

THE PROMISE

Written by

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v.1

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EVERYTHING IN <THESE PARENTHESES> WILL BE DONE IN KOREAN AND ENGLISH. THEY WILL OVERLAP.

INT. ROOM

Mechanical sound. Will be revealed at end what it is. We hear it occasionally throughout this piece. But sparingly or it will become too distracting.

Sound of LIGHTER. Smoking.

EXHALE. Mechanical sound again.

JUNG MIN

<If you don't do well in school there is really no other options. Life will be difficult. That's all there is to it. That is the truth.>

JUNG MIN (cont'd)

<I grew up in Gwangju. I don't know where I was born. But the orphanage was in Gwangju. And my Boss adopted me in Gwangju. Raised me with his family in Gwangju. Gwangju was my life.>

SMOKING. MECHANICAL SOUND.

JUNG MIN (cont'd)

I asked him once why he adopted me. Out of the hundreds of orphans, why me. And he said...

JUNG MIN (cont'd)

<He said, "Your hands. You had the hands of a killer.">

Pause.

JUNG MIN (cont'd)

My hands are slightly bigger than most. Especially for my size. But it was my knuckles. The strange shape of them. As if they were made of blocks of stone instead of fragile bones. I learned I had to be very careful with them. I thought they were ugly. Because I was teased about them. But one boy said to me that my mother left me because I was an ugly son of a bitch. So I punched him.

(MORE)

JUNG MIN (cont'd)  
 His face... It caved in from the force. I almost killed him. I didn't know I could do that. My Boss, he smiled when he was called in to school to pick me up. And he taught me that my hands--they were a gift. And I said, "From God?" And he laughed.

JUNG MIN (cont'd)  
 (Do not translate  
 this one. Only in  
 Korean.)  
 <He laughed, and said, "There is no God. There is only us.">

JUNG MIN (cont'd)  
 I loved him. But, I thought, he was mistaken. There has to be a God. Because God found me. He put me in that orphanage to be found. He gave me these hands, to be found. And I would use them...to serve him. And crush everyone who gets in his way.

INT. STUDIO

PAUL  
 From QRX you're listening to The Big Loop. I'm Paul Bae. Today's episode, "The Promise." We begin with Part One.

INT. ROOM

Traffic sounds.

JUNG MIN  
 <I was sent to get his dog. NONG-SHIM. A big brown dog. It was so ugly. One eye always looked in the wrong direction. It was half wolf so you would think it would be handsome. No. Very ugly. And it was stupid. But he loved it. His wife was in Daegu visiting her aunt. She had their dog.>

JUNG MIN (cont'd)  
 And someone kidnapped his dog. They left a note. A ransom was wanted.  
 (MORE)

JUNG MIN (cont'd)

We knew who it was. Only a few people knew how much he loves that dog. Because he is not public with his affection. To his wife. To his daughter. To me. None of us. But I have seen him alone, giving Nong-shim extra treats. Long walks in the garden. When he thinks no one is looking, he sits with him and tries to teach him tricks. He loved that dog like the son he never had. So when I came to work that day and he told me someone took Nong-shim. I knew what that meant. I would have to turn over heaven and earth to find his dog.

JUNG MIN (cont'd)

My Boss had two rivals. But we all had our separate territories. And we were all in Gwangju. We had a peace between us that has lasted almost seven years now. To risk that over a dog would be stupid. And none of them had connections in Daegu. So it could not have been one of them. Staying in Gwangju was a waste of time. So, for the first time in my life, I would have to leave Gwangju and go to Daegu.

JUNG MIN (cont'd)

<These are dangerous times. You have to be careful when leaving your family.>

JUNG MIN (cont'd)

The government has been cracking down on gambling and family business. So we all have to act like regular citizens or risk being thrown in prison. That is also why the peace has lasted so long in Gwangju. No one wants to attract government attention. Which means that whoever took Nong-shim didn't care about the peace. Didn't care about being thrown in prison. That meant one person. Pak Min-ho. His father was government official. A corrupt family. So he didn't worry about getting caught or going to prison. Because he was protected by his father.

(MORE)

JUNG MIN (cont'd)

He once took over another family's nightclub. And they couldn't do anything about it because of his connections. But my Boss had no fear. That is why he sent me. To send a message. I am the message.

JUNG MIN (cont'd)

<I drove a few hours to Daegu and met with my Boss's contacts.> These were gangsters. They wanted to get even with Pak Min-ho. So when I asked them if they knew where he lived, where he liked to drink, where his friends were, they knew why I was asking. So they told me. Everything.

JUNG MIN (cont'd)

I waited until night. It's easier, when they've been drinking. He was at a *noh-dae-bhang* with his friends. There were eight of them. And a few girls. Singing, drinking. I could hear them from the bottom of the stairs. I walked past the front desk and found his room. I took a tray of drinks from a server and opened the door. And before they realized I was not a server, I was hitting them. I punched the one by the door. One punch. His head slammed the wall and he bounced off on to the floor. The one next to him, same thing. And the next. That's when the rest of them stood up. I flipped the table. The girls went screaming out of the room. I kicked the table onto four of them. They were knocked unconscious. And there was one. Still holding his microphone and tamborine. I said--

JUNG MIN (cont'd)

<Pak Min-ho. You are coming with me. If you fight, I will kill you on the spot. I do this for a living. Don't test me.>

JUNG MIN (cont'd)

I looked at his feet. He was pissing himself. These kids grow up rich. Think they are gangsters. But they are just greedy. No sense of honour.

(MORE)

JUNG MIN (cont'd)

Of loyalty and what it takes to protect your family. They don't earn anything. They just take. And this one took my Boss's dog.

JUNG MIN (cont'd)

I threw him in the car and drove. He was in the back seat. I could see him thinking of running. But I told him--

JUNG MIN (cont'd)

<If you run, I will chase you. And I will catch you. And it will be worse. Where is the dog?>

JUNG MIN (cont'd)

I could smell something. So I said--

JUNG MIN (cont'd)

<You bastard. Are you pissing yourself again? How much beer did you drink, huh? You are going to pay for the cleaning.>

JUNG MIN (cont'd)

But then I saw something in his face. His eyes. Fear. He was more scared than he should be. I turned down an alley and parked the car.

JUNG MIN (cont'd)

I pulled him out of the car. I slapped him in the face. Lightly. I didn't want to kill him. Yet. I said--

JUNG MIN (cont'd)

<Where is Nong-shim?>

JUNG MIN (cont'd)

His hands were shaking. He could barely speak. So I said--

JUNG MIN (cont'd)

<You are going to tell me how to get to him. And this will be over soon. That is good for you.>

JUNG MIN (cont'd)

I threw him back into the car, front seat this time. And drove. He pointed his directions. He was shaking the whole time.

JUNG MIN (cont'd)

I pulled up to a dark warehouse in the middle of nowhere. A car was parked outside. I asked him how many were inside. He said two. I told him to call them out, that they should leave. He said he didn't have their numbers. So I pulled him out of the car and brought him with me.

JUNG MIN (cont'd)

He opened the door and went in first. I saw two men stand up from their chairs. One of them asked who I was and reached for a bat. I punched him in the face. He hit the wall, then the floor. His friend was frozen, staring at him on the floor so he was easy to hit. Which I did. And...

JUNG MIN (cont'd)

<That's when I saw it. The dog. Nongshim. On the floor.>

JUNG MIN (cont'd)

He was bleeding from his front leg. I knelt down and touched him. He was warm. He was breathing. But he was in pain. If you don't know dogs, it looked like he was smiling, but I know this dog. It wasn't smiling. Dogs have a high pain tolerance. Like me. I've never cried from pain. Neither has this dog. He must be in agony.

JUNG MIN (cont'd)

I went back to the second man and picked him up. I shook him until he woke up. I said--

JUNG MIN (cont'd)

<What did you do to him, you bastards? What happened?>

JUNG MIN (cont'd)

And he said that they decided to try to play with the dog so let it out of the cage. But it attacked them. So his friend shot it.

JUNG MIN (cont'd)

I looked at Pak Min-ho. His mouth was hanging open. He knew what this meant. I balled up my fist. And I sent it into his face. With all my strength. I heard it crack open. He slumped to the ground. Lifeless. The other one--same thing. And the other one. I made sure to avenge Nong-shim.

JUNG MIN (cont'd)

I always carried two knives. I used one to tear off a pant leg from one of the men. I used it to tie around Nong-Shim's leg. I picked up Nong-shim and carried him to the car, and put him in the back seat.

JUNG MIN (cont'd)

That's when I noticed a camera. It was mounted above the door of the warehouse. It was night so maybe my license plate was too dark to see. Maybe. But I had to hurry. Pak Min-ho's people would notice him missing soon.

JUNG MIN (cont'd)

<Have you ever been to Daegu? Mountains everywhere between Daegu and home. So I couldn't drive too quickly.>

JUNG MIN (cont'd)

I stopped at a small store for water and food. They didn't have dog food so I bought Nong-Shim some *kimbap*. He liked rice. Though he needed meat. He was hungry. We were only two hours from home. He would eat soon. He was breathing more easily. I checked his wound. It didn't look worse. But he was still in pain. I pet his head. One eye looking at me. The other looking in the wrong direction. Big, stupid, ugly dog.

JUNG MIN (cont'd)

I drove for almost half an hour when I saw the lights. Ahead of me. It was a police check.



JUNG MIN (cont'd)

<So strange. Even for someone so well connected, for the police to set up road checks this soon.>

JUNG MIN (cont'd)

It was raining. I could see their bright yellow police jackets. I pulled up to the officer. He asked where I was going. Then he looked in the back seat. That's when I saw...he had his gun already in hand. Korean police never draw their guns. Never. Not for a traffic stop. And on his face. A scar. From a knife fight. These were not police.

JUNG MIN (cont'd)

I grabbed his head and pulled him close and sent a fist into his face. He dropped. The other men pulled their guns and started shooting. I hit the accelerator and drove through them. I could hear them screaming and hitting the hood and roof as I rammed through. Bullets went flying through my windows. I could barely see. I think I made it a few hundred meters before I drove into a pole. I hit my head on the steering wheel, and everything came to a sudden stop.

JUNG MIN (cont'd)

I stayed calm and checked on Nong-Shim. He'd fallen onto the floor behind my seat. He was in pain. I carefully pulled him out and put his huge body over my shoulder. And I walked into the forest. Into the cold, wet darkness of the mountain valley. I had a head start.

JUNG MIN (cont'd)

<And I had to make it back to Gwangju. Because I made a promise. And I was going to keep it.>

INT. STUDIO

PAUL

When we return, the conclusion of "The Promise," after these messages.

[MIDROLL PROMO...]

INT. ROOM

SMOKING. MECHANICAL SOUND.

JUNG MIN

<Have you ever spent a night in the woods? Koreans love hiking. They love the mountains. But they rarely spend the night there. Because carrying a hibachi barbecue can get heavy on your back.>

JUNG MIN (cont'd)

When I was still at the orphanage, I got lost once in the forest. Some of the children were picking on me, because of my face. They wanted to fix my ugliness and said they could make me handsome with surgery like they do in the big cities. One of them had a pocket knife. This was before I knew I was strong, that my fists could kill each of them with one blow. So I ran into the forest. By myself. And I got lost. I don't remember much of that night, except the cold. I remember thinking, Why did everyone abandon me. Why did my mother leave me at the orphanage? She must have thought me ugly as well. But she is human. She is to be forgiven for her sins.

JUNG MIN (cont'd)

<But what about God? Why didn't he come to rescue me? From the orphanage? From the children? He is the one who made me this way. He is the one who made me so ugly even my mother couldn't love me. Where was he? Huh? I had no one.>

JUNG MIN (cont'd)

The adults found me. I was sick, and thirsty. And when I got healthy again and rejoined the children, I walked up to one of them. The one who said my face was too ugly for my mother to love. He was smiling. He asked me if I was ready for my surgery.

(MORE)

JUNG MIN (cont'd)

They had some ideas for my eyelids. And...I punched him. That is when I learned...God did not abandon me. He had given me a gift. A gift more useful than a mother's love. Because that's how my Boss found me. My hands...they gave me the ability to be feared. And loved.

JUNG MIN (cont'd)

I walked with Nong-Shim on my back for a few hours until I was sure I had lost them. I gently placed him on the ground and found some wet leaves for him to lick the water from. He was thirsty. And I didn't know when he last ate. I noticed how thin he looked. I could see his ribs very visibly. And his heavy breathing. Water was not a problem. But he needed food.

JUNG MIN (cont'd)

My phone had no reception out there so it was useless. I turned it off to save the battery. I started to walk away to look for food but I heard something. From Nong-Shim. He was whining. Crying. I tried to explain to him that I needed to find food for him. That I would only be gone for a moment. But he didn't understand. Because he was stupid. And only a dog. They don't understand. They think every time you leave, that you are never going to return. To them, every goodbye is the last. I looked at him as he looked up at me with his one good eye. As if begging me to stop his pain. His hunger. I put a hand on his head and tried to comfort him. Then, I picked him up, and put him back over my shoulders. And started to walk again. I walked west. To Gwangju.

JUNG MIN (cont'd)

<And I walked. I walked for two days. I found some berries here and there, but I began to get weak.>

JUNG MIN (cont'd)

I tried to set a trap for small animals. To find something for Nong-Shim to eat. He was getting weak. His breathing came more heavily. His crying at night was almost unbearable. And it would attract the attention of those looking for us. But I am not a hunter. I know nothing of the forest. So my trap stayed empty.

JUNG MIN (cont'd)

On the third night, I collapsed. I was weak. And Nong-Shim had become too heavy for me to carry. I sat against a tree, Nong-Shim's head on my lap. And I stroked his face. His ears. I said to him--

JUNG MIN (cont'd)

<At least we're not alone. We have each other, Nong-Shim. Look at us. Two ugly children unwanted by their mothers. Ugly, ugly bastards. Ignored by everyone except...my Boss.>

JUNG MIN (cont'd)

His breathing had slowed. He was so weak from his injury and hunger. I looked around. And realized what I had to do. I told him--

JUNG MIN (cont'd)

(in Korean sad rage)

<I will bury you here, my friend. I will bury you here and tell everyone about it. With my own two hands I will dig your grave. I will visit you every year when the blossoms come and bring food this time. You will not be ignored, Nong-Shim.>

JUNG MIN (cont'd)

And he looked at me, from my lap. His face wet from my tears. And that was the first time, I had ever felt someone look at me like that. He depended on me. Right then. For everything. His life...was in my hands. My big, lethal hand. My gift from God.

JUNG MIN (cont'd)  
<And I knew then...what I had to do.>

JUNG MIN (cont'd)  
I gently moved his head from my lap,  
and stood. I turned on my phone.  
Still, no reception. So I gathered  
some sticks and made a fire with my  
lighter. I tore off a strip of my  
shirt, and held it between my teeth.  
I stood apart from Nong-Shim. I  
didn't want him to see what I was  
about to do. I took out my knife.

JUNG MIN (cont'd)  
<And I cut. I stopped myself from  
screaming. And I cut, and cut. And  
buried the blade into the bone. And  
sawed. And I stopped myself from  
passing out.>

JUNG MIN (cont'd)  
Each time I almost blacked out, I  
looked at Nong-Shim, laying there.  
Waiting. For me. He needed. Me.

Long pause.

JUNG MIN (cont'd)  
When it was over, I tied the wound  
shut with that piece of my shirt. I  
put the nub of my hand, my left hand,  
on a stick. And cooked it over the  
fire. As it cooked, I could see Nong-  
Shim panting louder. He could smell  
it. He was hungry. And I took that  
black piece of meat from the fire...  
walked to Nong-Shim, placed his head  
back on my lap...and fed him.

Long pause.

JUNG MIN (cont'd)  
<And when he finished eating. I  
passed out.>

Transition.

JUNG MIN (cont'd)  
<I woke up in darkness. I heard  
people standing over me. Then...a  
light.>

JUNG MIN (cont'd)

It was a doctor. A private doctor. He worked for my Boss. I was in a bed, in a room. That's when I realized... it was my bed.

JUNG MIN (cont'd)

My Boss was sitting in a chair beside me. His wife was at the door, smiling. And there, licking my foot, was Nong-Shim. He was healthy.

JUNG MIN (cont'd)

Then, I heard this sound.

Mechanical sound.

JUNG MIN (cont'd)

And felt a very strange sensation. My Boss said--

JUNG MIN (cont'd)

<You will get used to it. It is my gift. To you.>

JUNG MIN (cont'd)

I looked at my left hand. The one I cut off. It was...robotic. A shiny metal hand.

Mechanical sounds.

JUNG MIN (cont'd)

I asked him how I got here. He said my phone suddenly showed up on their computer. They could see where I was so they went to find me. But they didn't know I was unconscious because my location kept moving. Towards the main road.

JUNG MIN (cont'd)

I looked at Nong-Shim. That brave dog. That stupid, ugly, brave dog... dragged me to them.

JUNG MIN (cont'd)

I looked at my Boss. And for the first time, I saw him...crying. He said--

JUNG MIN (cont'd)

<Thank you. I owe you everything. We owe you everything. My son.>

JUNG MIN (cont'd)

And he brought out a bottle of fine whisky. The expensive bottle he always kept locked in his bar. And he poured us a glass. We drank. And he put a hand on my head. And called me...a gift.

OUTRO MUSIC BY WILDIE

INT. STUDIO

PAUL

The Big Loop is written and produced by Paul Bae. Mixed and engineered by Steve Jin. Today's episode stars a fine actor and a good friend of mine, JAMES YI. He stars in the Vancouver stage production of the wonderful hit comedy series, Kim's Convenience, and a slew of roles on screen. We'll put all his links up on our website at THEBIGLOOPPODCAST DOT COM, where you will also find all the music from today's episode. Including what's become one of my favorite songs this year by WILDIE, an indie band out of Sweden who we think are headed for big things. You're going to love their album. And the soundtrack for today's story is by none other than DANIEL BIRCH. We used his incredible music before and we are honored to showcase him again here. We encourage you to go to our website, click on their links and PURCHASE their music. Follow us on Twitter, @BIGLOOPPODCAST, and on Facebook. And finally, if you like what we're doing at The Big Loop, please consider joining us on Patreon where we have tons of behind-the-scenes videos and bonus material and insider news at [Patreon.com/bigloop](https://Patreon.com/bigloop). And...that's it for this week. We'll be back again in two weeks with our season 2 finale.

(MORE)

PAUL (cont'd)

And we're letting you know right now:  
There's no way for you to prepare for  
that one. So until then, tell your  
friends, tune in, peace out.