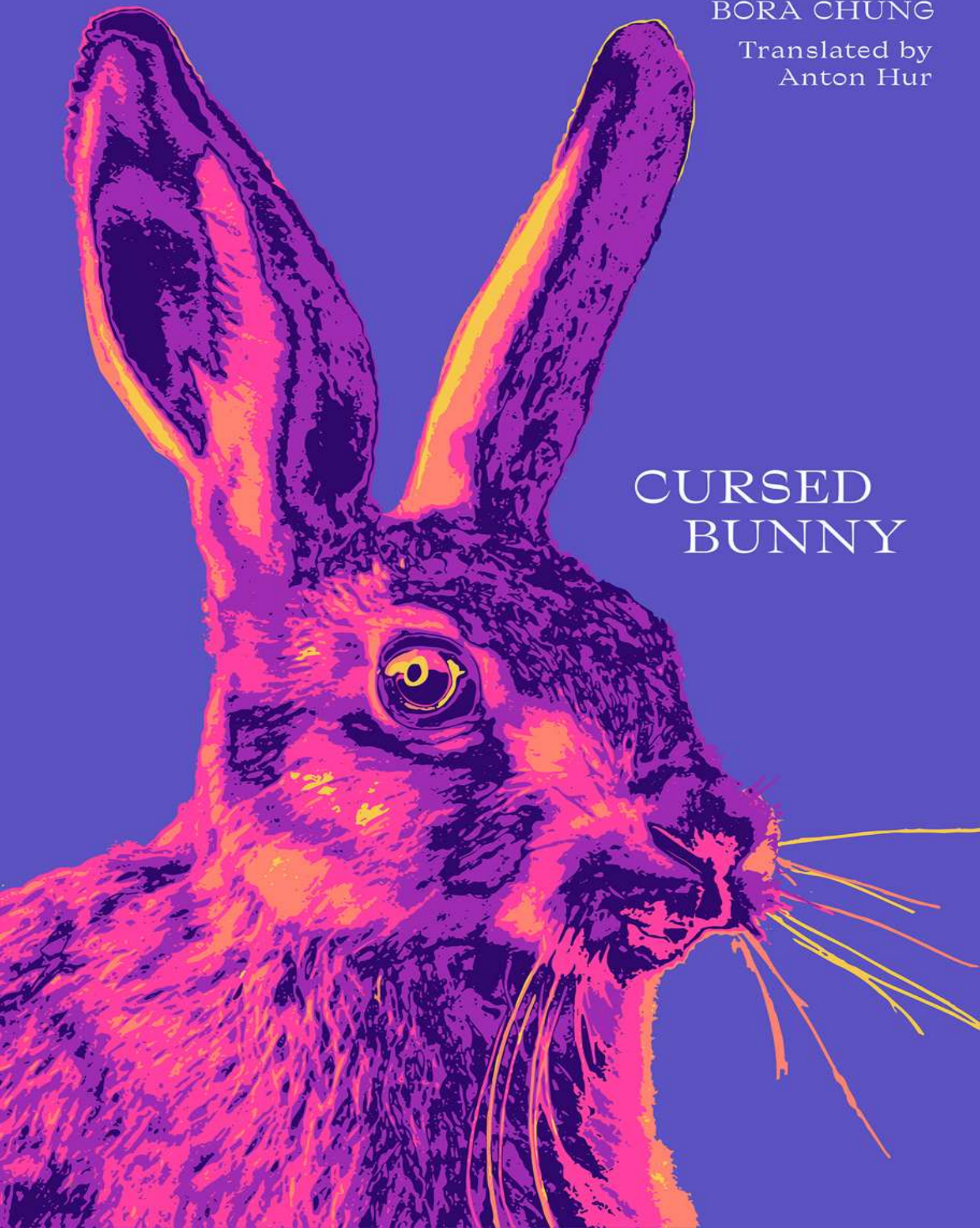


BORA CHUNG

Translated by
Anton Hur

CURSED
BUNNY



Cursed Bunny

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저주 토끼 (CURSED BUNNY)

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The Head

She was about to flush the toilet.

“Mother?”

She looked back. There was a head popping out of the toilet, calling for her.

“Mother?”

The woman looked at it for a moment. Then, she flushed the toilet. The head disappeared in a rush of water.

She left the bathroom.

A few days later, she met the head again in the bathroom.

“Mother!”

The woman reached to flush the toilet again. The head sputtered, “N-no, just a minute ...”

The woman stayed her hand and looked down at the head in the toilet.

It was probably more accurate to refer to it as “a thing that vaguely looked like a head” than an actual head. It was about two-thirds the size of an adult’s head and resembled a lump of carelessly slapped-together yellow and grey clay, with a few scattered clumps of wet hair. No ears, no eyebrows. Two slits for eyes so narrow that she couldn’t tell if its eyes were open or closed. The crushed mound of flesh that was meant to be its nose. The mouth was also a lipless slit. This slit was awkwardly opening and closing as it talked to her, its strained speech mixed with the gurgling of a person drowning, making it difficult to understand.

“What in bloody hell are you?” the woman demanded.

“I call myself the head,” the head replied.

“You would, obviously,” the woman said, “but why are you in my toilet? And why are you calling me ‘Mother’?”

The head strained as it formed unpracticed speech with its lipless mouth. “My body was created with the things you dumped down the toilet, like your fallen-out

hair and feces and toilet paper you used to wipe your behind.”

The woman became furious. “I never gave the likes of you any permission to live in my toilet. I never even created you in the first place, so stop calling me ‘mommy.’ Leave before I call the exterminators.”

“I only want so little,” the head hastily added, “I’m only asking that you keep dumping your body waste in the toilet so I can finish creating the rest of my body. Then I’ll go far away from here and live by my own means. So please, just keep using the toilet like you always have.”

“This is *my* toilet,” the woman said coldly, “so of course I’m going to use it like I always have. But I can’t bear to think of a creature like you living in it. Finishing your body is none of my concern. I don’t care what you do, and I’d appreciate it if you stopped appearing.”

The head disappeared into the toilet.

But the head kept reappearing.

After a flush, it would peer over the toilet seat and stare at the woman as she washed her hands. Whenever the woman felt like she was being watched, her eyes would dart to the toilet and lock gazes with its hard-to-tell-if-they-were-open eye slits. The mashed-up face seemed to be trying to create an expression, but it was impossible to tell what of. The head quickly disappeared down the toilet whenever she approached. The woman would then slam down the lid, flush, glare at the toilet for a while, and leave.

One day, the woman had used the toilet like always, flushed the bowl, and was washing her hands. The head appeared in the toilet behind her, as it normally did. The woman stared at it for a while through the mirror. The head stared back. The mashed-up face underneath the irregular clumps of hair would’ve normally been yellow and gray, but now it was oddly red.

The woman remembered she was having her period.

“Your color looks different,” she said to the head. “Does it have anything to do with the state of my own body?”

The head replied, “Mother, the state of your body has a direct effect on my appearance. This is because my entire existence depends on you.”

The woman took off her underwear and sanitary pad. She stuck the pad smeared with her menstrual blood on the head’s face and shoved it down the toilet. She flushed.

The head and the pad swirled around the bowl and vanished into the dark hole. She washed her hands. Then, she vomited into the sink. She vomited for a long time, then rinsed the sink and left the bathroom.

The toilet got clogged. The plumber presented the sanitary pad to her as if it were a trophy and delivered a long lecture about not throwing such things into the toilet.

She began to keep her toilet lid closed. Whenever she was doing her business, she developed the habit of frequently looking into the bowl. The woman developed constipation.

One day, just as she was about to close the toilet lid, she caught a glimpse of the head peering out of the hole. She slammed down the lid. She flushed several times. Just as she was about to leave the bathroom, she carefully cracked open the lid. Her eyes met those of the head. It was staring at her from the water. Its hair floated around its face. She shut the lid again. She tried to flush but the water wouldn't go down.

The woman told her family about it.

"It's not like it's laying eggs or anything. Why don't you just leave it alone?"

And that was all her family said of the matter.

The woman avoided going to the bathroom at home.

One day, she saw it at her workplace bathroom. She had flushed the toilet and was washing her hands when she caught sight of, through the mirror, the head peeping out from the toilet in her stall. She quit her job the next day.

Her constipation worsened. Her bladder became inflamed. The doctor told her she needed to make regular visits to the bathroom. But the thought of something lurking below where she did her business, waiting to eat her defecations, made going to any bathroom unbearable.

The inflammation and constipation never really went away.

Now that she had quit her job, her family suggested she might as well find a husband. She went on a date set up by a matchmaker recommended by her mother. The man was an ordinary office worker at a trading company. He said his dream was to marry a nice woman, have children, and live happily ever after. He seemed unassuming and dependable, albeit unimaginative. Sitting before this strange man, she couldn't help being nervous about the bathroom situation. The man misconstrued her distracted fidgeting. He said, "My ideal woman is shy and demure. It's hard to find a girl like you who's shy in front of a man these days."

The man was so enamored and enthusiastic about the match that they were engaged three months later and wedded in another three.

Now she was worried about the honeymoon. Thankfully, the head didn't appear on the trip. The first thing she checked after moving into her new home with her husband was the toilet. There was nothing inside. Life in her new home brought some relief to her bladder inflammation and constipation. Days had no

highs or lows, weren't particularly good or bad, and she thought herself more or less content. In the whirlwind of adjusting to her new life, she found herself thinking less and less about the head. Soon, she had a child and forgot about the head completely.

It was shortly after the birth of her child when the head reappeared in her life. She had been bathing the little one in a baby basin.

"Mother."

She almost drowned her child by accident.

The head's head had now grown to about the size of an average adult's. The yellow and gray mashed-up clay lump form was the same, but its eyes were a little bigger so she could now make out its blinking, and something that resembled lips was attached to its mouth. There were mounds of flesh for ears that looked like they'd been carelessly stuck on either side of its face, and beneath its barely discernible chin was a new band of flesh that seemed to be the beginnings of a neck.

"Mother, is that child your daughter?"

The woman sputtered, "How is it that you have reappeared before me? Who told you where we were?"

The head replied, "Your defecations are a part of me, so I will always know where you are."

The head's words displeased the woman. She hissed, "I told you to go away. How dare you reappear calling me 'Mother'! It's none of your concern whose child this is! But fine, this is my child. She is the only one in this world who may call me 'Mother.' Now, be gone. I said, be gone!" The child started to wail.

The head said, "I may have been birthed a different way from that child, but I, too, am your creation, Mother."

"Did I not say that I never created the likes of you? I told you to be gone. If you refuse, I shall do whatever it takes to find and destroy you!"

She slammed down the toilet lid and flushed. Then, she consoled her crying child and wiped off the remaining soap suds.

Once the head came back into her life, it kept reappearing like a bad rash. She could feel it staring at her from behind after she had flushed and was washing her hands. She could see something yellow and gray in the corner of her eye, but when she quickly turned to look, it was gone, leaving only a few tell-tale strands of hair floating in the toilet bowl.

Her constipation and bladder inflammation returned. More than anything else, she was worried for the child. Was the head jealous of her daughter? Would it

bully the child? Just the thought of the child glimpsing the head was unbearable. She became nervous whenever the little one wanted to go to the bathroom.

She clenched her fists. She was going to destroy the head.

The woman went to the bathroom, did her business, and flushed. She waited for the head to appear as she washed her hands. When a yellow and gray thing slowly rose from the toilet bowl, the woman said in a low voice, "I have something to say to you."

She finished washing her hands and crouched down before the toilet so she was eye-to-eye with the head.

"You are ..."

She hesitated. The head waited.

She grabbed the head, easily plucked it from the toilet, and wrapped it in a plastic bag. She threw the bag away in a trash can outside. Then, with a light heart, she went back to living her life.

The reprieve didn't last long. She was in the bathroom with the child when it happened. The child was now old enough to get on the toilet by herself. Her daughter could pretty much handle the whole process if the woman reminded her of every step, from lowering her underwear, sitting on the toilet and doing her business, wiping her behind, putting on her clothes again, flushing, and washing her hands. However, her daughter wasn't tall enough to reach the sink yet, so the woman had to hoist her up to the sink to soap her hands. One day, as the woman was doing so, a familiar yellow and gray thing appeared.

"Mother."

The woman turned around and saw the head. Then, she finished rinsing off the suds from the child's hands, dried them on a towel, and sent her daughter out the bathroom.

"Mother."

"What's the meaning of this? How are you back?"

The mouth of the head almost imperceptibly twisted into a sneer. "I begged the janitor who found me to flush me down the toilet."

The woman said nothing as she flushed the toilet. The head swirled in the rushing of the water as it disappeared down the dark hole.

Outside the bathroom, the child was full of questions. She told her child, "That was what we call a 'head.' If you see it again, just flush."

The head had the gall to appear before her and the child and call her "Mother." She decided she had to get rid of it once and for all.

Plucking the head from the toilet again was easy. But just as she was about to wrap it in a plastic bag and throw it out with the garbage, she hesitated. The head

could talk. If she threw it out like this, it could ask someone to flush it down the toilet like last time. She had to ensure that it couldn't talk.

The woman shoved the head into a small container, which she put in a sunny spot on the veranda. She figured that without water or more defecation, the head would eventually mummify. She couldn't think of any other way, nor did she care to expend further effort on the issue.

She cautioned her husband and child to not disturb the container. Her husband had no occasion to go out on the veranda, but her child was curious. Her daughter squirmed with the desire to poke and stare and talk to it. The woman gave the child a harsh scolding and hid the container with the head.

Her husband received some vacation time, and they went traveling for a few days. When they returned, the woman went to the bathroom. She was washing her hands when something appeared behind her. She turned around. She slammed down the lid of the toilet seat and flushed.

The woman scolded the child. "You did this, didn't you! I told you over and over again not to touch it!"

The child began to cry. Her husband stepped in. "Oh, that thing in the container? It asked me to put it in the toilet, so I did. Why, did I do something wrong?"

She sighed and told him the whole story.

Her husband remained nonchalant. "Eh, that's nothing. Just leave it alone. It's not like it crawls out of there at night and lays eggs around the house."

The woman dreamed she was in a white, tiled room. Suddenly, the head popped out from behind her. The woman turned around in surprise. Then, the head popped out from another direction. It began popping out from everywhere.

Next to her, her delighted daughter kept pointing at it. "Head! Head!"

The woman begged her husband for help. He was sitting on her other side reading a newspaper. "Eh, that's nothing. Just leave it alone."

His words bounced against the tiles and chorused off the walls. *Leave it alone. That's nothing. Leave it alone. That's nothing.*

The lever for the flush was near the ceiling. She reached it with some difficulty and just managed to pull it. Water swirled around her husband, her child, and the head. The woman got sucked into a dark hole along with her still delighted child and her still nonchalantly newspaper-reading husband. She grabbed her child and tried with all her might to escape the whirlpool. A familiar voice spoke in her ear.

"Mother?"

She looked down at her child. Upon her daughter's little body and delicate neck sat the head.

The shock woke her. She stumbled into the bathroom. She sat in front of the toilet and stared into the pure, flawless white of the bowl, the clear water pooled inside, and the dark hole submerged within. Imagining the thing inside and where that hole led to.

But ever since she had tried to mummify it, the head no longer appeared. And as time went on, she no longer had nightmares about it. The woman quietly went about her life—cooking for her husband and child, washing the dishes, doing the laundry, cleaning the house, shopping, and generally immersing herself in years comprised of unremarkable, peaceful days. Her husband moved up in his company, no faster or slower than others. The man wasn't especially gentle or warm, but he did bring home a cake on her or their child's birthday and placed candles on it. Her child, like everyone else, went to elementary school, then to middle school, and became a high school student. The child's grades weren't particularly good or bad. She was cute, but no beauty queen. She was a typical high school student who had trouble getting up in the morning, liked celebrities, and fretted over her pimples in the mirror.

"Come get breakfast or you'll be late."

"Mom, did you see my uniform necktie?"

"I hung it on the doorknob of your bedroom. Slow down, you'll get an upset stomach."

"OK. Oh, by the way, I saw a person's head in the toilet yesterday."

"Did you now. What happened?"

"I just flushed it down the toilet."

"Good. More stew?"

"I'm good. But about that head, I think I've seen it before. Is there a way to get rid of it? It's vile."

"Forget about it. Just flush it down again. Are you done?"

"Yup. See you later."

"You've packed your lunch?"

"I did. Bye, Mom."

"Have a good day."

The door closed.

Forget about it.

That's nothing.

The woman began clearing the table.

Her child entered college. Meanwhile, she started noticing wrinkles and sagging skin, and rough patches in places that had once been smooth. She gave her child

some lipstick and it suited the girl well, only the child wasn't a girl anymore but a young lady. The woman rediscovered the contours of her younger face in the familiar-unfamiliar face of her daughter, feeling surprise, pride, love, and jealousy at the same time. When her child straight-permed her hair flat and dyed it purple, the woman stood before a mirror when no one was watching and fiddled with the curls of her "auntie perm," a tight cap of poodle-like hair that had to be dyed black.

The woman spent more and more time alone in the house. Her husband had been promoted to the executive level and lived under a mountain of work and her child was also busy with her own life, so the family rarely saw each other during the day. From time to time, her husband came home a little earlier than usual and the two of them spent a quiet evening together, but they had never had a fiery romance to begin with or had much in terms of memories to fall back on. They had spent too much of their marriage in a state of emotional detachment to really start making an effort to be affectionate now. They usually ate dinner in silence, watched some television in silence, and her husband would go to bed first in silence.

The woman would then watch TV on her own. On days her child or husband came home late, or even after her whole family had long fallen asleep, she would watch TV until the national anthem came on. Partly because she had nothing else to do, but more so because she thought if she concentrated hard enough on the screen, she might decrease an odd-feeling little space that had appeared in her heart. The space felt empty sometimes, full at others, and bitter or aching at still other times. This strange little space, if she ever let her guard down, could suddenly blow up in size and consume her. So she kept watching TV, trying to empty her heart and mind as she gazed upon the meaningless progression of scenes on the screen. But the well of thought taps a deep spring, and no matter how much she tried to bail them out, her thoughts kept overflowing the brim ...

Then one night, she went to the bathroom.

She had been watching TV, like always, and was alone in the house, like always. She did her business, closed the lid, and flushed. While washing her hands, she glanced at herself in the mirror. Sagging eyelids, wrinkles, rough and dry skin. White hair peeking out from the roots of her dye job. She was fiddling with her hair, thinking she'd need another hair appointment soon, when she saw, through the mirror, the lid of the toilet seat move.

Clack.

A wet hand rose from inside the toilet and pushed the lid open. Another wet hand emerged. The two hands gripped the edge of the toilet.

She watched as the back of a person's head, thick with hair and slick with water, rose from the toilet bowl.

The delicate hands spread their long, thin fingers and pushed down against the rim, bringing up a narrow pair of fine-boned shoulders and slender arms. The rich black hair reached all the way down the smooth back, followed by the sensuous line of a svelte waist and white, voluptuous buttocks and firm thighs. A knee rose up and a foot perched on the edge of the toilet bowl. The leg was white and long and slim. The calves were precisely the right size, the muscles tensing a little as the foot was brought up, the ankle dainty. The other foot emerged, and its exquisite toes lightly touched down on the bathroom floor. The drenched, naked body shone in the yellow, dim light of the bathroom.

The woman kept staring into the mirror. The person who had emerged from the toilet slowly turned around. The woman saw the face of her youth reflected next to her own sagging face. Her young self, smiling at her old self.

The old self slowly turned around to face the young self.

The head that was no longer a head stood still. The old self stared back at the face of her youth, a face that continued to smile at her.

“Mother?” The tone of voice was a little high-pitched but there was no more of the old gurgling sound, no more of that irritating voice of a person drowning. “Do you recognize me?”

“Well ...” Her own voice creaked like a rusty hinge.

“How have you been, Mother?”

The woman said nothing.

“I have finished my body. And just as I promised, I shall leave and live by my own means. I'm here to say goodbye and ask a final request.”

One word pricked her attention: “Request.”

“Don't worry.” The head smiled as if to reassure her. “I can't very well go out in the world naked now, can I? It was hard enough finishing my body with just what you were giving me, so I had no means to create garments to cover myself. This is my first and last request. If you could just give me a change of clothing, I shall hide my shameful parts and be on my way.”

The woman thought of the clothes hanging in her wardrobe and turned to leave the bathroom. The head stopped her.

“Don't go out of your way. Just the clothes you're wearing now will do fine.”

The woman replied, “What are you talking about? You want me to take off my clothes for you this minute? On the freezing floor tiles? You should just take what I give you— why are you being so demanding?”

“Mother, please calm down.” The head gazed at her with an expression of longing on her young face. “I've never received anything from you besides what

you've thrown away. This is my first and last request. If you give me the clothes you're wearing now, I shall keep the heat and scent of you forever with me until the day I die, with gratitude."

The woman stared at her younger self. At her younger body. At this individual created not through a womb and placenta but through the colon and defecation. She stared at what had hidden in the dark hole in the white porcelain all that time, torturing her, and was now declaring independence. If this really was goodbye, and if they really were never to see each other again, what was a change of clothing to her?

As her young self towed off, the old self stripped down. Her garments weren't anything fancy: a cardigan, a simple dress, a bra, panties, and socks. That was it. Naked, she watched her young self pick up each item and put them on. Panties. Bra. Dress. Cardigan. Her young self seemed to relish each item. Lastly, the socks were put on, the buttons on the cardigan done up. Her old self felt a chill against her naked body.

"All right, then. Now that you've put on my clothes, be off. I'm cold. I need to put something on."

She turned again to leave the bathroom.

Her young self swiftly came between her and the door.

"*Where do you think you're going? Your place is not out here.*" She pointed to the toilet. "It's in *there*."

"What are you going on about?" cried the old self. "Did I not give you clothes when you asked for them? Did I not do everything you told me to? Why are you so ungrateful? Enough with this insanity, be off. Be off!"

A sneer transformed her young self's face. "That's right. You gave me everything I told you to, and all you have left is that old lump of a body. For too long, I've endured down there while you got to enjoy your life on the outside, all this time. Now it's your turn to go down the toilet. I shall take your place and enjoy everything you've enjoyed!"

The old self was furious. "You ingrate! What was there to *enjoy* out here? My life is the same as everyone else's, and did you not, with your torture, ruin what little happiness I had? I withstood all that disgust and hate and made you who you are today. If you have any gratitude for what I've done for you despite everything that you've put me through, then use your finished body to disappear from my life! Get out of my sight!"

The sneer faded from her young self's face. With flashing eyes, her young self spoke through clenched teeth, but in a clear, slow, and restrained tone. "Gratitude. What gratitude should I have for you? Did I ask you to give birth to me? Did you ever take care of me or even say a kind word to me, your

indisputable offspring? You birthed me even when I didn't want it, and did you not try at every turn to destroy me out of hatred and disgust? What have you given me besides your feces and trash? I had to bear all sorts of humiliations and degradations to get what I needed from you to complete a human-like body. But now, it's complete. This is the day I've been waiting for in that dark hole all my life. Now that I have become you, I shall take your place and live a new life."

The young approached the old. Young, strong hands gripped old shoulders and neck. The young hands shoved the old's head into the toilet and quick as a flash, lifted her by the ankles. Lightly shoving the old body into the toilet, her young self closed the lid shut and flushed.

The Embodiment

몸하다: “*to body.*” *To menstruate. To undergo menstruation.*

The bleeding refused to stop. It was twelve days into her cycle. Usually the flow began to lessen around the third day and ended on the fifth, but it was now almost two weeks without any sign of stopping. The flow seemed to taper off at night but would inevitably return by dawn.

A fortnight later, the blood still flowed; should she see a gynecologist? But the gynecologist’s office was not a place a young unmarried woman could visit without feeling oddly guilty.

After the twentieth day, the dizziness began, and she became so tired that it was starting to affect her daily functioning. She gritted her teeth and went to see a doctor.

The gynecologist wordlessly slathered a transparent, slippery gel on her belly and passed a cold metal disc over it. He mumbled as he stared into a foggy black-and-white display, “I don’t see anything strange ...”

She wiped off the gel as best she could—it kept getting all over her hands and clothes no matter how vigorously she mopped—and went back to the consultation room. The doctor glanced at the chart before him and asked, “Have you been very stressed lately? Or had any big changes in your environment?”

“I’m writing my master’s thesis ... But I don’t think I’m *that* stressed about it ...”

The doctor gave her a look before scribbling something down.

“Stress causes hormonal imbalances that can lead to your situation. According to the ultrasound you’re fine, so I’ll prescribe you some birth control pills. Take them for three weeks, go off them for one, then take them for three weeks more, then rest for a week, and so on. You’ll be back to normal in two to three months.”

She began taking birth control pills.

She took them for three weeks and had a week off. Then three weeks more before quitting after those two months. But her period, which began two days after she had quit, refused to stop for over ten days. This meant going back on the pills, and like clockwork, the blood stopped. When she tried to get off the pills again three weeks later, the same thing happened. She ended up having to foot the unexpected expense of taking six months of birth control pills.

After six months, her period went back to normal, ceasing after five days. She cheered.

Another month later, she got out of bed one morning but had to sit back down when the world began to spin.

She dry-heaved all day. The dizziness was unbearable and nothing she ate stayed down. She felt sluggish and had a touch of fever.

A full-body check-up was in order. At a big hospital, she got her X-rays taken and her blood and urine examined.

The doctor informed her of her results in an emotionless manner. “You’re pregnant.”

“Excuse me?”

“You should see an obstetrician.”

She went down a few floors to see one of the hospital’s obstetricians—a young woman in her thirties who wore an unbelievable amount of makeup. After a few more fairly unpleasant examinations, the obstetrician declared her diagnosis in an ice-cold voice. “You’re six weeks pregnant.”

“But I’m unmarried and have no boyfriend.”

“You’ve never had any sexual experiences? Or taken any pills?”

“I did take some birth control pills for a while because my period wouldn’t stop —”

“For how long?”

“Six months.”

The doctor gave her a sharp look, narrowing her bright blue eyeshadowed, thickly penciled eyes.

“Were they prescribed?”

“The doctor told me to take them for a couple of months, and you don’t really need a prescription for birth control pills . . .” Her voice trailed off as she felt oddly ashamed.

“If the doctor told you to take them for just two to three months, you should’ve taken them for just two to three months!”

“Well, uh, my period just wouldn’t stop . . .”

The doctor sighed her irritation out her vividly painted red lips. “If your body happens to be abnormal, a side effect from taking birth control pills for a long time can be pregnancy.”

“Really? But ... aren’t birth control pills made to prevent pregnancy?” Her objection came out meek.

The doctor’s black-and-blue gaze immediately turned sharp again. “You’re the one who overdid it with the pills— it’s your own fault. Medicine isn’t candy you can gorge on whenever you feel like it.”

“What ... what do I do now?”

The doctor flipped through the chart. “Does the child have a father?”

“Excuse me?”

“Does the child have someone who can be their father?”

“No ...”

The doctor looked up and again gave her a scary look through her thick makeup. “Then you better hurry up and find a man who’s willing to be the father.”

“The child’s father? Why?”

The doctor shot back, “You’re carrying a child—of course the child needs a father!”

“But, uh, what happens if there’s no father?”

“You’re in a situation where you’ve become pregnant under abnormal circumstances, which means that if you don’t find a male partner, the cells of the fetus will not properly propagate or grow. You know how in grocery stores there are freerange fertilized eggs and non-fertilized eggs? It’s the same thing here. If the fetus does not properly grow, then your pregnancy will not proceed normally, and this will ultimately be bad for the mother. Do you understand what I’m saying?” Clearly, the doctor was annoyed with her.

“W-what do you mean bad?”

“That depends. You’re only six weeks along right now, so I can’t really tell you what’s going to happen.” The doctor sighed. Then, she glared at her again and threatened, “You better find a father for that child, fast. If you don’t, things will really get bad for you.”

Her family concluded that she should take a leave of absence from school and get set up by a matchmaker before she began to show. She wrote “sickness” on the request form as her reason for taking leave. Her short-tempered thesis advisor threw a fit over her taking a break just when her thesis was finally shaping up. She regretted the interruption in her work as well, but there was nothing to be done. The people in her department commiserated with her as if she had contracted a fatal disease.

She didn't have much to do once she had left school. Her family became busy instead, coming together for the great "Find the Child a Father" project. It wasn't long before her mother and the matchmaker had set up her first matchmaking seon date at a café.

An awkward silence descended between her and the man as soon as the matchmaker and her mother left the table. This was her first time on a seon date, and she didn't know what to say to this complete stranger or where to look or what to do with her hands. Her morning sickness, which had seemed to ebb, had come back that morning with a vengeance, and the strong air-conditioning breeze of the fancy hotel café, coupled with the smell of the black coffee, was making her shiver and her insides flip-flop.

The man, somewhat apologetically, began to speak. "So ... you're a graduate student?"

"Yes ..." Her lips were blue from the cold and she could barely manage to answer him through her shivering.

"What are you specializing in?"

"Slavic literature—"

"How very unusual! I'm sure there can't be many people studying Norwegian literature in Korea?"

"Uh, that's not quite—"

She suddenly couldn't stand the smell of the coffee. Casting her dignity to the winds, she bolted from her seat and sprinted to the ladies' room. For a long time, she wrung out nothing from her stomach other than a little coffee, air, and bile. She prayed the man had left as she washed her mouth and hands.

But he was waiting for her in front of the ladies' room with worry written all over his face. He quickly supported her arm as she came stumbling out the door. "Are you all right?"

"Yes ... I'm so sorry."

She was bright red and didn't know what to do with herself. The man helped her back to their table. As she leaned on him during the short distance of their slow walk back, she noticed how his shoulders were wide enough to wrap around hers in an embrace. Her hands and shoulders, freezing from the air-conditioning, registered that the man's arm was strong and hard, but at the same time warm and appealing. The room was still spinning, her legs threatened to give way, and she was so ashamed that she wanted to make a run for it, but as she became conscious of these facts about his body, her red face grew even more crimson.

"Are you very unwell? Shall we go?"

"I'm sorry, may I sit down for a bit?"

"Oh, of course."

She collapsed into the chair and couldn't think of anything to say to him. The man, not knowing what to do, kept sipping his coffee.

"Are you sick today? I hope you didn't force yourself to come out ..."

"No, it's just morning sickness ... I'm pregnant, you see."

"Oh, really? Congratulations."

"Thank you."

"Then it must be the smell of the coffee that made you uncomfortable. Shall we get rid of it?" He immediately called over a waiter.

"Thank you so much." She was still mortified, but it was a relief not to have to smell the coffee anymore.

"But you mustn't be too far along?"

"Yes, it's only been two months."

"So you don't know if it's a boy or a girl? I'm sorry, I'm being nosy."

"Oh no, that's fine. I don't know yet. I didn't ask, on purpose."

"I guess it's more fun to wait and have the anticipation."

The man was polite and kind, an unexpectedly nice conversation partner. She felt attracted to him. They talked for a while about pregnancy and babies until she suddenly asked him, "So, um, would you be my child's father?"

"The child's father?"

"Yes, to be honest, that's why I'm on this seon date ..." She gave a quick summary and confession as to how she became pregnant through the birth control pills and the doctor's warning.

The man listened with a sincere expression. After she finished, he seemed lost in thought for a moment. "Well ... I think I'd have to think about it a bit more. I didn't know this was your situation when I agreed to come ... I know it's a seon date but becoming a father is not an easy decision. I hope you understand."

"Of course, that's fine."

"I can't give you an answer right now, but maybe if we saw each other a bit more and got to know each other better, I'd be able to decide then. Would that be all right?"

"Very much so."

The man insisted on driving her home despite her repeated refusals.

"I'm actually a driver by trade. You can trust me," He said this with a smile.

As she watched him drive off into the night after dropping her off by her house, she thought of how they had talked all afternoon and the only thing she really knew about him was the fact that he was a driver.

She went on a string of seon dates with other men after that, but nothing really took. There were many times where she would run to the ladies' room and come back to find the man had disappeared. Some of the men became tense and took