAE-GAHNG holds JO DAE-JAH's hands.*

HUH TAE-GAHNG

Mom, when this is over.....

Let's live a new life. Not like this, a different life. Please.

JO DAE-JAH

(Grinning) Black Mama won't be finished that easy. You know who I am. I am Jo Dae-jah.

IV. Winter

16. Huh Tae-sahn's studio apartment

Seoul / December

*HUH TAE-SAHN practices accordion on his own.
JO MOK-RAHN is sitting, leaning against the wall. It's obvious that she is
exhausted.*

HUH TAE-SAHN

Where have you been?

*JO MOK-RAHN does not respond.
HUH TAE-SAHN continues playing the accordion.*

JO MOK-RAHN

It's too loud, Mr. Huh.

*HUH TAE-SAHN stops playing.
JO MOK-RAHN approaches HUH TAE-SAHN.*

JO MOK-RAHN

I've been to the salon.

It looked like it has been closed for a while, what's happening?

HUH TAE-SAHN

... I'm not so sure.

JO MOK-RAHN

Please don't lie.

Where's the madame?

HUH TAE-SAHN

I've already told you... I'm so sorry....

But there's nothing we can do other than waiting.

Take it easy. Things will get better.

JO MOK-RAHN

Could you just tell me what's happening?

She not showing up here, she's not picking up the phone, and creditors are coming here to demand their money back. So what's happening? Is she on the run?

Why? Is it because she's out of money? Is that what's happening, Mr. Huh?

HUH TAE-SAHN

Probably...

JO MOK-RAHN

Don't be so ambiguous.

I'm drowning and you're flaunting your strokes, having fun?

When is she coming? Is she coming back this year?

You said that we should give her just one more day and it's been fifteen days.

When is she coming? Why can't you say anything?

HUH TAE-SAHN

I dunno. Let's stop all this.

JO MOK-RAHN

Then what about my money, sir?

Who's giving me the money?

Huh? Please say something.

HUH TAE-SAHN

If only I had money, I'd give it to you... I'm sorry.

I'm not saying that I won't give it to you or that you should wait for years.

Let's just wait a few months.

JO MOK-RAHN

Did you just say a few months, Mr. Huh?

You said a few days just a while ago and now you are saying a few months?

HUH TAE-SAHN

She will rake in that much money just in a day, when things get better.

You know my mom. She's not kind of a person who can't afford that much.

JO MOK-RAHN

A day? When is that day, sir?

What's the point? A man dies and then you butcher a pig, a cow?

What's the point of preparing a feast for a dead man?

HUH TAE-SAHN

Hey, just calm down. What's wrong with you? You're not yourself.

JO MOK-RAHN

(Screaming) Yes I'm not myself. It's driving me crazy.

Where is the madame?

HUH TAE-SAHN

(Yelling) Stop it! Fuck!

Are they all like you, North Korean defectors? You're from a communist country and you love money that much?

JO MOK-RAHN glares at HUH TAE-SAHN.

HUH TAE-SAHN tries to breathe.

HUH TAE-SAHN

... I'm sorry.

I forgot... That we made you like that...

HUH TAE-SAHN heads out.

JO MOK-RAHN looks in the mirror.

JO MOK-RAHN

Filthy bitch.

17. Huh Tae-yang's studio apartment
Seoul / December

JO MOK-RAHN and HUH TAE-YANG sit facing each other with grim faces.

HUH TAE-YANG

How am I supposed to find 50 million out of nowhere?

JO MOK-RAHN

Move out of this apartment. And give me the deposit.

HUH TAE-YANG

Wow, look at you.

JO MOK-RAHN

Look at you? (*Enraged*) Me? What's wrong with me?

HUH TAE-YANG

(*Scared and stepping back*) Why are you doing this... You're freaking me out. Stop it.

JO MOK-RAHN

(*Shrieking*) You're freaking out? I'm freaking out. I'm the one who's scared to death. You're gonna move out or what?

HUH TAE-YANG

How would I do that? This property has been seized already.

JO MOK-RAHN

Where is your mother? Where is she hiding?

HUH TAE-YANG

I really don't know.

JO MOK-RAHN

Get me 50 million. I don't care how you do it, just give it to me. Or you and I, we're gonna die here.

HUH TAE-YANG

Alright, let's just kill ourselves here. I don't wanna go on like this anyway.

JO MOK-RAHN

You... You got paid for that film literature, right? 50 million won.

HUH TAE-YANG

Wow... You... I don't know what to say.

JO MOK-RAHN

Why? Why do you make such a face?

You sold the story about my grandmother, didn't you?

You think I wouldn't know that you stole her story?

Give me that money!

HUH TAE-YANG

I haven't been paid yet.

JO MOK-RAHN

Don't blow the bullshit-trumpet and give me the money now.

HUH TAE-YANG

I really haven't been paid yet.

JO MOK-RAHN

I can't trust you. Money.

HUH TAE-YANG sighs and calls OH YOUNG-WHAN.

OH YOUNG-WHAN does not pick up. She leaves a voicemail.

HUH TAE-YANG

Your phone is still off.

I really need to talk to you.

Please. Pick up the phone. I'm begging you. *(Hangs up the phone)*

JO MOK-RAHN

Why didn't you say anything about the money?

HUH TAE-YANG

There's a good reason.

JO MOK-RAHN

Call him again.

HUH TAE-YANG

No.

JO MOK-RAHN takes the hammer out.

JO MOK-RAHN

Can't you see what I'm capable of? Do you wanna die at my hands?

HUH TAE-YANG trembles as she calls OH YOUNG-WHAN on the cellphone. OH YOUNG-WHAN does not pick up. She leaves a voicemail.

HUH TAE-YANG

Director Oh, please, pick up the phone.

Please pick it up.

(She starts to sob.)

Pick up the goddamn phone you son of a bitch.

I saw the premier date on the Internet.

How could you do this to me, huh?

Written and directed by Oh Young-whan?

I don't even get a co-writer credit?

I don't care about the ending credit.

I don't care about the 50 million won.

But how could you do this to me? Huh?

How can you just abandon me like this?

You bastard. You son of a bitch.

JO MOK-RAHN leaves in the midst of the voicemail.

HUH TAE-YANG cries, holding her cellphone.

As JO MOK-RAHN leaves and HUH TAE-YANG speaks on the phone, OH YOUNG-WHAN in a tuxedo appears upstage.

He has a trophy in his hands. A barrage of camera flash.

He delivers a speech with a resolute face.

OH YOUNG-WHAN

First of all, I would like to thank the 15 million moviegoers

Who have sent constant support and affection for “Ryuh Mok-rahn the North Korean Woman.”
 Although I rejoice at the success of the film,
 I cannot help but think about the fact that the peninsula is still divided into the North and South.
 The pain of the divide reverberated far away in the Vietnamese War
 And it is still shared by us today and now.
 I have a conviction that the reunion will approach us an inch by inch,
 As we share this agony and continue to ruminate on.....

OH YOUNG-WHAN basks in his flowery rhetoric.

18. Huh Tae-gahng’s studio apartment Seoul / December

HUH TAE-GAHNG and JO MOK-RAHN are lying side by side.

JO MOK-RAHN

I used to dream of going to a warm, southern beach.
 When I was younger, I wanted to go to Jeju Island.
 I wanted to see *hae-nyeos*³⁰ diving in the blue ocean.
 Hand in hand with my comrades, I wanted to frolic on a warm, southern beach.

 There’s a place named Yang-gahng-doh Hae-sahn near the Ahp-rok River.
 I was in the Propaganda Squad there.
 In Josun, you can’t make your dream come true unless you have served in the military.
 My father was a painter, my mother was a dancer, and I wanted to be a musician.
 One day, somebody came and claimed to be my father’s friend,
 And asked me to take his luggage for a few days.
 I didn’t know anything and I did as he asked me to do.
 The next day, my close comrade working for the Security Department came to the Propaganda Squad,
 with a very pale face.
 A smuggler is dropping your name, do you know the man?
 I could feel the sky collapsing.
 It wasn’t just any smuggler but a porcelain smuggler
 Who sells Goryeo blue porcelains in South Josun.
 My comrade told me that all of my family will be arrested as political prisoners.

³⁰ Translator’s note: *Hae-nyeos* are women in Jeju Island who dive in the water without breathing equipments to harvest seafood. This traditional occupation dates back to 434 A.D. They are considered an icon of Jeju Island.

So the comrade said, if you want to save your family, you should disappear and erase your trace. Then she left.

That was the only thing I could do.

HUH TAE-GAHNG

What about your parents? Do you know their whereabouts?

JO MOK-RAHN

I heard that they have been expelled from Pyongyang and that they are in Chung-jin...

HUH TAE-GAHNG

Are they safe?

JO MOK-RAHN

I've been told that things are not easy for them.

HUH TAE-GAHNG

(Sighs as he sits down) Is that why you need the money?

JO MOK-RAHN

.....

HUH TAE-GAHNG

And you need it soon?

JO MOK-RAHN

(Nodding) I wish I were dead.

HUH TAE-GAHNG

That fucking 50 million won..... I'm so sorry.

JO MOK-RAHN holds HUH TAE-GAHNG as she sobs.

HUH TAE-GAHNG stands up and paces about for a while.

He trembles as he stares at her.

He rushes towards her and hugs her tight. He kisses her passionately.

He kneels in front of her.

HUH TAE-GAHNG

Mok-rahn, stay with me. We, we should leave South Korea together.

Let's leave the peninsula altogether. Let's go as far as we can from here.
Canada, Australia, or Africa--wherever it is, let's run away as far as we can.

JO MOK-RAHN

What do you mean, Mr. Huh?

HUH TAE-GAHNG stands up and takes a brown photo album from the bookshelf.

He takes an envelope from the album and places it down on the floor.

JO MOK-RAHN

What is that?

HUH TAE-GAHNG

50 million won.

JO MOK-RAHN looks at HUH TAE-GAHNG and then at the envelope.

HUH TAE-GAHNG

Let's send this money to the North and leave without any regret. Yes?

JO MOK-RAHN trembles and then hugs HUH TAE-GAHNG from behind him.

19. Van

Seoul / January

In a shabby van parked somewhere.

KIM JONG-IL at the driver's seat, BAE MYUNG-HEE at the passenger's seat, and YOO MOK-RAHN at the back seat.

KIM JONG-IL

I knew this was gonna happen from the beginning.

I just let it be because you were making such a fuss about it.

BAE MYUNG-HEE

I got it, so stop it.

KIM JONG-IL

Not a jot of blood was mixed. So how could we consider her as our child?

BAE MYUNG-HEE

I thought pity was more than enough to bind us.

KIM JONG-IL

Pity! Listen to yourself!

You talk like a demented hag.

BAE MYUNG-HEE

Well I've never seen a girl like her. She just wouldn't say anything.

KIM JONG-IL

I haven't even heard her talking in sleep.

BAE MYUNG-HEE

You don't think she's become mute, do you?

KIM JONG-IL

Who knows. There are people who are born normal and then one day, *kahk!* They can't speak any more.

BAE MYUNG-HEE

Didn't she speak fine at the detention center?

KIM JONG-IL

Yup. Right, right. She used to sing well too.

(*Spotting JO MOK-RAHN through the window*) There she comes.

JO MOK-RAHN gets in the back seat. She has sunglasses on.

BAE MYUNG-HEE

Wow, I almost didn't recognize you.

KIM JONG-IL

Great. Look at you. You look like a regular jetsetter. That's the way to go.

BAE MYUNG-HEE

Hahaha, who could possibly tell that you're heading all the way to Pyongyang?

KIM JONG-IL

(Straight face) Shut that mouth!

JO MOK-RAHN

I assume everything is set?

KIM JONG-IL

Don't worry a thing.

KIM JONG-IL hands a document envelope to JO MOK-RAHN.

JO MOK-RAHN puts the passport and documents in a secure place.

KIM JONG-IL

So here we go.

The van starts.

JO MOK-RAHN looks at YOO MOK-RAHN.

JO MOK-RAHN

Who is she?

KIM JONG-IL

Nobody.

BAE MYUNG-HEE

We're just gonna drop her in Incheon before we cross the border.

Oh, by the way, you two have the same name.

KIM JONG-IL

Hahah, that's true.

BAE MYUNG-HEE

Her name is Mok-rahn too. Yoo Mok-rahn.

JO MOK-RAHN

.....

KIM JONG-IL

What a coincidence.

JO MOK-RAHN

Is she also from Josun?

BAE MYUNG-HEE

Yes, we met her in Burma. At a refugee camp.

KIM JONG-IL

Her father got caught at the border and her mother died in the camp.

BAE MYUNG-HEE

Her mother died just a week before she was supposed to come to South Korea. What a pity.

JO MOK-RAHN

Where has she been since then?

KIM JONG-IL

You won't believe it. This hussy insisted that we should keep her, at least just for a few months.....

JO MOK-RAHN

..... Where is she headed to?

BAE MYUNG-HEE

You know, to where she used to be.

KIM JONG-IL

Where else would she go? She's going back to the facility.

Silence.

YOO MOK-RAHN wakes up.

Puzzled, she feels somewhat diffident and tries to read the room.

JO MOK-RAHN stares at YOO MOK-RAHN for a long time.

JO MOK-RAHN turns her head towards the window.

She wipes away her tears on her cheek.

V. Spring

20. Canadian Embassy

Seoul / March

*HUH TAE-GAHNG is being interviewed for immigration.
He answers the questions.*

HUH TAE-GAHNG

The capital is Ottawa et le symbole du Canada est feuille d'érable.

There are four seasons like South Korea.

(Beat) I have been to Vancouver.

(Beat) To travel. Ainsi que pour étudier mon français.

(Beat) First I will look for a place to live and then I will look for a job as I master the languages.

(Beat) Why do I want to leave South Korea? Pourquoi?

Heureux! Je veux vie heureux. Je veux Heureux!

21. Secretary's Office at a Korean Conglomerate Company

Seoul / March

HUH TAE-YANG

So you want more drama and pizzazz, right?

HYUN SUNG-WOOK

Yes, I'm so glad that you understand our needs.

HUH TAE-YANG

And I suppose the president doesn't have any time to give me a voice recording?

HYUN SUNG-WOOK

No, he doesn't.

HUH TAE-YANG

Well, I don't have enough source materials but I guess it will have to do.

HYUN SUNG-WOOK

Are you sure?

HUH TAE-YANG

I'm a novelist. So I shall write a novel.

HYUN SUNG-WOOK

Wonderful.

HUH TAE-YANG

Writing things that didn't happen as if it happened is not easy.

Writing things that didn't occur as if it occurred is not easy.

Writing things that did happen, that did occur,

Who can't do that?

HYUN SUNG-WOOK

Amazing. I can't wait till I read it.

HUH TAE-YANG

Right? Could you perhaps add a zero? Please?

22. Huh Tae-sahn's studio apartment

Seoul / March

JO DAE-JAH is lying under a comforter.

HUH TAE-SAHN is reading "The History of Shit and Piss."

JO DAE-JAH rises suddenly and hits her chest.

She drinks up mahk-gol-li from the bottle.

JO DAE-JAH

What are you reading?

HUH TAE-SAHN

"The History of Shit and Piss."

JO DAE-JAH laughs grotesquely and then stops abruptly. She shivers.

JO DAE-JAH

You have the sleeping pills, right?

HUH TAE-SAHN

... No. Just go to sleep.

JO DAE-JAH

Tae-sahn.

HUH TAE-SAHN

What?

JO DAE-JAH

Sahn.....

Sahn, would you like to die with your mom?

HUH TAE-SAHN wipes away JO DAE-JAH's tears.

He lies her down.

HUH TAE-SAHN

Sleep.

Sleep. We have to be on the run again tomorrow.

JO DAE-JAH

.....

HUH TAE-SAHN

Are you feeling sleepy?

JO DAE-JAH

.....

HUH TAE-SAHN

Look at me.

Hands on your belly, legs straight, eyes shut, lips closed, empty the mind.

And tell yourself, everything is fine, everything is fine, everything is fine.

JO DAE-JAH closes her eyes.

HUH TAE-SAHN stares at JO DAE-JAH and then picks up the accordion.

He breathes in deep and then presses a key.

Last Scene. One day, someday

Far away on the stage, JO SUN-HO is still painting Kim Il-sung's portrait with his back towards the audience.

*HUH TAE-SAHN plays accordion downstage.
There are Korean history books piled up beside him.*

Between the two, there is nothing but the hammer.

*From stage left,
There comes a faint melody of guitar from a red-light district in China.*

*The woman playing guitar raises her head. The light gets brighter.
She is in a black bikini top and a glittering maxi skirt with a long slit.
JO MOK-RAHN sings "The Labyrinth of Love" in Chinese.*

JO MOK-RAHN

Woo roon sahn mung hai seu ttoo-oh, xiang-ryang aiching tsui-eh whan woo-chang
In-way aiching mi wang fang-who-ahng, in-way aiching toong-ku jui-eh-wang
Yong ni choon-ji-eh duh xin-ring, fu-wan nah ah-i di yang-ccu-ahng
Yong-wi-ehn xi-wang, Yong-wi-ehn who-wan-shang
Yong ni ni-ehn-ching duh tsu-bbang, yong-bba-oh nah aiching duh tah-yi-yang

*From stage right, YOO MOK-RAHN walks in.
Hesitantly, awkwardly, diffidently, she browses the stage,
And then looks at the hammer.
As YOO MOK-RAHN steps closer to the hammer
Her small shadow is elongated.*

Curtain.