

LOVE STORY

Lee Kyung-Sung and Creative VaQi

The performers Woo Bum-Jin, Na Kyung-Min, and Sung Soo-Yeon of the Creative VaQi wrote their own texts and created their own characters based on their research and imagination.



[https://tinyurl.com/Lee -LoveStory](https://tinyurl.com/Lee-LoveStory)

ENGLISH TRANSLATION FROM THE KOREAN Colin Marshall, Emily Bettencourt,
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SUPERVISION Alyssa Kim

This text was translated in Advanced Stylistic Practice Class, LTI Korea Transla-
tion Academy.

WITH Woo Bum-Jin, Na Kyung-Min, and Sung Soo-Yeon

DIRECTOR Lee Kyung-Sung

DRAMATURG Jun Kang-Hee

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR Hyun Ye-Sol

Throughout the creative process, the assistant director archived the words and materials found by the actors, then the dramaturg brought a new perspective and set of interpretations to bear on the texts to create the final structure. Finally, it was only possible to complete the performance thanks to the work of the space, sound, and lighting designers.

PREMIERE November 6, 2018, at Doosan Art Center Seoul, South Korea, as a new
work by the winner of the 5th Doosan Yonkang Art Award (Lee Kyung-Sung)
COMMISSIONED BY Doosan Art Center

The setting is the actors' workroom. Each of the three actors has their own table. Gyeongmin's table, stage right, is a folding ping-pong table, and Suyeon's table in front of the blackboard has a laptop connected to a screen. Beomjin works at a piano, stage left. Upstage there are a blackboard and a video screen, and above that are the South and North Korean flags. There are photos attached to the walls.

As the audience enters, the actors are onstage, doing their respective work. Suyeon writes "imagining" on the blackboard. Then she begins to search on her laptop. (North Korea. North-South relations. Inter-Korean summit. Handshake.) When she searches "handshake," the three actors shake each other's hands.

Suyeon continues searching.

(North Korean woman. Kaesong Industrial Complex. How to get to Kaesong Industrial Complex.)

After she searches "how to get to Kaesong Industrial Complex," she reads an interview script.

SUYEON: Which checkpoints do you have to pass through to get to Kaesong from your house in Seoul?

GYEONGMIN: There's an army checkpoint at the end of Unification Bridge. You get the first inspection there, and then you go on to the Dorasan entrance office. If you go by car, you get a vehicle inspection at the CIQ and have to write down your personal information, and before you go to the UN checkpoint, everyone gathers at one place. There, the cars going in at a designated time slot all line up and the number of people get confirmed, and then you leave the army checkpoint guided by a UN vehicle driven by UN military police. When you get 100 meters from the Military Demarcation Line, the UN vehicle returns. A North Korean car takes you from there on. Following that car, you pass a Northern checkpoint and arrive at the Northern CIQ. There they check the number of cars and people again. After that, you follow another car from Northern customs, and at the last intersection there's an army checkpoint. You pass it in single file and enter the complex.

SUYEON: It sounds very complicated.

GYEONGMIN: Getting through it all takes about an hour.

BEOMJIN: It's not that far. About seven kilometers. But it takes a little more than an hour.

SUYEON: What if you don't have your own car?

GYEONGMIN: They do a headcount at the army checkpoint. While the people coming by car are going through the CIQ at the Dorasan entrance office, the people on foot go through a process like customs at the airport. When you are done with the procedure, an escort vehicle picks you up and you stand by at the last army checkpoint. There's another headcount, and the rest is the same.

BEOMJIN: It's just like taking your passport and visa when you go abroad. From the Unification Bridge onward, you have to show your South Korean passport. When you get your pass scanned at the Southern CIQ, it goes into the system, and you also get it scanned in the North to enter. They used to do this all by hand, but now it's automatic.

GYEONGMIN: Everything was done by hand at first. So it took much longer.

SUYEON: It must've felt very different, the first time you passed through.

GYEONGMIN: It feels different every time.

BEOMJIN: (*breathes deeply*) The air is so fresh there. When I come back to Seoul, I can notice the air pollution right away. The Kaesong Industrial Complex is like a country in itself. Getting in and out of there is just like getting in and out of a country.

SUYEON: I definitely want to visit the place at least once.

SUYEON (*recorded voice*): When I go somewhere, if it's outside, I always look for cats that might be living there. I really love cats. I look for places near grass, with food waste bins close by and a couple of cars parked. This is the back parking lot of a factory. There's a sign on the wall that says Se something Corporation. Cats like this kind of place. I take the can of food I brought and call for a cat.

SUYEON: Meow Meow.

SUYEON (*recorded voice*): The air is nice. I can see the far-off mountains clearly. It might be nice to sit out here and drink a can of beer. I decide to keep looking for cats on my way to the convenience store. I go into an alley. A narrow alley between two factories, not quite wide enough to be called a street. I like this kind of place. Cats like this kind of place too.

SUYEON: Meow?

SUYEON (*recorded voice*): It seems like a good place for doing things secretly.

I suddenly remember hearing that women in North Korea aren't allowed to smoke or drink in front of people. I look down as I walk. I want to find a cigarette butt with lip gloss on the end. No, it's fine even if there's no lip gloss. I hope that some female North Korean worker smoked cigarettes here in secret, mocking the people who said she couldn't.

That secret smoker's footsteps, stealthy, looking around, holding her breath, like a cat, like she could run away at any moment.

I walk along the alley. I think of things that are better suited to alleys than large streets. Things that are often pushed aside in favor of more important issues. People who silently watch others make decisions. Emotions kept hidden in one corner of the heart, in case it ruins one's relationships with others.

SUYEON: (*sighing*) Ahh...

SUYEON (*recorded voice*): I remember what one Kaesong worker said about seeing a cat fleeing through the window of the bathroom. I look carefully at the small windows of the buildings as I walk. I peek in through one of the windows. There's a poster on the opposite wall. I can see a slogan that says "Normalize at Any Cost."

Normal. Abnormal.

North-South Summit Meeting.

I look at a picture. Among the twenty-four people in the picture, only one is a biological woman.

There's a blue ping-pong table under the poster. They say that the Kaesong workers gathered in twos and threes during their break times to play ping-pong. As a rule, North Koreans and South Koreans couldn't enjoy sports together, but once they got to know each other, they could play ping-pong, at least. I'm no good at ping-pong. I would just stand and watch the good players send the ball back and forth.

I think about a cat watching a toy in my hand and jumping back and forth.

A cat I saw every time I took a walk in the neighborhood park near the theatre. I called that cat Neighborhood. The cat that lives here—what do people call it?

Since it's the Kaesong Industrial Complex... Industry? Industry.

SUYEON: Meow.

SUYEON (*recorded voice*): What kinds of sights would Industry see in this alley?

Many feet all walking to the same place. Someone sighing deeply. The hands that petted her. The eyes that glanced at her. A small pebble that was thrown at her. People saying the word "unification."

I imagine a person who might have stood and looked at the cat. She slowly crouches down. She extends her right hand, slowly. She shows the back of her

hand to the cat. The cat looks at the hand approaching her. The cat thinks about whether it's a friend's hand or a foe's. The cat hesitates for a moment and then disappears around the corner to the back of the building.

It's noisy behind the building. Out flows the sound of machines operating inside. The wind that comes from the fan vents is hot and smoky.

I imagine someone who might have leaned against this wall. The sound of machinery is unexpectedly comforting. She would have stood here, tired of people's sharp words and cold gazes.

What would she have thought about this place? Did she talk to herself, inaudible words muffled by the sound of machines?

I call the cat as I walk.

SUYEON: Industry Industry

SUYEON (*recorded voice*): As I walk, I imagine someone calling the cat Industry.

SUYEON: Industry Industry

SUYEON (*recorded voice*): When I see a traffic sign, I remember drawing a poster of the North and South when I was young. The South was always blue, and the North was always red.

Every year there was a competition to write letters to North Korean kids. The title of the letter I wrote in third grade was "To My Nameless Friend," in fourth grade it was "To my Friend in North Korea," and in fifth grade it was "To the North Korean Friend I Want to Meet." To the North Korean friend I want to meet. To the North Korean friend I want to meet.

SUYEON: To the North Korean friend I want to meet. To the North Korean friend I want to meet. To the North Korean friend I want to meet.

SUYEON (*recorded voice*): At some point, I arrive in front of the convenience store. It's called CU, Kaesong Industrial Complex Branch #2. The employee is North Korean.

The first North Korean I've met in North Korea.

What kind of person is she?

I slowly open the glass door and go into the store.

The video shows images of the Kaesong Industrial Complex.

GYEONGMIN: I'm actor Na Gyeongmin. Since I'm in the acting business, it's my job to mainly deal with fictional characters created by writers. But this time, we set out to make a play about the Kaesong Industrial Complex or more specifically, the real people who worked at Kaesong. But the thing is, even as South-North relations have abruptly gone into reconciliation mode, we weren't al-

lowed into Kaesong. Moreover, we had no way of meeting any North Koreans who worked there. So we started to imagine. Using everything available to us, we tried imagining the North Korean workers of Kaesong.

He writes "Choi Song-Ah" on the chalkboard.

The character I've created is a young man who drives the Kaesong commuter bus. You know, once you're assigned to a manufacturing process, you don't really get to leave that place. I thought it'd be nice if he had a job that took him to places and allowed him to meet lots of people. I also wanted him to be someone who'd faced a great deal of change.

The North Korean Kaesong workers' wages came from the country. North Korea, that is. The company didn't pay them directly. Apparently the workers called what the Southern corporations provided in lieu of a salary, "labor service supplies." Choco pie, coffee mix, stuff like that. So I pictured a young North Korean man who grew up eating choco pies from a young age thanks to his parents who also worked at Kaesong. A young man who'd been raised welcoming the waves of capitalism in the world's only communist country under the socialist system, you know?

Choi Song-Ah. Male. Late twenties. There's a small mountain right next to the complex. Janam Mountain. It's more of a hill. Almost all the mountains in North Korea are barren, but apparently Kaesong used to be known for its pine trees. Which means Janam Mountain must've been packed with pine at one point. His mother had loved that pine hill. So she named him "song" for pine and "ah" for hill. Song-Ah, Song-Ah. He enters the military at 17 like all the other North Korean men. But he has a small accident and finishes his military service early. I didn't want my character to be in the army for too long. Afterwards, he attends the Kaesong College of Arts and dreams of becoming an actor. Because he loves the works of Anton Chekhov, he wants to study in Russia after finishing college. "Mother loves me, loves me not, loves me, loves me not. I shall show them the people's Treplev!" My colleagues said my character studying theatre seems too contrived. But I told them, "Rather than imagining a world I don't know anything about, I'm trying to meet the character through the world I know well." Anyway, Choi Song-Ah ends up not studying abroad. Why? Because he starts working for Kaesong on behalf of his parents under a policy order. He ends up working as a bus driver because of his army driving experience. His leg is slightly uncomfortable from his accident in the army, but otherwise he has no problem walking or going on with his daily life. It's a bit of discomfort that only he can feel.

Gyeongmin touches his own knee.

He takes a lot of pride in his job of transporting nearly 50,000 Kaesong residents to the Industrial Complex via the commuter bus. He grows secretly close

with a Southern worker who teaches him repair skills. They play ping-pong together, share some ginseng wine, and the Southerner shows him photos of his family vacation to Jeju Island. He lets Song-Ah drive his car and puts his hand on the steering wheel. In this way, they grow really close. Song-Ah sees his co-worker's sister in vacation photos. He asks half-jokingly, "Um, is your sister married?" The Southerner chuckles and says, "I'll introduce you if you're interested, comrade!" From that day on, Choi Song-Ah dreams of reunification.

I'm sure all actors do this, but we pour in a lot of effort to get close to our characters. For Song-Ah, I eat choco pies in my spare time. Why did I want to imagine a young North Korean man working with South Koreans at the Kaesong Industrial Complex?

He eats a choco pie.

He wears jeans. They should have some oil stains. You know how they say North Koreans don't really wear jeans because they're American? Apparently North Koreans don't understand why people wear ripped jeans. But because denim is so durable, some men have started wearing jeans to go fishing or do hard labor. Choi Song-Ah also likes the pair he tried on and keeps wearing them. They're fine even when he goes under the bus for maintenance and scrapes them on the ground or against metal parts. "Go on now, I've fixed you well."

BEOMJIN: What about the top?

GYEONGMIN: Top? Jacket? He wears the kind of jumper that industrial workers here in the South also wear. You see, there were no uniforms for drivers. Since he started working at Kaesong, Song-Ah likes wearing the jumper he got as a gift from a Southerner. He basically never takes it off unless it's summer. He didn't accept the gift at first because of his pride. "I don't need this sort of thing." "I have lots of jackets at home." But the Southerner leaves it behind in the breakroom, saying, "Ah, I have two of these, so I'd better throw this one away." Only then does Song-Ah take it and even stitches his name into it in case some other driver might take it. Choi. Song. Ah.

Gyeongmin takes out his nametag and puts it on his jacket. He puts on a glove.

He always wears gloves, and his palms are grimy. He doesn't really ever take the gloves off because his Southern co-worker is missing a pinky finger on his right hand. Since he doesn't take his gloves off, Song-Ah doesn't take his off either. When Song-Ah saw his co-worker washing his hands with only four fingers on one side, he said, "Are you a crip, too?" But he only learns later that he hurt the other guy's feelings. Likewise, the Southerner learns only later that there is no word for "the disabled" in North Korea—only "cripple."

He takes off the glove.

I can't really picture his face. Have you ever met a North Korean, by any chance? I've only met two in person; they were both defectors and women. So I tried turning to films for North Korean male faces. Kang Dong-Won in *Secret Reunion*. Hyun Bin in *Confidential Assignment*. Jung Woo-Sung in *Steel Rain*. Kim Soo-Hyun in *Secretly, Greatly*. Who should it be? What kind of expression? Choi Song-Ah likes driving cars and fixing things, and is satisfied working at Kaesong. He's curious about the world, and his eyes are wide open because there's so much he wants to learn about. And he rolls his eyes well. Apparently not fulfilling your military service or being discharged midway is really shameful in North Korea. He's a bit cautious because he has to hide his leg injury. He always smiles with his mouth wide open. But he was told that he'd get in trouble with the North Korean administrators if he were that friendly with the Southerners, so he's since made a habit of keeping his mouth shut when smiling.

I wanted to ask Choi Song-Ah the following questions:

What does the North Korean radio station play?

Has anyone died from an accident on the commuter bus?

How did you change after working with Southerners?

How did you feel when your workplace was suddenly shut down?

What will happen to us following this sudden disjunction?

After the last question, Gyeongmin takes out the glove from his pocket and looks at it in his hand. He pulls on the glove.

As for me, I worked part-time at the Shinwon Eben Esel factory in Gwangju, Gyeonggi Province. For about half a year? My job was simple, just unloading containers of clothes made in foreign factories and shelving them in our factory. Apparently, clothing-factories moved around a lot because the labor costs were high and kept rising. First China, then the Philippines when China got too expensive, then Malaysia, then Indonesia, then finally Kaesong, North Korea. They built an aggressive number of factories because Kaesong has ridiculously cheap labor and uniform wages. Shinwon did, I mean. Even if they make it in North Korea, it's still "Made in Korea." I unloaded boxes of clothes with that tag. (*Spreads the fingers of his right hand*) I used to cut myself here a lot. On the hangers. And we'd ship off the fabric and buttons and zippers and other subsidiary materials in the empty containers. The fabric from our country will become a garment after North Korean workers cut and sew it; it'll pass through the hands of a day laborer like me en route to department stores, where someone will buy it. Someone. The same for school uniforms, Cuckoo rice cookers, glue sticks.

He returns to the table and holds up a book.

This book is called *The People of the Kaesong Industrial Complex*. It features interviews with South Koreans who worked at Kaesong, including what it was like on the day of the bombardment of Yeonpyeong, what kinds of conflicts came from their different understanding of labor and wages, how they felt when the complex was shut down then started up again. In this book, I found conversations that Choi Song-Ah might've had with his Southern co-workers. Beomjin, could you hand me the text?

“Why are you so desperate to make money?”

“We gotta make money to feed ourselves, no?”

“We eat just fine without doing all that.”

“We try to make more money to live a better life.”

“I don’t get that at all. Is that capitalism?”

“I don’t understand you either.”

“Is this your car?”

“Yes, it is.”

“No way. I don’t believe you. Prove it.”

“I’m not even done with the monthly installments.”

“And what’s that?”

“It’s a thing. In the South.”

“Tell me... Are all the Southern cars in Kaesong?”

“Hahahaha.”

“The photos from your trip to Jeju Island. Show me those again.”

Gyeongmin closes the book and holds up a notebook.

I tried writing a story about things that could've happened on February 10, 2016. That was the day that the Kaesong Industrial Complex was shut down by the South Korean government.

“Go on now, I’ve fixed you well.”

Shutting the hood of a repaired car, Choi Song-Ah picked up his toolbox.

“Where did everyone go?” He walked to the back of the lot and saw people gathered in small groups, whispering to each other.

“What’s going on?”

“The Southerners will be deported right away.”

“They have to leave the tools, the parts, everything—and go back to the South.”

“What are you talking about?”

“They pulled this fucking shit about three years ago, and they’re doing it again.”

He dragged his bad leg to the office. Many had already gathered, but they were all keeping quiet. The manager started to speak, breaking the heavy silence.

“Starting tomorrow, we North Koreans won’t be coming here to work, so everyone make sure to take all your belongings with you.”

Right then, the workers started moving quickly. It’s not that there were lockers or any special place for storing personal items. But from various corners, people started pulling out the Southern items they hadn’t been able to take home due to the exit search. The manager must’ve understood, because he pretended not to see anything that day. Choi Song-Ah rushed out as well. He, too, had hidden something.

Gyeongmin brings a blanket from off-stage.

He tried imagining where he’d be, carrying three cartons of Ryongbong cigarettes that he’d exchanged for ration tickets and saved up, as well as two bottles of Kaesong wild ginseng wine, all wrapped in cloth. *Maybe?* He rushed to the breakroom with the ping-pong table. *Of course.* His co-worker was blankly watching the Northerners clock out for the last time through the window. Choi Song-Ah approached him. “Comrade, take this. Ah, you begged me for ginseng wine. And cut back on those cigarettes, will ya?”

Receiving the cloth-wrapped gifts, he looks at Choi Song-Ah, and places his own toolbox at Song-Ah’s feet.

“This is yours, comrade. Have it.”

“No thanks.”

“Anyway, we might never see each other again.
Why don’t we call each other brother?”

“...I have something to ask you.”

“Go ahead, brother.”

“How are we getting last month’s overtime incentive?”

“I’ll give it to you instead. Is this enough?”

“No thanks.”

“I’ll get it for myself later.”

“Give it to me in dollars, then.”

“How about betting on a final round of ping-pong?”

“With a busted leg like this, no bet for me.”

“What about it! Look at my finger!”

“If I win, send me on a trip to Jeju!”

“And Baekdu Mountain for me?”

The two face each other at the ping-pong table. With Choi Song-Ah’s serve, their never-ending rally begins...

Ping-pong ping-pong ping-pong ping-pong ping-pong ping-pong.....

Beomjin plays The One Left in My Heart on the piano and sings. When the song ends, he writes "Ri Ye-Mae" on the blackboard.

BEOMJIN: 1. Ri Ye-Mae's view

February 2015. Ri Ye-Mae first arrived for work. In a few years, how would he remember this day? Maybe other than his bumbling, he wouldn't remember anything. Even though it was February but snowed heavily, and even though early that morning a young woman worker was run over and killed by a bus, he wouldn't remember. He was like that. Always clumsy at first. And he could never remember his firsts: The first day he'd been placed in a unit in Musan, North Hamkyeong Province, the first day he'd gone as a laborer to Krasnodar, Russia, the first day he'd met his wife, his wedding day, and even the day his mother died. He couldn't remember any of it. He needed to pass through the tunnel called adjustment to see the surroundings more clearly.

Even though he had seen the Kaesong Industrial Complex a few times from afar before, heard about it from the people in the area, and been trained at the National People's Committee over the past few weeks, going into the complex was another matter entirely. Going to work together with his wife in a bus driven by his neighbor Song-Ah must have been some comfort. Everyone who'd arrived for their first day of work gathered at the entrance. Then they moved to the support center in the middle of the complex and received training all morning from the people of the Reconnaissance Bureau. But there was no way Ri Ye-Mae would remember or understand what he was taught.

When the training ended, the people from the Southern companies came to get the workers assigned to them. Ri Ye-Mae was assigned together with five other workers to a logistics company called Y, but he had no sense of what the company did. Two Southerners took them to a van.

“Hello. Nice to meet you. Before we go to the office and eat, we'll first take a ride around the complex and explain to you what's where. Since we're a logistics and sales company, we have to know where everything in the complex is. We'll explain as we go, so pay close attention.”

The van set off. But Ri Ye-Mae couldn't possibly remember what was said. Looking at the factories out the window, he thought only this: "What does this company do that we have to know every place in the complex?" "How come all the buildings and roads here look the same?" "How am I going to remember all this?" "Oh, why am I so unlucky?"

2. Introduction

While studying the Kaesong Industrial Complex, we always had to use our imagination. One day the director told us to try writing a story. So he's making us do all the work now? But how? Well, I had to give it a try. What kind of story will I imagine? What kind of character will I picture? In the end I had these questions: "What kind of people am I drawn to? What kind of people do I feel for?" And the answer, to put it my own words, was, "people who can't do things that well." That is, people who don't pan out, the people who worked at the Complex and wanted to do their best but couldn't pull it off. I thought I had to tell their story. I didn't want to make them just naïve or nice or innocent; I wanted them to be the ones who make me uncomfortable. Out of what I then scribbled down came the previous scene.

3. North Korea

North Korea, Korean people, unification. If I think back on my sentiments about these words, I go back to 1991, my third year of elementary school. I remember that my teacher back then was a man, born in 1933, who talked about the Korean War with hot anger and about unification with hotter love for the people. It influenced me, of course. That spring, the North-South unified table tennis team won the women's team competition in the world championships. I remember watching it on TV. My memories and feelings about that time are buried at the very bottom of all things.

4. What kind of person is Ri Ye-Mae?

I'll start with his appearance. He is 164 centimeters tall, shorter than average because of the hardships he endured while growing up. But his body is strong-looking. With a thick torso like Maradona's, developed back muscles, and sturdy calves, it would be a good body for weightlifting.

His eyes. His gaze. His field of vision is narrow, like he's wearing blinders, so his face is also tilted forward. And he can't focus or concentrate well, so his gaze doesn't stay at one place for long but moves around.

His nose. He is dense and unaware of his surroundings, and on top of that his sense of smell is poor. One side of his nose is always blocked due to sinus-

itis and rhinitis, so in order to breathe more easily his mouth is always open. Possibly out of a lack of consideration for people around him, he spits and blows his nose everywhere. (*Blows nose.*)

His mouth. Uncouth and hot-tempered, he has had to repress his temper since he was young. So his upper lip is always tense, and it covers his upper teeth. But he is also simple and honest, so when he is happy or angry, he ends up smiling or getting pissed off, showing his upper teeth. (*A happy expression, then an angry expression.*)

His hands. Worker's hands. Large, thick, and stubby. They have many small scars and calluses as well. He often does manual labor, so his hands always look as if they're clenched around eggs, and because he's dense and insensitive, his fingers always look like they're stuck together.

Honest and unafraid, he thrusts his chest confidently forward. Having performed manual labor for a long time, he stands with a straight back. Because his back muscles are tighter than his abdominal muscles, his hips are open, and so his feet are turned outward. His center of gravity is toward the front of his feet, which suits his straightforward and aggressive personality.

5. Q&A: What would it be like to meet someone like him?

SUYEON: What do you think it would be like to really meet someone like Ri Ye-Mae?

BEOMJIN: Honestly, I think I'd be uncomfortable enough to keep my distance.

SUYEON: Have you met someone like him?

BEOMJIN: Hasn't everyone met someone like him one time or another? I've met a lot of people like him while trying to earn a living. One time I did demolition. It was hard work. And on top of that, all the dust and sweat and noise. One older guy I worked with was friendly and good-natured, but he would start yelling at the drop of a hat. One time there was a fire-hose spigot sticking out of a building. They're really expensive. So the guy gave me a sledgehammer and said, (*sweetly*) "Hit it softly!" I hit it very softly. *Tap, tap*. Then he suddenly shouted, (*abruptly*) "Shit, are you kidding me? Are you kidding me?" Taken aback, I said, "You told me to hit it softly!" He said, "Give it here!" He took the sledgehammer and started hitting the spigot really hard. We had different definitions of "softly." And when we finished work, he was back to saying, (*sweetly*) "Good job." Ri Ye-Mae has that side to him.

6. What happens to Ri Ye-Mae?

What happens to Ri Ye-Mae? I haven't written that yet. Though I did think of a plot.

Ri Ye-Mae isn't a good worker. He's slow to learn and makes a lot of mistakes. And he doesn't get along well with others. What's more, because the company does sales and distribution, Northerners and Southerners get along better than they do at the other companies. But that's not the case for Ri Ye-Mae. Even when everybody else gets together to play table tennis or volleyball, he can't. He's not good at sports.

They say that at the Kaesong Industrial Complex, Northerners and Southerners secretly exchange gifts and necessities. Suppose a Northerner says "gloves." A few days later, a Southerner will buy gloves and leave them in a place only the two of them know about, and the Northerner will pick them up. But to Ri Ye-Mae, that's unthinkable. Time passes this way, and then comes the year 2016. Ri Ye-Mae has a son who looks just like him. The son demands soccer shoes as a combined birthday and Lunar New Year present. "I want them! I want them!" Like his father, he isn't good at sports, but he wants to play in an important match on February 12th no matter what. Ri Ye-Mae generously promises to buy the shoes. "I'll get 'em for you!" But his wife won't hear that kind of nonsense. Suyeon! Gyeongmin!

Suyeon and Gyeongmin read aloud, with Suyeon reading the wife's lines.

"What? Idiot? You call your husband an idiot?"

"Well, what else do you say to an idiot? And not so loud. You'll wake up Seong-Geun."

Ri Ye-Mae is on his feet, shouting, and his wife berates him while still lying down, with her eyes still closed.

"I mean, why would you make a promise you can't even keep? Now Seong-Geun is thinking only of his birthday."

"I'll keep it! I told Manager Park all about it! He said he'll bring back some Nikes next time he goes to the South!"

His wife snorts.

"Oh, bullshit. You think I don't know you? It's obvious you couldn't bring it up at all. What's so hard about talking to them, making friends with them... all the comrades you work with get along with the Southerners, play table tennis with them, and exchange gifts with them."

"You know I can't play table tennis. Don't worry. I'll get the shoes for sure."

It's February 10th. His son's soccer game is the day after tomorrow, but Ri Ye-Mae still hasn't said anything to any Southerner. Nervously smoking a cigarette outside, he spots a Southern employee looking around with a black bag and heading toward the doghouse. At that moment, Ri Ye-Mae knows what it is. "Soccer shoes!" In truth, a Northern co-worker has been bragging about

them for a while. What's more, their sons are friends. Ri Ye-Mae hides. Ri Ye-Mae silently watches the Southerner tossing the black bag into the doghouse. Before he knows it, he's heading for the doghouse himself, and soon he is leaving the place with the bag in hand. He runs to the bathroom and hides the shoes in a ceiling service duct.

There is a commotion, Ri Ye-Mae is suspected which leads to a fight, but he ends up with the shoes. But he can't take them home with him. The next day comes the bad news. The Kaesong Industrial Complex has been shut down due to a reckless decision by that Park Geun-hye and her cronies, so he has been told not to come in for work. Ri Ye-Mae runs the ten kilometers to the complex. "Soccer shoes, soccer shoes!" But the entrance is firmly guarded by soldiers, and nobody is going inside. Ri Ye-Mae wanders the area around the complex. He hangs around the barbed-wire fence that surrounds the complex, not knowing what to do. "Soccer shoes, soccer shoes, soccer shoes..."

Calisthenics. Music plays and images are projected.

The actors move to the music.

SUYEON: Did everyone really do this in the North? It's way harder than our National Calisthenics.

BEOMJIN: I saw a video of the factory workers doing the calisthenics. More or less, anyway. But their hearts weren't in it, and it wasn't exercise at all. Just like how we used to do it in school.

GYEONGMIN: I thought the calisthenics would be robotic because it's a communist country, but there are a lot of wavy dance movements.

BEOMJIN: What would happen to you if you were to do the exact same movements to the exact same music at the exact same time all your life?

SUYEON: You'd become a good dancer.

GYEONGMIN: You'd definitely become a good dancer. And wouldn't an individual learn through their body that they're a member of the country?

SUYEON: Even having learned that automatically, I think they could still wonder one day, all of a sudden, "Why am I doing this?"

GYEONGMIN: Still, wouldn't it give you a strong sense of belonging? That would grow into a love of the country, and that love of the country would grow into nationalism.

BEOMJIN: Like what we call getting a shot of patriotism about being Korean.

SUYEON: Which must be a hairsbreadth different from love of the country.

BEOMJIN: By what criterion?

SUYEON: The criterion in your heart. So I've prepared a short test that can show our feelings about our country. Shall we give it a try? (*Gives papers to Gyeongmin and Beomjin.*) Let's have some music.

The patriot test. "Arirang" plays as background music.
The actors hold the papers and read the questions.

SUYEON: I feel touched by the music playing now.

GYEONGMIN: When I travel, I always pack kimchi, *gochujang*, and other Korean foods.

BEOMJIN: I feel inexplicably happy when I see another Korean abroad.

SUYEON: When I watch an international sports competition like the Olympics or the World Cup, I often scream and cry.

GYEONGMIN: I watch Korea-Japan sports matches no matter what.

BEOMJIN: Honestly, I kind of dislike Japan.

SUYEON: I think that Dokdo is, without a doubt, Korean territory.

GYEONGMIN: I think the Japanese government must issue an official apology and reparations for the comfort women issue.

BEOMJIN: I know about the atrocities Korean soldiers committed in Vietnam.

SUYEON: It's not because I'm from here, but I think there's something special about our history.

GYEONGMIN: I think it's a great shame that ancient Goguryeo's territory doesn't belong to us now.

BEOMJIN: I'm proud that our country has retained Confucian customs and manners.

SUYEON: I'm proud of our country's inventions, like Hangeul, the sundial, and the rain gauge.

GYEONGMIN: I can sing all four verses of the national anthem. (*The actors sing the national anthem.*)

BEOMJIN: I think Samsung has a lot of problems, but I'm proud of the fact that it's a globally recognized company.

SUYEON: I truly wish for just one thing. When can we see our friends on the other side of this divided land?

- (1) I think the fact that we are one people is reason enough to reunify.
- (2) There are economic and military reasons to reunify.
- (3) I think that even if we don't reunify, we can find another way to coexist.

GYEONGMIN: If an opportunity arises, I will emigrate.

BEOMJIN: ("Arirang" *crescendos*) When I hear this song, I cry. (*The test ends.*)

GYEONGMIN: How would the characters we've created answer? How patriotic are they?

BEOMJIN: Ri Ye-Mae's patriotism is moderate. It used to be average, but while working in Russia, he experienced capitalism, and his sense of patriotism became moderate. And Song-Ah's?

GYEONGMIN: Out of 100 patriotism points, 97? Out of 100 nationalism points, 99? He is satisfied working at the Kaesong Industrial Complex, and has no complaints about Chairman Kim Jong-un or the system. The younger you are, the more you accept everything you're told. Suyeon, how about your character?

SUYEON: One point.

BEOMJIN: Out of 100?

SUYEON: No, out of 1000. At first, I vaguely believed that Northerners were very patriotic. You know about the episodes of collective protest at the Kaesong Industrial Complex when the Southerners thoughtlessly tore up calendars with Kim Il-sung's face on them. But do you suppose everyone felt the same way and reacted the same way? There must be some who didn't.

BEOMJIN: Then how did you approach your character?

SUYEON: Basically, I wanted to picture Northern women laborers in the Kaesong Industrial Complex, but it wasn't easy. So I first imagined the stereotypical Northern woman. Steadfast, strong, but feminine, bright, who says things like, "Cheer up, comrade. You can do it. Lift up your spirits." Like the main charac-

ter of that Northern movie we watched, *Comrade Kim Goes Flying*. I wrote down all the modifiers that came up when I searched for "North Korean women." They were similar to my stereotypical ideas of North Korean women. I must have been influenced by the media. A nice, kind-hearted, affectionate, tenacious, pure, uncomplicated, obedient, devoted, tough woman warrior with strong convictions, but one who dreams of romance, awfully confident but who still wants to be a man's only woman — with big eyes and fair skin. If that's the society's typical image of women, maybe it's also the image forced onto them. How hard it must be for those who don't want to comply with those images... More than half of the 55,000 workers at the Kaesong Industrial Complex were women, and it must have been very difficult for some of them. When I started thinking this way, it connected with what has happened to me recently. For about a year now, I've been absorbed in certain thoughts.

Why me?

Why me?

There are some people who have just begun to voice their opinions, and I wonder if there is a way to stop their voices and words from being swept away by other people's louder voices and words. And I thought it would be meaningful to ponder this issue with the character I've created. Basically, I approached my character by reflecting my reality.

GYEONGMIN: Tell us your character's name.

Suyeon writes "Kim Bbul" on the blackboard.

SUYEON: Kim Bbul.

Bbul, like "horn." You know that the Northerners and Southerners who met at the Kaesong Industrial Complex made the same joke back and forth: "Oh, we all thought Northerners had horns growing on their heads." "Oh, we all thought Southerners had horns growing on their heads."

I wanted to create a character that seemed angry to Northerners as well as Southerners. On the surface she looks normal, but somewhere in her heart, she has horns growing inside her. An angry person, someone who doesn't get along. What we would call an outsider. Kim Bbul was a bit of an outsider to begin with, but since working at the Kaesong Industrial Complex, she has started to grow horns.

Kim Bbul works at a convenience store in the Kaesong Industrial Complex. CU, Kaesong Industrial Complex Branch #2. There's a CU store here, right across from the Doosan Art Center. I hear there are three in the Kaesong Industrial Complex, including the one in the Support Center. In all three, the managers are Southerners, the employees working at the register were Northerners, and only Southerners could shop there.

Apart from cigarettes, the best-selling item at CUs in the South is banana milk. (*Hands a banana milk to Beomjin.*) At the CUs of the Kaesong Industrial Complex, Coca-Cola sells the best. (*Hands a Coca-Cola to Gyeongmin.*) What Kim Bbul likes best isn't banana milk or Coca Cola, but beer. (*Grabs a beer.*) Cheers! (*Toasts with Gyeongmin and Beomjin.*) But she absolutely can't drink where people can see.

Kim Bbul worked for a long time as a seamstress, sewing women's underwear at a factory that makes underwear and children's clothing, but she came to work at CU when the second one opened in the complex. At first, Kim Bbul was thrilled to get out of the underwear factory. Given the nature of its products, the factory was rife with dirty jokes. Her shift leader was a bit rude and took his jokes too far. The other workers laughed at his jokes, but she couldn't.

"Comrade Kim Bbul's is so flat-chested. What will she do if she gets married?"

To that, she just stayed silent.

"It's a joke. Why so serious? Can't take a joke?"

To that, another silence. She didn't even laugh. Awkwardness hung in the room. As this sort of thing kept happening, she became the odd one out. But she did the job well. While she worked without saying a word, "Comrade Kim Bbul has such a plain face. So she has to work hard, because there's nothing else she can do for the country."

The others joined in the laughter. As if it's funny. As if it's embarrassing. As if they're making fun of her. (*Gradually, a blank expression.*) Over her four years working in the factory, Kim Bbul gradually became clumsy and sullen. She couldn't look people in the eye. She developed a habit of biting the inside of her mouth until it bled.

But now, working at the convenience store, Kim Bbul sincerely wishes she could go back to the underwear factory. There she spent so much more time looking at underwear than people at the factory, but here she has to interact with people all the time. Her Northern co-workers. And the Southern customers. It's hard for Kim Bbul to interact with anyone, Southern, Northern, Eastern, Western. She feels more at ease with sewing machines and fabric. To someone like Kim Bbul, a convenience store is a difficult place to work.

Kim Bbul often stares vacantly out the window at work. At times like those, she doesn't hear when people call her.

"Comrade Kim Bbul! Comrade Kim Bbul! Comrade Kim Bbul!"

"Oh, yes?"

"Ah, come on."

"I'm sorry. So sorry."

Even if she gets chided, she soon goes blank again.

What Kim Bbul sees through the window is a choco pie wrapper being tossed by the wind.

A white volleyball flies up over the wall and lands on the other side. Industry the cat, cautiously prowling around. People saying the word "unification."

A group of Northerners and Southerners gathered under a parasol in front of the store, talking heatedly about unification. Amid it all, one person is smiling without saying a word. It's a Southern worker, a woman. That worker is a smoker who sometimes comes into the store to buy cigarettes, and she has become a subject of talk among the Northerners, both men and women.

"A lady comrade smoking... could you even imagine it in our country?"

Someone speaks harshly: "What trash. Who would want her? She would bring disgrace on the family."

Kim Bbul doesn't agree with them. Partly because she can't join the conversation, and partly because, after Industry the cat, that worker is the only living being in the Kaesong Industrial Complex she likes.

The worker, who was sitting quietly, walks over to a spot away from everyone else and lights a cigarette. Kim Bbul watches her intently. The worker stares at Kim Bbul. Their eyes meet. They nod at each other. She stretches and points to the bathroom. It's a signal that she's put it behind the toilet. "It" is music. The worker, who has exchanged pleasantries with Kim Bbul now and again, secretly shares with her music she likes. Kim Bbul sometimes leaves her impressions of it. (*Peeling off a sticky note.*) "The melody was a little sad this time." Picking up the device in the bathroom, Kim Bbul looks around and stealthily ducks into an alley behind the building. She puts the earphones in, covers them with her hair, and plays the music. (*Plays the music.*) Kim Bbul has never heard this kind of music in her life. Her heart fills with energy different from anger. She can't be discovered listening to music. But when she focuses on it, her body keeps moving to the rhythm. She's never seen anyone performing this kind of music. As she listens to the music, she imagines how the people playing it must look. (*Removes earphones.*)

Now Kim Bbul's heart starts to pound. It beats in time with the music. It has never, ever beaten this fast before.

Kim Bbul's Challenge. Chapter one: Kim Bbul and the Cat

"Industry! Industry!"

After looking for Industry in every free moment all day long, Kim Bbul found her. A group of people had surrounded her. Industry stood in a corner, looking quite angry. Her ears were folded back. With her brow furrowed, she was hissing and mewling. Snickering, the people were throwing pebbles at her. Right then, a pebble thrown by someone struck her in the eye. It was Kim Bbul's former manager from the underwear factory. Kim Bbul started to tremble almost as reflex. Her heart also beat faster. She couldn't just leave Industry crying there. She clenched her fists and walked toward her old manager.

When I wrote the next part, I wrote it like this, hoping that Kim Bbul wouldn't endure any consequences.

Kim Bbul looked askance at him and spoke. "Don't do that. You know how miserable that poor thing is."

I didn't like it. It felt like the character had collapsed. I rewrote it.

Kim Bbul spoke to him as if making a joke. "If you keep that up, she might attack. Aren't you scared?"

That didn't do it for me either. I rewrote it again.

Kim Bbul spoke to him softly. "Tormenting a cat. And you don't even have the guts to say anything to your supervisor comrade. Subservient to the strong and overbearing to the weak. You're good at turning a blind eye to injustice. It's really pathetic."

GYEONGMIN: Suyeon, could there really be such a person in the North? Do you think there is?

SUYEON: I thought about it for a long time, and I think there is.

I've never handled a situation like that one directly. I'm too scared. But in any society, in any era, there are people who have their doubts about what is taken as given and who bring about change by starting with small things. Even in North Korea, however conservative society is, they must be somewhere.

We see the North from so far away, we only know what happens on the main streets, not in the alleys.

Hmm... I think there is such a person. It would be good if there is one, even if what they do doesn't look like anything special.

Chapter two: Kim Bbul and the Fart

A man walked up and stood near Kim Bbul, who was outside the convenience store getting some fresh air. Kim Bbul was quite afraid of this man, whom she'd occasionally seen when she went out walking. But so as not to show her fear, she did her best to put on a calm face. Noticing the young woman in the vicinity, the man turned his head to glance at Kim Bbul, then looked away, and lit a smoke.

Kim Bbul looked sideways at the man smoking. She imagined snatching the cigarette out of his hand and smoking it like crazy. Then, as if he'd felt her gaze, the man turned and looked at her. The two met eyes. Kim Bbul hurriedly looked away. Suddenly the man, who had been smoking so casually, farted.

The man was acting nothing was out of the ordinary. He might not have heard the sound of his own fart, or he might have forgotten about the person next to him. He smoked a little more, then spat.

Kim Bbul thought for a moment.

"Do I feel bad because I just heard something so gross, or do I feel upset because he's acting as if I'm not here? Anyway, it must be nice to be him. Whether someone is next to him or not, he lets out what's inside him just like that. What a relief that must be!"

After a bit of hesitation, Kim Bbul squeezed out a fart. Pfft! The man looked at Kim Bbul. Kim Bbul also looked at the man. A moment passed in silence. Kim Bbul hastily turned and, heading back to the store, looked back at the man and farted once more. Then she quickly opened the door and went back inside.

How far can you go in imagining these things? The Kaesong Industrial Complex isn't a fictional place like Hogwarts. The people who worked there were real people. Can we imagine things like this when we haven't even met any of them? Sometimes when you imagine things, it can make you fall in love with someone, or it can make you misunderstand them. Maybe because I felt uneasy about it, the story I wrote kept turning into fantasy.

There was a scene where Industry the cat eats a marble given to him by the spirit of Songak Mountain and turns into a human, and I even added a plot in which Kim Bbul actually starts to grow horns as she takes on one challenge after another. The story I have now is not like that, but it is still close to fantasy.

Fantasy. The kind of story where wishes impossible in reality come true.

Maybe the Kaesong Industrial Complex could have been that kind of place. A place where the people who thought they could never be or live together ate together, exercised together, talked together, and cared for each other. Through my protagonist, I also decided to realize a wish of mine that seemed impossible in reality.

Chapter three: Kim Bbul and the Sheet of Paper

Kim Bbul who had been slowly transformed made a big decision. She decided to do something at the Kaesong Industrial Complex, something she had never imagined of doing. In that miraculous space where a small unification took place every day, she made a decision to hope for another miracle.

The day before she carries it out, Kim Bbul finds Industry the cat. She slowly holds out her hand to her.

Now Industry, who has become pretty friendly with Kim Bbul, comes up to her without hesitation and rubs her hand with her head.

"Industry, I don't think we'll be able to meet again. Before you get close to a person, think carefully about whether that someone is going to treat you nicely or is going to catch and eat you. But even if you can't tell, it's not your fault. Please stay well."

That night on the way home from work, Kim Bbul rips a leaflet off of a wall.

Then she thinks of one sentence that implies everything she wants to say.

Suyeon writes "Guarantee women's smoking rights!"

She thinks about how good it would be to hold that sheet while standing somewhere in the Kaesong Industrial Complex. She thinks of the best spot to stand among all the streets she has walked along in the complex. She decides to stand under the giant letters that spell out "IN SERVICE OF THE PEOPLE." Holding that sheet of paper, with a cigarette in her mouth.

Kim Bbul thinks for a moment.

"What will happen to me tomorrow? How long can I stand here like this? Will I be dragged off to the Aoji coal mine? Either way, it's fine. I hope tomorrow comes quickly."

She can't stop herself from grinning and every so often laughter bubbles out.

Early the next morning, Kim Bbul receives notice that, due to the suspension of all activities at the Kaesong Industrial Complex, the people no longer need come to work.

The North Korean national anthem starts playing. Standing, the actors listen to the anthem. When it ends, Suyeon writes on the chalkboard: "To my North Korean friend, whom I want to meet."

Gyeongmin walks to center stage with a mic stand and reads the letter.

GYEONGMIN: To my North Korean friend, whom I want to meet.

Comrade! In the long hours I spent imagining you for this project, I had multiple dreams about meeting you. Even in sleep, I couldn't let go of the imaginative thread. In my dreams, your face was my face. Not Kang Dong-Won's or Hyun Bin's. Probably because I'm an actor, I think I was used to the process of you, my imagined comrade, ultimately becoming me, and my becoming you.

Thinking about the feelings you might've felt when the Kaesong Industrial Complex was shut down, I recalled the disjunctions I've witnessed or experienced myself. I can't compare my experiences, of course. Because your world and my world are different. Because we ultimately can't know. Even if I were to live in your world. So it seemed foolish to speculate about someone else's feelings. All I can say for sure is that life would be very different. For me, as for anyone else.

You know, there are societal moments we simply can't avoid. Systems we can't escape. Decisions we can't make for ourselves. It's the same for reunification as well as capitalism. How can I remain steadfast in such systems? Working on this project, I wanted to find the answer and tell you. I couldn't find it. If I did, it would've been extremely idealistic. Like writing a letter to a North Korean friend, like a homework assignment from elementary school. One of my creative writing professors once told me, "Don't kill off your characters so easily. The characters you kill will haunt you." I think she said that because a lot of inexperienced creatives would kill their protagonists willy-nilly if they couldn't think of a conclusion. In creating you, my comrade in North Korea, I instinctively wrote you to be satisfied with your life, to have a

happy ending no matter what obstacles you faced. Reconciliation, peace, reunification, happiness. Even if those are the most obvious, clichéd conclusions.

In discussing this project, my team said the process of imagining you could be a process of steadily accumulating misconceptions. Comrade, I hope that my misunderstanding of you will serve as a step towards understanding you better. Even if this statement itself is overly idealistic.

Sincerely,

Na Gyeongmin

November 2018

The actors exit.

The ending sound plays.

In a video, Choi Song-Ah, Ri Yemae, and Kim Bbul appear in succession, look at the audience, then fade away.

The End

