

Excerpt 1: The Dog Butcher

“Hey, big bro. How’s business? Pretty good, huh?”

“Let me see the dogs.”

“How about saying hi first? You really don’t know how to greet people, man!”

Jinho ignored him and looked over the man's shoulder at the dogs on the truck. Hyong-geun shook his head and gave up on having any kind of conversation. He went back to his truck and pulled the dogs out.

The dogs had never been to a slaughterhouse. They could sense something was definitely wrong. They hid their tails between their legs and pulled their ears back. Some of them trembled. It was as if they could sense death in the air.

“You know I saved the best ones for you. See? The biggest and the fattest dogs you’ve ever seen. I don’t give these high quality dogs to anybody but you, bro.”

The dogs didn’t look special to Jinho. They were not that much bigger or fatter than any of the other dogs he usually purchased.

Jinho knew Hyong-geun well. He was all talk. Jinho ignored him and counted the dogs. One, two, three, four, five, six... His count stopped at an extremely skinny dog whose right eye was shut. The eye was covered with a big scar that looked like it had been made by the slash of a sword. The scar was black and looked old.

“That dog...”

Hyong-geun’s eyes followed Jinho’s fingertip.

“Ah! That one-eyed dog?”

This time, Hyong-geun didn’t sound so upbeat. He seemed somewhat troubled.

“Well, it’s nothing to concern yourself with. Losing an eye doesn’t change the taste of the meat. You know that, right, big bro?”

“No, I mean... What happened to his eye?”

“Are you kidding me? How an earth would I know what happened to a stray dog’s eye?”

Hyong-geun gave Jinho a friendly pat on the shoulder and laughed.

It wasn’t that Jinho expected an answer from Hyong-geun, but his curiosity about the dog’s eye grew. Jinho walked up to the dog.

He took a closer look. The dog wasn’t that much shorter or smaller than the others. Its skinny, bony body just made it look that way. Its faded yellow fur was patchy on its back.

“Hey, don’t tell me you don’t want him. He is a dog, too.”

Hyong-geun seemed a little worried that Jinho would turn down the dog, not because of its eye, but because it was so thin that it looked like it was going to perish from hunger. Hyong-geun had been having a hard time trying to sell it. No butchers wanted this dog with no meat on it.

“If you feed him a little more, he will be just fine. Right, bro?”

Jinho knew that Hyong-geun was trying his best to manipulate him. But Jinho wasn’t really listening. His sudden curiosity about this skinny, one-eyed dog wouldn’t let go.

Maybe it was because he never could look into a dog's eyes for any amount of time. But looking at this dog with its shut eye was easier for him.

"OK, OK. I won't charge you for that freakin' dog. But remember that I'm doing it just because it's you. I wouldn't give away a dog to anyone else. Give me a little credit. How about buying me a drink tonight?"

Jinho didn't bother to reply. Hyong-geun drove away in his truck with an unpleased look on his face.

Jinho pushed the new dogs into the cage. The top dog bared its teeth and growled and chased the new dogs into a corner.

Excerpt 2: The Dog Butcher

"Don't forget the mackerels after your haircut. And don't pay more than what I gave you. If they demand more money, you tell them you know the market price for mackerels. Don't let them know you're not a frequent shopper. If necessary, tell them your wife is dead and you've been shopping for years. Then they won't try to rip you off."

Jinho wondered how much money a person can rip off selling mackerels, yet it seemed like a big deal to his mother. She reminded his father about a dozen times how important it was to buy the fish at the right price.

"Women!" his father said as he got on his bike.

His father pedaled his bike with young Jinho on the back.

"Hey, son," his father said. "Never marry a talkative woman. She will drive you to an early death. Don't concern yourself with how a woman looks, and don't get carried away with how big her boobs are. Just concern yourself with how quiet she is. If you can find one, I think a mute might make the best wife. If I ever teach you anything, remember these as my most important words for you, son."

Jinho was only eight years old, but he clearly understood his father. His mother had probably been a woodpecker in her former life.

Was she the reason his father died young?

No, that made no sense.

If what his father told him were true, Jinho would have lived forever since he never bothered to marry in the first place.

His father pedaled the bike down a trail lined with red and yellow wildflowers. He breezed into town and parked the bike in front of a barbershop.

"Hey, stranger!" the barber said. "And stranger's son!"

The barber was his father's close friend. He welcomed his father with a slap on the back of the head.

"Look at your hair. Are you a war resister? The Korean War ended decades ago. No one should look like you. God, you're ugly with that mop of hair."

"Shut up. Ask anyone on the street who is better looking between you and me. Do you

ever look in a mirror?”

Jinho licked a lollipop and listened to the two friends bicker at each other. It was their old tradition. No matter how the haircut came out, his father would never pay his friend a compliment.

“Hey, hey, you are not making it even. Look at this. The left side is longer than the right.”

“I’m the barber. I know what I’m doing.”

The barbershop was abuzz with noise; the barber and Jinho’s father bickered, the radio played, the clippers hummed.

The barbershop door swung open and a customer walked into the shop.

“Hey, how are you?” the customer said to Jinho and his father. “Long time no see, kiddo.”

Mr. Cha, who owned a wallpaper store downtown, seemed pleasantly pleased to see them.

A loud, abrupt buzz from the clippers filled the shop.

“Oh my God!” the barber gasped.

“What?” Jinho’s father asked with alarm. “What happened?”

The barber didn’t answer. Instead, he looked at the back of his friend’s head and his jaw dropped.

“What did you do?”

Jinho’s father snatched a hand mirror from the dressing table. He spun the chair to see the reflection of his head. Jinho stopped licking his lollipop. A big, glaring bald spot was centered on the back of his father’s head.

“What the...? What have you done to me? This is... Put it back!”

“Put what back?” the barber asked timidly.

“You know what I mean. Put my hair back on.”

“Hey, I’m sorry. You turned your head so suddenly.”

“Glue it back on!”

“Please, friend, calm down. I didn’t do it on purpose.”

Jinho’s father growled in a low tone. Mr. Cha backed silently out of the shop. Jinho’s father rose from the chair and went after the barber. After a couple rounds of grappling, the barber offered to shave his father’s head at no cost.

“Hey, it might look good on you. People are shaving their heads these days. It’s fashionable now.”

“People? What people?”

“Well... I’m sure there’s someone.”

“Who? Name someone. Or I’ll kill you right here.”

The barber’s eyeballs looked upward at the ceiling as he tried to think. Just one shaved head, one bald guy, might save his life.

“Yes! I know! Yul Brynner!”

A bright light of a glory shone from the barber’s face.

“Yul who? Never heard of him! Is he a Buddhist monk? If so, you are still a dead body.”

Buddhist monks don't count."

"I've never heard of anybody as ignorant as you. Yul Brynner, man. The famous actor. Haven't you seen his movies?"

Jinho's father would not believe that there was any man named Yul Brynner with a fashionably shaved head. The barber rushed out the barbershop door and returned with people from neighboring shops. Some of them knew of Yul Brynner from the movie "The King and I" that they had seen at the downtown movie theater or on TV.

"Yes. A great actor. A macho man."

Eventually, his father sat back in the chair in resignation and was shaved bald.

Jinho and his father returned home having forgotten to buy the mackerels, but Mom didn't say a word about that after she saw her husband's shiny head.

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Jinho returned from the memory. The red and blue stripes still spun in front of the barber shop. His childhood was long gone. The memories were painful to recall. It had been such a short period in his life when he had felt truly happy. He sighed and pulled himself up.

"Hey, let's go," he said to the one-eyed dog at his side. "Come on. We have to find our home."