

The Vegetarian

They have been married together nearly for five years. When the husband first met the wife, he had no interest in her, and she had no charm nor attraction. The husband was the type of man who wanted to boss around the juniors who are one or two years younger. He always wanted to be a bigger fish in a small bowl. The wife read books a lot and seems to have no friends. All her day was filled with reading dull books and preparing foods. Another weird thing about her was she do not wear bra. They did not try for kids till they got their own place. They got their own house quite recently. One cold afternoon, the husband saw his wife in a sleepwalking-like standing. When he asked her, she did not react and said that she had a dream and went back to bed. Next morning, when the husband woke up, he slept in, and the wife did not wake him up.

The most shocking thing was that there were scatters of plastic bags around the floor. She was throwing every piece of meat into the rubbish bag. The husband confronted and tried to grab the bag but surprisingly she resisted. Then his phone rang, and he immediately dressed himself and went to work. It was the first time; he had to dress everything himself without the assistance of his wife.

The wife had a dream. She was in the dark woods, where there was only a red house, where the smell of blood was strong. She saw sizzling meat, barbequing meat, and dripping blood. It was frightening to her. When the husband came home, she had prepared a vegetarian meal for the dinner. The husband was quite disconcerted. Although he understood that some people chose vegetarian meals for religious or health reasons. He did not complain any longer after some time. But the changes in the physical appearance as well as the mood of his wife became increasingly prominent. She became a skeletal frame and avoided sex because of the meat smell from the husband's sweat. Yeong-Hye was the name of his wife. In her dream, she saw the husband nearly swallowed a chipped knife from a meat meal. And she saw the barn full of blood.

Today was a special day for the husband, as his boss invited him and his wife to the dinner. He was hoping that her wife would act natural, but she did not even wear the makeup. So, he had to remind her to put on some makeup. When he arrived, he realized that his wife's nipple had been visible through her black blouse. His boss, the managing director, and the executives, they were all there. But he acted natural. When the dishes appear, the wife suddenly said in a loud and clear voice that she did not eat meat. When the other asked why she did not eat meat, she said that she had a dream. But the husband saved face by saying that she had a gastroenteritis. The wives did not like the existence of a vegetarian in her table. When they came back home, she went into her room, without sleeping together with her husband in the living room. Her mother phoned the husband. The husband told her about her daughter's vegetarianism. Then he phoned her sister-in-law, In-hye, who resembled

a lot like his wife. They all were surprised and apologized for her. He wanted to call her brother as well. But he did not want to overdo it.

The wife had been avoiding sleeping with him for some time. One night he forced himself to insert into her. Her face shows no desire and only disgust. He repeatedly did the same for several instances. Her father called her and shouted over the telephone. But she did not care. She went on living like that. So, they arranged a family gathering to give her a dressing-down. Two days before the gathering, the husband found her topless while peeling the potatoes. She answered that it was hot. She looks horrible with protruding collar bones and small breasts.

The gathering was at the house of his sister-in-law. Her husband was an art college graduate, who do nothing to contribute to the salary. The husband envied the life of his sister-in-law's husband. When he saw the meal, she had prepared, he felt hunger suddenly. She was a good cook like his wife used to be.

She prepared all this food since yesterday, and even made an oyster dish, one of the favorites of the Cheong's wife. When everyone arrived, they started the dinner. The wife did not eat anything else, except for rice and kimchi. Her sister tried to persuade her to eat the meat but no avail. Her mother chimed in, but she did not response anything. It upset her father, who told her to eat meat. One thing led to another, when he tried to force her to eat some pork. He had hit her twice and thrust the meat into her mouth. She runs away into the kitchen and cut her wrist. They managed to stop the bleeding in time and rushed her to the casualty department. Mr. Cheong's and her dad's shirt were stained with blood. So, he went to the sauna and washed off.

The husband and the family of the wife attended her during her stay in hospital. Her mother came and tried again to feed her black goat as an herbal medicine. After repeated tries, she consumed some and vomited it when her mother left. Her mother shouted at her and cried when she realized what her daughter had done. In the wife's mind, she was only feeling the pain in her chest, even without her bra. The chest was full of the howling and crying of all the meat she had consumed throughout her life. When the husband woke up, he could not find her wife anywhere. When he found it, she was sitting on a bench near the fountain topless. She said it was hot.

Mongolian Mark

When the curtain fell over, he left the auditorium. He saw the foyers and posters along the way. He had been in the bookshop before. Then he saw a poster about a performance that involves naked bodies. He realized that someone has materialized his dream performance. He rushed to the specific theatre but let down by the hoarseness of the performance. He wanted milder and quieter performance. He went back to his studio, a small room where a company let three of them use a

single computer for their videos. He brought the program and tape. He had not made any video for more than two years, and it made him anxious.

He could not help himself but think of the images he saw in the poster. He remembered that his sister-in-law Yeong-Hye had same kind of Mongolian mark in her buttock and imagined that it would be her. He made an art sketch. But he thought again and not to mention his sister-in-law, no women would agree to perform such sketches. Even if someone agrees to do so, he will have no chance to exhibit it, and his family would discard him.

Then he heard the door locked tickle. So, he hid the picture and went back home. Her wife was waiting for him to take a break. She has been running the house and the cosmetics shop by herself all weekdays, so she considered Sunday as her day for break. Her son, Ji Woo, was sick. When he saw her, he knew what he was missing when he was introduced to her sister. When he was showering, her wife told him that Mr. Cheong had handed the divorce paper to her sister. He felt relieved and asked her if it is ok to call her. His wife was glad as she had not call her for a long time. She had lived with them for some time after her release from psychiatric ward. When he called her, he got no response at first. When he asked for reply, she only replied that the water is boiling, and she needed to go. Before she could hang up, he said that he was coming over.

When he arrived, he saw that the door was open. Then he waited. After a while, she came out from the bathroom, naked. She saw her sitting. She was embarrassed nor surprised. She slipped into her clothes. She said she had nothing for him to eat. She only put some slides of pear. Her brother-in-law apologized for coming inside since the door was open. When he saw her naked body, she was not as thin as she used to be. Due to the great care from her sister, she got full again except for some areas. She was looking for a job and he said that her sister could provide a job at her store. After a few minutes, he mentioned to her that he needed a favor and asked for a walk outside. He bought an ice cream for her, and when she ate it, she looked like a Mongolian. So, he brought up his courage and asked her to be a model to paint while she sat naked. She replied where it would be. He mentioned that he would rent his friend's studio. She did not answer if she agreed or not. He mentioned that it would be a secret.

At the appointed time, she arrived. He had rented a studio from his friend and prepared the necessary things. He asked her to shed her clothes. After a while, she took her clothes off and lied on her stomach. He focused the camcorder on her and started painting her whole body except the left buttock that has the Mongolian mark. It took him for some hours to finish it. When he finished painting, they went out for something to eat. During the whole time, she showed no feeling or emotion, simply lying as told. It took them for some time to find some place that has the vegetarian meal, and they found the Buddhist's cuisine. While eating, he told her that it would take several times to wash the paint off, she replied that she did not want it to come off.

When he arrived back at his home, his son was sleeping at the neighbor. So, he took him back to his room. His wife called and told him that she would be late. He replied that he needed to go out to the studio again. His wife cried and replied that she is coming back then. He was hesitant to go out again. But decided to go back. He finished editing the tape that night. The master tape was four minutes long and he labeled it as the Mongolian marks and flowers. He then imagined about the Mongolian mark 2, where his sister-in-law and another man, both painted, were having intercourse. He did not go back home yet, instead, he went to sauna.

When he came back home, he called his sister-in-law and asked if the paint had come off. She said that she did not want to come if off as it stops her dreams. Then he asked if it is ok to paint another man in front of her and if she could come again. She agreed to come. So, he phoned one of the guys from the studio and met up with him at the studio and showed him the video. J was mesmerized by his art and her body. So, he asked if it is ok to paint on him in front of her. J was hesitant. But later that night, J called him and agreed to do so.

At the appointed date, she was late, but when she came, she was a bit wet. So, he painted him first and asked her to undress. Then without any instruction, she drew him closer and caressed him. He filmed it with his camcorder. When he asked J to have an intercourse with her, J pushed her away. He said that he did not want it to be like a porno. Afterwards, he was a bit uncomfortable. Though he agreed to film till the end, it was quite clear that he was disturbed. When he left, he asked her how she felt. She said he felt wet. So, he tried to kiss her and undress her. But she pushed him away. She said it was the flower. So, he asked if he painted the flowers on himself, she would be okay. She did not reply anything.

So, he got himself painted by one of his friends from the studio. As soon as she finished painting him, he went to the Yeong-Hye's. He realized that the door was open. She was awake, and so he made love to her swallowing the pleasure of her Mongolian mark. He recorded some part of it on the camcorder. He slept well and woke up late that day. When he entered the living room, he saw his wife sleeping on the table. She was awakened by his movements and confronted him for using his sister-in-law for his gains. She also told them that she had called an ambulance already for both of them.

Flaming Trees

Yeong-Hye had been missing from the ward. The whole hospital and the whole area were alarmed. The hospital called her sister. Her sister was at another hospital, taking her son for chest X-ray. Fortunately, he had no pneumonia. Then she got another call. Yeong-Hye had been found in the forest nearby, soaking wet from the rain. It was nothing short of a miracle.

She thought Yeong-Hye and her son, Ji-woo, must have a special connection. Then she fell asleep for about an hour and dreamt of her sister saying that flowers are

springing from her. She dreamt of blood tickling from her eyes. She woke up and rushed to the mirror. The blood was not there. It had been three months since she had not slept well.

She went to the hospital to visit her sister. Along the way from the bus stop to the hospital, she walked thinking about how she met her husband and how her sister met her son for the first time. When she arrived at the hospital, the receptionist remembered her from the previous visits. She had been visiting her sisters once every month. While waiting, she saw the big trees around the hospital. She thought about how all things started to fall apart. She remembered when all that happen. It was the time when her sister started doing odd things and turning into vegetarian. She thought about if it would be different, if she could have stopped her from cutting her hand. She remembered the paramedics putting her sister and her husband into arm strap and taking into hospital. Her husband was released after several months with several lawsuits. He went on hiding after that. Her sister condition had improved till her disappearance. In-hye continued to open the shop despite the scandal. Time went on.

A doctor came from the door and told her that her sister's condition has not improved. They will try to feed intravenously. The doctor continued that people with anorexia nervosa will starve to death as they believe that they have put on weigh even though they are thin to the bone. In-Hye requested to speak to her sister to make her see sense. So, he gave her thirty minutes. If not successful, she will be transferred to the general hospital. He also asked about In-Hye's condition and said that carer should take care of themselves as well.

Before she was called, In-Hye remembered the first time she brought Yeong-Hye. They both saw the big trees around here. At that time, Yeong-Hye was getting better and was discharged from General Seol Hospital. Instead of taking her back to the social life, In-Hye decided that it would be better if she stayed at the hospital and Yeong-Hye agreed. So, she chose this hospital where the treatment is good as well as she can afford.

When she was called, she was led to her sister's room. She saw her sister being on handstand. So, she gave her a little nudge so that she will tumble and fall back. In-Hye picked her up and talked to her. Yeong-Hye greeted her sister and told her that she was standing up like the trees. Lately, she realized that the trees stand on their hand. And she told her that she does not need to eat anymore, and she just need water so that the flowers will spring out of her leg.

In-Hye brought Yeong-Hye's favorite fruits, but she was adamant in shutting her mouth. She refused to eat, no matter what. The IV line in her hand is the only thing that kept her alive, but it will not keep her any longer. It was raining outside. In-Hye talked to her nurse-aid and discussed how she had become so thin that he looked like an overgrown adolescent without any sexual appearances. In-Hye's mind was flying from one thing to another. She remembered one time when her husband called her just to see Ji-Woo, but she pulled off the cord. As she expected, he did not

call her again. Yeong-Hye told In-Hye that she was the same as others since she was forcing her to eat. A few months ago, she said that she wanted to leave here as everyone is forcing her to eat. All she wanted was to become a tree and all she needed was the sunlight.

In-Hye's mind was flying from one place to another, from the past to the present. She remembered the time when she was having bleedings from her vagina for a month. She was worried that it could be a serious thing, so she postponed the medical appointment. It was around the time when she had sent Yeong-Hye to the hospital. When she consulted her doctor, it was nothing. She had been worried for nothing. It has been like that for all her life. She had never really lived, just endured. In-Hye tried to put some plum juice by putting some of it on her lip with her finger. She asked her something but there was no reply. So, she put her finger near her nose and still got the breath. She thought if she did not have her child, she might lose all her sense like Yeong-Hye.

She remembered her son making the sound with his hands clasped. Was she hallucinating or was she seeing things here on earth? She packed all her things and went out to the lobby. Nurse aides were cutting the nails of the patients. Then a doctor came. Here a doctor is the Messiah, everyone is trying to complain of their issues; one persuading him to discharge him, others complaining about their daily issues. Then a young doctor, an internist, came. He told In-Hye that Yeong-Hye is still conscious, and we had to get her out of this state. So, they brought Yeong-Hye into a room and tried to insert a tube through her nose. The first one is a failure. They believed that In-Hye watching here was making things more difficult, so they pushed her away. The second time is a success. Before they could give the tranquilizer, In-Hye came screaming to take the tube out.

After some struggle, she made them stop. The doctor handed her a paper and told her that she needs to transfer her sister to the Seoul right away. When she was in the ambulance, she remembered how her sister's hair resembled Ji-Woo's. Ji-woo was a sick child and she did not know how she could explain all that had happened when he grew older. She wanted her to stay happy. The light is shining through the windows. Then she heard a sound from her sister, and she grabbed a towel because she thought her sister was going to vomit again. But she did not. In-Hye put her mouth close to her sister's ear and said that she had dreams too and sometimes let them carry her, but she had to wake up. Before she could finish her words, she saw the trees along the road were burning with green fires. She stared at it fiercely trying to find any answer.