

BORAME

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The light autumn frost had swept through the park during the night, silent and empty, without the hustle and bustle that would burst through the gates in the early morning. It had crept across the ground, climbing through the ragged, wild hillside, gently touching even the highest leaf on the tallest gingko. The frost had traced intricate patterns, like those of miniscule Victorian embroidery samplers, over the drooping stems of the exhausted lotus blooms and the tall reeds that are surrounding the fringe of the small lake.

Only now has the frost melted, dissolving into delicate pearls of icy cold water - the shadow of the wild, untamed hillside shading the small lake and most of the sprawling, expansive park from receiving the limited autumn morning sunlight until midmorning. Small beads of melted frost slowly trickle down the stems that sway eerily in the chilling early breeze. Herons and cranes mill about, perched on the platform in the middle of the lake, having their usual morning conference, before the usual crowds of early commuters race through the park, avoiding the traffic that caused a jam in the city thoroughfare.

During the weekdays, the park is filled with regulars: groups of old ladies walking around the oval, nattering about whatever their grandchildren are up to, retired old men, overseeing the daily activities of the birds. They sit on a bench under the aged weeping willows, that are just as gnarled, crooked and wizened as themselves, while they contemplatively watch the branches sway and bend, gently trailing through the water, and dancing like figure skaters in the icy air.

Small children with bright yellow backpacks run excitedly to the small kindergarten near the east entrance. They wave happily to each other, chattering morning greetings, like the birds perching in the spindly oaks nearby, as they cheerfully stomp across the frost-covered grass as they rush to meet their friends. Dog owners jog past, the animals overjoyed to leave their small city apartments for a wide, open space, leading their owners to the dog park. Commuters pursue each other as they race to meet deadlines and zoom past the tranquil scenes of the early morning, too enamoured with a new podcast episode or the latest recording of Lim Yunchan performing the Van Cliburn award-winning third Rachmaninov piano concerto to notice the beauty of the changing seasons around them.

Later in the day, the park is filled with noise: the sounds of life and existence. Energetic and loud music from a bygone-era drifts out from the senior center, as crowds of elderly citizens mill around, excited to show off their shiny, fluorescent tracksuits, bundled under layers of hand-knitted scarves and autumnal parkas in a cacophony of vibrant shades, as they prepare for the dance class. They are enthused, singing along with the wails of the trot artist, reliving their pasts, swinging their arms and forgetting how the world around them has changed. A jazz trio perches by the oval, enticing passing university students to spare some change, as the maple leaves begin to slowly fall, adding to the melancholia in their minor key tunes. Nurses from the nearby Seoul National University Hospital wander by, on their lunch breaks, weary, with dark circles under their eyes, exhausted from a tedious morning. Between lectures, students from the nearby university laze around in the last of the late autumn sunshine, eating lunch together under the falling leaves. Coworkers escape the chaos of the office, gossiping amongst themselves, with a firm grip on their steaming takeaway cups filled to the brim with caffeine, as they search for a free bench to enjoy the heat of the midday sun, before they return to the towering glass buildings that line the outskirts of the park.

During the afternoons, high school students fill the library, that stands near the north-east edge of the park, filing through the glass doors, that are perpetually cloudy with handprints, in an orderly line, laden like packhorses. They territorially protect their own little corners into the late hours of the night as they refuse to succumb to their drowsiness, not wanting to be defeated by a particularly challenging physics question, heads bowed, scribbling furiously. They dream of one day being like the students from the nearby Seoul National University, who seem to find time to laze around in the last of the late autumn sunshine, despite having reflected the exact routine merely six months ago. Sometimes there are film crews, filming some yet-to-air K-drama in the extensive grounds. Occasionally, there are actors in historical hanbok gowns, silken hair piled on top of their heads, and at other times, there are actors in military air force uniform, a more appropriate choice, given that the park was once an air force training facility.

In the evenings, the park is bustling with life. Commuters are on their way home, happy to walk further away from their tedious work lives for the moment and enjoy the break they have now. Students cut through the park on their way home after a long day of lessons then hours at their various hagwon, loosening their ties, and rubbing their eyes as they yawn, utterly exhausted from exam prep, the night growing slowly darker. Despite the loss of most of the light, skaters whizz past, spinning daringly, their silhouettes illuminated by the gleaming streetlights dotted throughout the paths. Their arms are spread out wide, like Christ the Redeemer, embracing the

inky twilight, not sparing a glance backwards, as if they are chasing something only just out of reach.

Small children clutch the hands of their parents, eager to be out so late in the evening, hopping along. They are too excited to jump on the crunchy fallen leaves, to complain about the bone-chilling cold and the weariness in their feet, often pulling away when they spot a particularly inviting and enticingly crackly looking leaf. Bikers curse, ringing their bells noisily, as they swerve dangerously to avoid the children that seem to appear out of thin air. The scent of autumn is in the air, wafting deliciously, mixing with the smell of traditional wintertime street food that drifts from the stalls.

The tents are brightly coloured, filled with ladies cooking bungeo-ppang, the sweet red bean smell enticing nostalgia and reminiscence of childhood memories from those passing by. One is fogged up by the heat of steamed corn, with brightly coloured kernels, like the colours of the leaves still adorning the nearby hornbeam trees. An elderly couple are busy bustling to serve, the line of people listening to the chirping mechanical birds that perch on their chestnut roaster, waiting patiently for a warm brown paper bag of perfectly roasted chestnuts. Though the heat permeating from the bag warns of the temperature within, the promise of the sweet, nutty scent and crumbliness of the chestnuts is too hard to resist, inevitably resulting in most people end up scalding their mouths. The cold is starting to set in for the rest of the season, making people crave the winter snacks of their youth. Parents clasp the chilled hands of their children as they ask the elderly ladies and gentlemen who sell these treats for a serving, eager to impart upon their children the same nostalgia they have for street food.

High above the park, the Nongshim billboard on the top of the brand's headquarters flickers to life, illuminating the display of their latest ever-popular instant noodles, adding to the bright, glittering night skyline. Above, darkness crosses, like the curtains that are being drawn in the apartments over the way. The sky is clear, stars twinkling cheerily, distracting the park wardens from their last tasks of the day. They usher the last stragglers out of the gates, before securely locking them. Finally, only the sound of the late subways rattling across the nearby bridge can be heard, loud and abrasive, a contrast to the silence that now fills the park.

Borame seems to stop breathing, now empty and dark, holding onto the memories of the past day, waiting to overflow with life once again in the morning.