

## KIM Hena

## BITTERSWEET

The air in the practice room was heavy. The floor was wet with the early morning cold. Sweat dripped from the bodies of the ceaselessly moving people. The smell of *masala*, India's unique spice, mixed with the sweat, creating an unidentifiable and unavoidable aroma. Nevertheless, I found a space between them and spread out my own yoga mat. It was a world of less than a single square, and I stood on it, closed my eyes, muttered the opening mantra, and started practicing yoga. This involves the process of reaching my arms up toward the sky, bending my back towards the ground, and breathing in and out. Suddenly, somehow, I felt like the world outside this little yoga mat disappeared and I was alone existing only in it. I could only see myself; I couldn't see anyone or anything in the rest of the world. Sometimes painful, sometimes pleasant, sometimes feeling nothing and feeling everything at the same time; this is why I like to do yoga. I didn't have to have any thoughts or emotions in the sense of opening and tightening every part of my body.

I went into a meditation room with my yoga mat after I finished practicing *asanas*. I spread out my yoga mat again in this room, lay down on it, and took a *savasana*, which is an invoice posture. Meanwhile the sun had fully risen, and the day was bright. I felt a bit cold from the breeze which was coming through the window. I covered myself with a towel and closed my eyes again. The world inside my eyelids was not dark. Lights and sounds leaked in, and I could see and hear everything clearly. I thought about Jin, who was lying in the same posture, experiencing the same sensation as me, in this room.

'No, not everything she does would be the same as me. She could be feeling her own, it might be different feelings from myself.'

I thought to myself. It could be similar, though. She must have felt the same cold as me and covered her body with a towel like me. Then she will go to her flat, put sliced potatoes and zucchini in broth with radish, seaweed, and dried mushrooms, cook *sujebi* with small pieces of flour dough. I'll hold the hot bowl with both my hands, blow the *sujebi* to make it a bit cooler, and the broth will go down to my stomach. Jin, I feel I'm getting cooler. I'll tell her and she will smile at me without any sounds.

"Have some more. Do you not want to eat anything else? Shall I make you some more fried eggs?" Jin said to me.

"I am fine, Jin. I want to have something sweeter."

Jin took a box of chocolates out of the cupboard, put it on the table, and also brought yogurt out of the refrigerator right away.

"They're the new chocolates I made yesterday, and a little bitter." Jin said, opening the lid of a chocolate case.

"Why do you like such a bitter taste?" I asked her, picking up a piece of chocolate and chewing it in my mouth. "It feels more bitter because it is so solid."

"I love this kind of solid and bitter taste."

I opened my eyes wide and asked her again.

"Really? I can't eat such bitter and solid things. Don't you feel as if you're chewing on crayons?"

"Huh, do you feel so? Yeah, now it does, come to think of it."

Jin said so, and took the yogurt out of a small bowl and put it in front of me with a wooden spoon. I held the spoon and the yogurt bowl she gave me. She said to me quickly:

"If you'll have only this, you'll definitely only taste the sour. I have both mango jam and pomegranate jam. I'll mix them up: which one would you like to have?"

"I don't mind. Choose what you want."

She took a glass jar of pomegranate seeds out of the refrigerator after she heard my answer. Then she carefully took some of it out of the jar with the wooden spoon and put it into the yogurt bowl. Jin said, "In fact, it's not jam, it's a sort of extract. The proper condition is to first separate the pomegranate seeds and then put them in a glass jar with sugar for three days."

I put the red pomegranate extracts on the white yogurt, and it looked like a camellia flower that had fallen on fresh snow. I stirred it with the wooden spoon and took some in my mouth.

"I definitely love sweet and soft things."

I laughed out loud. Jin smiled vaguely at me. The smile which was so transparent that it had no colour. Whenever I saw Jin's smile, I would get the impression that white sand was falling from between my fingers. I love Jin's hand gestures, her facial expressions that kept everything calm without being impatient or busy. While I was looking at her, I felt as if my mind was also calm. Even if I would not try to meditate especially, I could feel a peaceful and warm energy just by looking at her. I put another piece of chocolate in my mouth. And I chewed this chocolate again with my teeth and gulped it down. Broken chocolate pieces and pomegranate seeds mashed together in my mouth. I pushed them down my throat, and imagined the fragments burrowing between the muscles and joints throughout my body.

I hoped they would not slip out of my body but stick close together.

"I want to eat more."

"Hmm? Which one?"

I didn't answer her question but just smiled gently.

Only gray light was shining out from the dark-darkened house. Jun held his laptop and was playing a game again today. I furrowed my brow because of the weed powder he burnt was scattered on the table.

He was playing computer games, and he knew that I was already in the house; still, he did not look back at me or say hello. I went to the front of Jun's table and pulled the curtains open. Sure enough, Jun jumped up, grabbed the curtains and shouted, "What are you doing?"

"Look at this, it's full of smoke. I don't like this smell."

No matter how much I spoke up, Jun ignored me, drew the curtains again and sat in his own chair to play game.

"When can we air this room out?"

I asked Jun, and he replied that he would open the window when we went out.

I went to the kitchen with an empty plate that Jun had left on the table after breakfast. He had toasted bread and fried eggs, and I could see a frying pan on the stove, and a peanut-butter bottle with a fruit knife sitting on the top. I hurried to clean them up and wash the dishes with soapy water in the sink. He told me that he would clean up later, but I've never seen his comments lead to action. I was tired of telling him to clean up the mess after eating and leaving dirty dishes behind, so now I don't like to say anything like that. It's much better to just clean things up myself and feel a little bit tired than to feel mentally stressed. That's because every time I nag him it devolves into arguing.

I finished washing the dishes, dried my hands, went into the room, and lay down on the bed. I tried to take a break with my eyes closed, but Jun came into the room with a big smile.

"Jin-ah, it's me."

He came into the bed where I was lying, put his arms around my waist, and kneaded my breasts with his hands. Jun is Japanese, a manager at a hotel in Gangnam, and he is fluent in English, Japanese and Korean. However, I am not good at Japanese, so we talk almost in Korean and a little bit in English, as needed. The place I saw Jun for the first time was in the hotel where he was working. In classes for hotel guests and staff, I had worked as a yoga instructor for two years; that's how I met Jun. His real name is Matsun, but everyone just called him Jun. He was also the manager of my yoga class. Hotel staff and guests who would like to take my yoga class had to book with him first. It was also Jun who sent me my salary every month and oversaw general management such as

supplies and preparations to my yoga class. One day he took the time to participate in my class and practice yoga. He is a tall and thin guy. I could see his rounding shoulders and bent spine after he took off the hotel uniform. His pelvic joints are so stiff that there were few yoga postures he could practice properly. I thought about how I could help him so that he could do yoga postures more comfortably, but there was very little I could do to help him. Nevertheless, he did not give up and consistently came to my class to practice yoga.

Jun is skinny, and not a macho man, but he's good-looking with a gentle smile. When Jin saw Jun for the first time in India, she had whispered to me, "He doesn't seem to have sexual desire." In contrast to his appearance, however, Jun wanted to have sex all the time. Not only in his flat, but also in the hotel where he was working; he would sometimes bring the master key, and then pester me to have sex secretly in an empty room there. When we watched movies in the theater, he frequently touched and kissed me, showing off his sexual desires without paying attention to other people's glances.

When I decided to go to a yoga school in India to study and practice, Jun said he would take a month off from his work and follow me. I was happy because India is a country where security is not very good, and I thought it would be safer to go India with Jun than if I were to go alone. Plus, I thought it would also be better to share the rent and living expenses with him. First and foremost, though, living with a lover was something that I had always wanted to try.

It didn't take long before my fantasies were destroyed. Of course, they did not break into pieces in a sudden flash, like a broken window. No, if it were like that, it would have been easier. If things had broken more easily, I could have been free of them more easily. However, our life together was more complicated and inconvenient because it didn't break down so easily.

At first, I found a crack on one side of the wall, but it was like I didn't pay much attention to it. As I turned away from it more and more, I didn't notice from some point that the crack was getting longer and longer. When the crack tore the wall apart completely and the house collapsed, I realized that something had been wrong from the beginning, and it was irreversible. The divided walls could not be reattached, nor could the house be rebuilt. In front of the wreckage of the houses, I knew it was best to turn back right away, but somehow, I couldn't. I made up my mind to just stand still in front of all the wreckage and I waited for the days when the debris would be swept away by the rain and wind, naturally.

I took off Jun's clothes, then mine. I reached down and stroked his penis to make it hard, and I put it in my mouth. Although I hated the feeling of him in my throat, it was the smoothest way to ease him inside of me given our typical lack of foreplay. I spread my saliva over him, lifted my head, and guided him to my opening, rubbing against his hardness until I could push it inside me. I sat on him at first, but then soon changed position because I didn't have the energy to move on top of him. I lay calmly under Jun, waiting for him, hoping that he would finish quickly.

There was really only one reason that I had unsatisfying sex like this with him, and it was because I could not bear to endure his constant irritation and complaining whenever I refused.

At the same time, just because I don't enjoy having sex with him doesn't mean I don't love him. Nor does it mean I hate him. The truth is that he was annoying me, claiming that I had changed and that I didn't love him anymore. Instead of trying to figure things out, though, he would just smoke weed and play games all day, refusing to hear my explanations. This persisted no matter how hard I tried to tell him. I had come to India to practice yoga, and there was only so much energy I had; this meant I had less energy to do other things. Still, he didn't trust me.

I felt I had to have sex again to appease his feelings. I told him he could have me, but still he didn't seem to be happy with. He said, "You don't like this, I don't want force you to do it", and then it was he who refused first sex. I lied, told him that no, I'd really like it, almost whining to him. Then we had sex, but he was clearly reluctant, and he didn't release his mind. I could have opted to break up with him right away, if it were possible for me to not have to see him anymore. For now, though, I have to maintain my life and relationship with him. Even if I will break up with him one day, I know I will want to get along with him as long we are together. Therefore, I had to have sex and pretend to like him to

that I could get along with him as I want.

I told Jin that I wanted to watch the process of making chocolates, and she said it was okay as long as I only watched. She meant that she doesn't like it when someone helps her when she's making chocolates. She told me again, she would prefer me to just watch, because she wants to make the chocolates all by herself. I guessed that what she really meant was that she felt sorry to be helped by me. But that was just true. Jin wasn't that happy to have someone next to her when making chocolates. She accepted me only because she knew that I was coming to her house to spend time together. She hadn't had any actual intention of making them with me.

Jin was staring vacantly at what she was doing while she stood in front of the stove and melted a chunk of solid chocolate into the double boiler. She said, the point at which a chunk of chocolate melts properly is the most important, and it's difficult to explain its state in words, but she would be able to see it when I look carefully. She became silent as she put the melted chocolate in into the small mold with her sure hand. She used her concentration and attention to fill it in; even a small mistake could cause the liquid to spill over or under fill the chocolate mold.

I stood back a short distance from her to observe the process of pouring out the chocolate fluid. Somehow, my eyes moved to the muscles rising and sinking along her arms, shoulders and neckline. Even though her strong body was filled with muscles honed through intensive yoga practice which I knew she did every morning with the dedication of a soldier, I found myself wondering how she can look so thin and tender? I was curious.

"I love to see this."

Jin said so. She meant she doesn't like to make chocolates, but she likes to see the process of how chocolates are made.

"The cold chocolate melts and then warms; the hard chocolate melts and then softens. The solid melts into liquid; the liquid chocolate hardens and becomes solid chocolates again. So I can make this the way I want it, the way and the shape and the taste I want, at least this....."

She took a moment to catch her breath and then she began to speak slowly again.

"I don't have to think of anything when I'm looking at the process, so I like it. I don't think of any things that I've been obsessed with, and only this moment comes to me. The moment the solid melts, the moment the liquid hardens, the moment we can't look at it with our eyes or touch it with our hands, really exists. And I can feel it all over my body."

I smiled, and breathing a little louder, asked:

"Is it kind of a meditation?"

"Yeah, that's kind of the thing. I can only make chocolates like this when I stay in India. When I'm in Korea, I can't even try this at all."

At that moment, I heard the door open quite loudly. I could hear someone taking off their shoes and throwing away their backpack and running into the room in a mad rush.

"Jason."

I called out his name even before he appeared. He is Jin's son and his real name is You-jun, but I only call him Jason. The name Jason is the English name he used when he was taking an English class at an academy in South Korea. And I felt more comfortable just calling him Jason because I saw him for the first time in India. Jin stared at Jason running into the kitchen without saying anything.

"Hello, Jin-ah."

Jason ran in, saw me, and then stopped and bowed politely to me. I was horrified every time by Jason's polite bowing, but I gave him an answer and a question at the same time with a smiling face. "Yes, are you here?" Jason is a ten-year-old, taller and bigger than his mother. Plus, he's fat, and so everyone who looked at him asks if Jason is really Jin's biological son. Although it was a rather rude question, people used to ask Jin if she had adopted Jason. Their looks are that dramatically different. At such times, Jin would take out her cell phone, find the pictures they took together, and show them to people. They were pictures of Jin, her husband and Jason. In the picture, the father and son were a perfect match. They were both tall, broad-shouldered and bulky. Between them, Jin who is as

skinny as a stick, looked like a marvelous match. No one who sees the picture can doubt that they are a family. Each time, people laugh and joke to Jin to have another child, this time a daughter who looks like her.

Jason took a mineral water pack out of the refrigerator, opened the lid, put the pack to his mouth, and gulped the water. He opened his mouth, and screamed at his mother before he had even swallowed all the water.

“Mom, what are we going to eat today? What are we going to eat? What are we going to eat?”

Because of his excited shouting, water dripped down from his mouth and the collar of his shirt was all wet. Jason wiped away the water with the back of his hand and asked again.

“What are we going to eat? Where are we going? What are we going to eat?”

“Let’s have something my son wants,” Jin said, but Jason screamed louder and annoyed her.

“Och, tell me what you want to eat, then, tell me!”

Even though Jason screamed and irritated her like crazy, Jin said nothing. She just wrapped a chocolate-filled mold with parchment and carefully lifted it up and moved it to the refrigerator. I cleaned and arranged the dishes on the table to help her. Jason eventually tired of pestering his mother. He sat on a table chair and looked at something on his cell phone. I could see him as he moved his fingers quickly. He had probably started to play a mobile game. At the same time, he continued to move his legs, making a knocking sound against the table chair. I turned on the tap and water flowed into the sink and then rinsed the soapy dishes while listening to the water dripping.

Jun was waiting for us in the middle of the crosswalk in front of the yoga *shala*. His long, slender frame stood upright in the breeze. His body is neither flexible nor sophisticated, but it contained a physical force of a man. Whenever I looked at him closely, unprovoked anger and fear rose up inside me.

“Yo, what’s up?”, Jason greeted Jun.

Jun greeted him with a slight smile, without any particular answer.

“How have you been?”, Jun asked both Jin and Jason.

Jin answered, “I’m doing well, Thanks”, and smiled. I called a taxi using my mobile phone application. The app informed me that three taxis were passing by a short distance away. I checked the number of a taxi that was one minute away and waited for it. Jun tended to play well with young Jason. Their age gap was significant, but they have been going well since the first time they met, as if they were born with a male-specific connection. They both liked ball games, playing computer games, joking, and their dietary preferences were almost identical. Unlike the way Jin and I avoid meat or fish, they enjoy eating meat, chicken and lamb in particular. So I felt satisfied that all four of us could meet. Whenever I went to a restaurant with Jun, he was unhappy that I didn’t share the food he likes. But he could share his favorite foods with Jason, so I felt more comfortable. It wasn’t good, but it was easy, that kind of comfortability.

The taxi, which was supposed to arrive within a minute, had yet to arrive. I took out my cell phone and turned on the screen to check the location of the taxi, and Jason, saying he would look at it first, took hold of my hand. I felt a sudden pressure, so I instinctively tightened my own hand, and told him to stop it.

“What did I do? I didn’t do anything now”, Jason snapped, maliciously, as if I were somehow to blame for something. His obstinate behavior angered me each and every time, but I always tried not to let it show.

“Just take your hand away”, I said to him through gritted teeth. But Jason did not listen to me. I

knew that it was like a situation where children were fighting over a cell phone. Nevertheless, I didn't have the slightest intention to do what this child wanted, especially with him being much younger than me. Jason said again. "Let me see it."

He grabbed my cell phone forcefully and tried to get it out of my hand. Jin didn't stop him. She didn't even point out to him it's Jin-ah's cell phone. Jin only waited for the taxi to come, leaning against us slightly.

"Jin-ah, you've done something wrong. That's why the taxi doesn't come."

I had no love for this child's mind or behavior; he seemed to be acting as if he would only be satisfied if he dragged and crushed his opponent and finally climbed on top of them.

I told him again not to touch, but I eventually lost my grip and he got my cell phone. My phone rang as soon as Jason tried to check the screen in the application. It was the taxi driver calling me. I told Jason again to give me my phone, so I would be able to answer it, but he quickly pressed the call button and said "Hello". While staying with his mother in India, Jason confidently spoke using simple English greetings and expressions. But he actually did not know exact grammar or the proper spelling of words in English. Even when he was talking to international people, he was a child who could only say words that were related in simple ways to what he wanted to say in the moment; he could not always understand when others were speaking. He couldn't understand what the taxi driver was saying, but he kept repeating, "Hear, Gokulam, yoga shala, yoga shala", trying to explain where we were. When he was caught off guard, I quickly grabbed my cell phone from his hand and told the taxi driver our location. I gave the driver a detailed explanation. Jason, who seemed to be angry, just started chatting with Jun, after muttering "Damn it".

The taxi arrived, and we got in. Jun sat in the front seat, Jason was in the back seat, in the middle, and Jin and I sat on either side of him. Before anyone could say anything, Jason told the driver to go to the Mysore hotel. I was constantly angry at Jason's words and behavior. Why does he have to decide everything first, and have his own way every time? And why doesn't anyone get mad at his behavior? Why am I the only one? Why does it seem that I alone am unable to bear him?

"He's still a little boy." Sometimes when I asked Jason, "What's wrong with you?", Jin would say in her peculiar, calm and helpless tone, "He's still a little boy. He's big, but he's still young inside, so he doesn't know much. Don't mind him."

How does she bear that kid? Could it be possible just for the reason that he is her own child? If so, why doesn't Jun get angry? Matszun, do you? Aren't you at all upset with that kid? Why? Why are you like that? Why doesn't anyone get mad at him? Why is it only I who gets overwhelmed with this anger? Why?

At the hotel restaurant, Jun and Jason ordered lamb steaks, and Jin and I ordered pastas and salads. We went to a Western restaurant every time we went out to eat because Jun and Jason didn't like to have anything with Indian spices and didn't even like to smell them. When the food we ordered came out, Jason quickly finished his own plate and then asked Jin to order one more. So Jin ordered the same food again, as soon as it came out, Jason pushed the new plate away, and said he can't eat anymore because he is full. But Jin and I don't like meat, and Jun didn't touch the plate either because he likes to eat less, as always.

We didn't have to call another taxi because there were always cabs waiting in front of the hotel entrance. I wanted to walk a little because I was full. But Jason hated walking, so we had to take a

taxi again. The hotel staff opened the taxi door and we got in one by one. Jason didn't even say hello to the driver, just, "Mysore Zoo."

The zoo in India felt more like a botanical garden than a zoo. We could see the tropical country's density of flowering trees and coconut trees from the entrance to the zoo. The colourful garden lined with flower beds. The well-cultivated flowers and trees made me feel like perhaps they put more effort into plant care than animal care. As I walked along in the shade of flowering trees, I felt cool and refreshed as if I in were a forest bath.

"Have you ever seen the film *Life of Pi*?", Jin asked me. I answered that I had both seen the movie and read the novel. Then she said, "Right. I've read the novel, too. I don't usually read books, but I read this one because an Indian boy is the main character in it. And both the film and the novel have an Indian zoo in the beginning. So I always wondered: what about the actual zoo in India?"

Come to think of it, the Indian zoo depicted in the movie was like a botanical garden with deep green light. She continued, "The story is about an Indian boy drifting in the Pacific with a Bengal tiger, and I liked the scenes from India more than the main part."

"I agree. I thought the same as you. Especially at the beginning of the novel, things like what the author actually experienced in Pondicherry, India; descriptions of the old man he met there; the childhood of Pi; Pi's people and his family, are the same as the actual Indians we've seen here. That's why I felt that part more vividly."

"Right, I think so, too. But most people said that part was too boring, or no fun. Every time people say that, I feel like I'm a stranger, or someone who's living in another world. Why is everyone different from me? No, why am I different from everyone? The things I'm looking at, I'm thinking about, I'm feeling for, do other people really not know all of these things?"

"Everyone seems to dislike India."

"What?"

"I meant, the *Life of Pi*. There Pi's father told him to leave and go to a new land, like Columbus did. Even though Columbus left in search of India, the new land he found was never actually India, and I think this is the same for most people."

I was glad that Jin and I could walk and chat slowly while Jun and Jason were rushing around and looking at the various kinds of animals on display. Jin could not hang out me without Jason, and I could not hang out with Jin after made Jun play games in the room. Whenever the four of us met together, Jin and Jun rarely talked, and Jason and I had few conversations. Jun and Jason spent time naturally, talking to each other easily, and I was able to enjoy time with Jin as if it was just the two of us.

I went to the bird park with Jin after Jun and Jason went to see the predators. As we entered, I thought that it was a real tropical country. A variety of colorful birds that I might have seen in picture books from my childhood were separated into cages. I had never seen such strong primary colors — the whites, yellows, reds and blues — in South Korea. Besides these, there were other marvelous colored birds; some were cyan, purple, sky blue, and light green, and they were singing here and there. Jin had been walking in silence for a while, looking only at the birds, then suddenly she said, "I thought zoos are just places that keep animals from living in nature and abuse them for profit. But I realized that maybe I was wrong after reading *Life of Pi*."

Pi, the main character of the novel, said something like that. In zoos, animals can just relax, eat, drink, bathe, and groom their hair without having to worry about being eaten by each other, or needing to eat each other. Animals in zoos behave as they do in the wild, and objectively there is nothing better or worse than living in the wild.

"The theory might be controversial, but if I don't believe that that's true, it's too painful to live my life....."

She told me she wants to go to the southern part of South Korea, open a yoga center and live her own life. Then do it, I thought. But I couldn't tell her directly. Her husband works in Seoul, and Jason goes to school in Seoul. Why..... can't you break up with them? I was always curious about it. But because I couldn't bring myself to ask her, it was impossible to know the answer.

Jin, let's go. Let's go there together, get a flat, find a studio and make a yoga retreat. Let's live together, teaching yoga and running our own yoga center. It may be difficult for you alone; I don't think I could do it alone, but if we do it together, our dreams can come true. Let's live like that, Jin, huh?

So, do you think if we go there, and run away from everyone to achieve the life we want, the dream life will be there? That could be so. There could be a real me, a new life. But do you think we will be happy there? If we have what we want, if we achieve everything we dream of, then can we enter the eternal cycle of happiness, and live without feeling unhappy? Do you really believe that?

At the end of the bird park the road branched in four directions. We ran into Jun and Jason; they had just come from the predatory animal section, and we decided to go to the snack bar together. On the other side of the fence that followed the path we were walking were herbivores such as horses, deer and giraffes. There were no animals that particularly caught my eye or piqued my curiosity, but nevertheless we were walking slowly in the hot midday sun.

"Wow" Jason shouted. "Look at that!"

There was an 'Ullook-mahl', or zebra in Korean, where Jason was pointing his finger. Jason spoke again, "I've never seen an ullook-mahl before".

Then Jin and Jun both said, "Me neither".

Come to think of it, that was my first time seeing zebras in person as well. I thought the zebra's pattern was just a simple overlap of white and black stripes, but the combination of two colors is more unusual to see. It was a totally out-of-the-way combination, so I looked at it more, and I felt it actually wasn't something from this world. We all stood still in front of the fence and looked at the zebras. No one was willing to take off first. Jason asked me out of the blue.

"Jin-ah, how do I say 'ullook-mahl' in English?"

"Zebra".

"Does 'ullook' mean zebras in English?"

"Nope, 'ullook' translates to 'stain' or 'spot' in English".

"Then, what's the meaning of 'zebra'?"

"The zebra is 'ullook-mahl' in Korean".

"You just said to me that 'ullook' is 'stain' or 'spot' in English".

"Well, I don't know what zebra means in English".

"Why don't you know that? Why don't you know?"

Jun was next to me, pulled out his cell phone.

"I'm going to look it up".

Jun went online and started searching for 'zebra'. I was annoyed by Jason's question, but I also wondered what zebra meant in English. Jun had been searching for this and added that the word zebra originated from the Latin word '*ēquifērus*' which means 'equus ferus' and wild horse in English. Basically, the word 'zebra' comes from vulgar Latin pronunciation of *enciferus*. It came to be *ezebrario*, then *ezebra*, and finally zebra.

Jason was surprised and asked me again, "Is it a predatory animal, then?"

Jun hesitated about how to explain it to Jason. So I explained, instead of Jun.

"Wild animal doesn't necessarily mean only predatory animal in English. It also means animals that live in nature. No one rides zebras, takes care of them, or raises them on the ranch. So that's probably a horse that doesn't grow up among humans and lives only in nature."

Jason heard my explanation, then turned away from me as if he didn't care anymore. He said, "Okay, I get it. Let's go".

When we arrived at the snack bar, Jason and Jun bought vanilla ice creams, and Jin and I bought bottled water. Jun asked me, "Would you like to taste my ice cream?" I said to him, "I'm good".

Jin and I sat next to Jason, while Jun and Jason were having ice cream on the bench in front of the snack bar. Jin took something shiny out of her bag and handed it to me as if something had suddenly occurred to her. It was a chocolate wrapped in foil.

"You don't like bitter taste, so I made it with more sugar. I also added more milk".

"Thank you, Jin".

I took off the foil and put a piece of chocolate in my mouth. This chocolate had melted properly in the hot south Indian climate, and now it was melting in my mouth. I rolled my tongue gently and savored it slowly. What was once hard and cold was now actually soft and warm. I could hardly believe, while tasting the chocolate, that it was made by Jin. I chewed it and swallowed it. There was actually no difference between them. As Jin said, this chocolate was much sweeter and smoother. And yet the bitter taste of cacao still remained in it; I swallowed it all together. And I just looked at her.

*Translated from the Korean by the author*