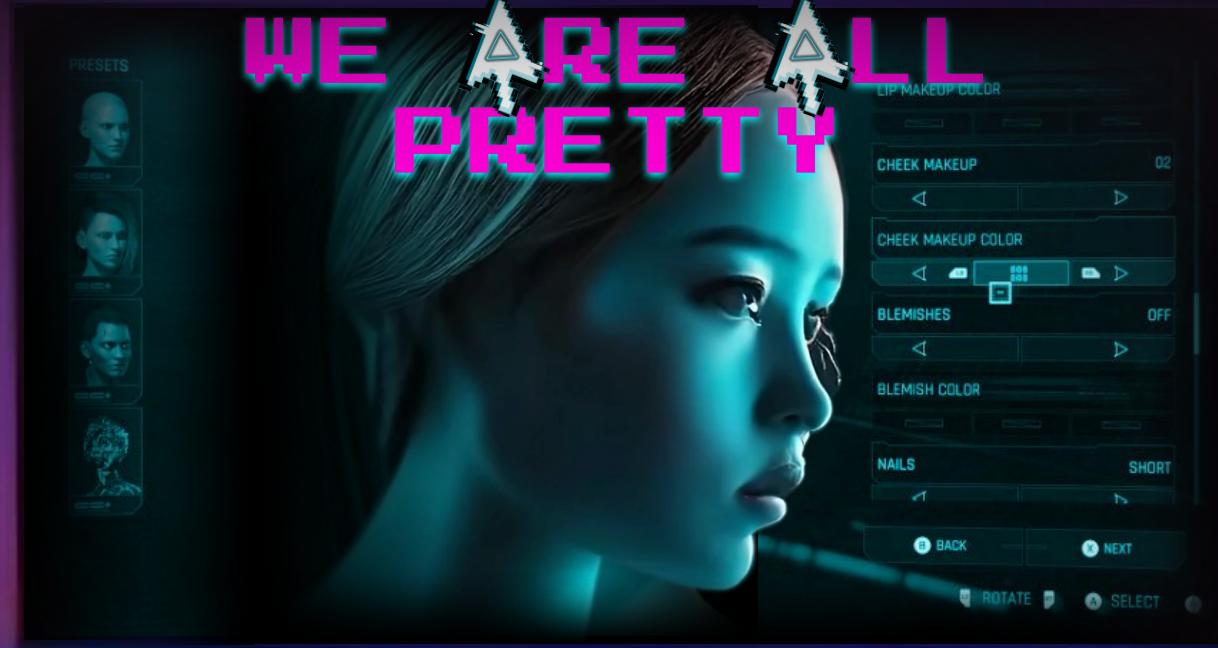
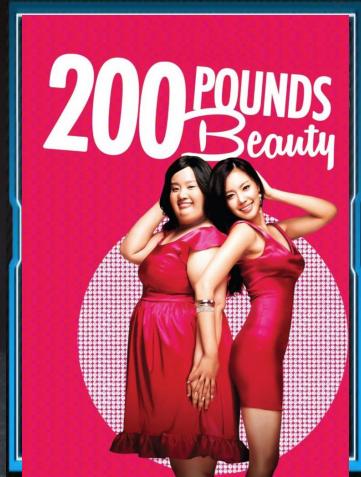


WE ARE ALL PRETTY



COMPS



2023, Mask Girl, South
Korean Thriller Drama,
NETFLIX



2021, Shadow Beauty, Drama,
adapted from webtoon

TONE & SETTING

Set in the competitive acting industry of South Korea, where a nose job can mean the difference between fame and being out of work, this story explores toxic, shallow beauty standards and their effect on women.

In a culture where people are judged for their looks based on a cookie-cutter formula, Sooyoung finds herself the butt of the joke. She doesn't fit any part of the formula, and it takes a toll on her work and self esteem.

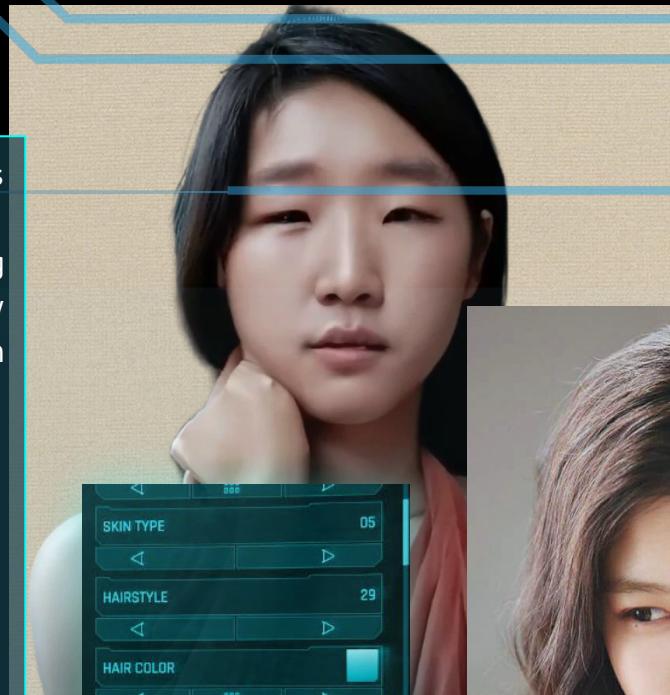
The story is an address for changing social perspectives on beauty, not just in Korea but across cultures.

This is a story that hinges itself on Drama and an injection of Science Fiction that gives the main character unprecedented power in her field.

Sooyoung

...is an arowana in a sea of mermaids. She has an unfortunate face resembling that of a fish, with downturned mouth corners, jutting jaw, and naturally leering eyes. Practically the opposite of the notoriously strict South Korean beauty standards. This deficiency is compensated by her natural acting talent, which gets her into a prestigious acting school. However, she's shoved aside by casting judges due to her looks, no matter how great of an actress she is.

She finds comfort in her best friend, Somi, who is the most conventionally attractive girl at school. Her attitude towards Sooyoung matches her angelic face-she's the only person who has never criticized Sooyoung for her looks.



Somi

...is the prettiest girl at school, her magnetic beauty summoning instant popularity among her peers. Like Sooyoung, she is an aspiring actress and finds the experience more rewarding than her friend's. Because of her conventionally attractive looks, she is able to easily secure acting jobs, overshadowing Sooyoung.

Despite this, she considers Sooyoung to be her best friend and a sort of guardian figure who saved her from a close-call with a crazy stalker in her childhood...



Panda-Alien

02

...is on an Earth vacation, but things have gone wrong. He's crying because he accidentally bought the wrong model of a device that can be used to alter one's appearance. This one only works for humans.

Panda and Sooyoung meet one fateful night and strike a short-lived but life-altering friendship...





The
Story

Everyone knows that Sooyoung only got into acting school because she blatantly flaunts her own ugliness. The audition judges, as shallow as they are, could excuse her looks because of her sheer talent and the ability to admit her shortcoming—an ugly face. To her peers and teachers, her face was a joke, and Sooyoung played along.



Sooyoung's best friend, Somi, is the it-girl. She's so pretty that Sooyoung looks even uglier next to her, but Sooyoung doesn't mind because Somi is the only person who never pointed out her flawed looks. Even though Somi outshines Sooyoung in looks, Sooyoung outshines Somi in acting prowess, even if most producers never look past her unappetizing face.

Thanks to Somi's popularity, by proxy, Sooyoung also becomes popular.



Sooyoung finally gets a callback for a 2nd round audition. Perhaps this is her lucky break after countless rejections based on only her looks. An upcoming rom-com, "Maid," would follow a woman insecure about her looks on a journey to become beautiful. The pre-beautification role would be perfect for Sooyoung, and thankfully the director seemed to agree.



Undecided, she enters the stage and the judges immediately start whispering amongst themselves. The investor, the new round two panelist, unabashedly rejects Sooyoung on grounds of her unredeemable looks. No amount of makeup, no amount of editing could salvage her face. The investor claims that such a face is unfit for the role regardless of whether it's before or after the beautification.



Defeated, Sooyoung is led off the stage. The assistant director, feeling pity for her, tells Sooyoung that her prospects could be improved with plastic surgery. It would be a waste of her talents to let a bad face ruin her career. But Sooyoung had already had plastic surgery. Twice. Any more and her life may be compromised.



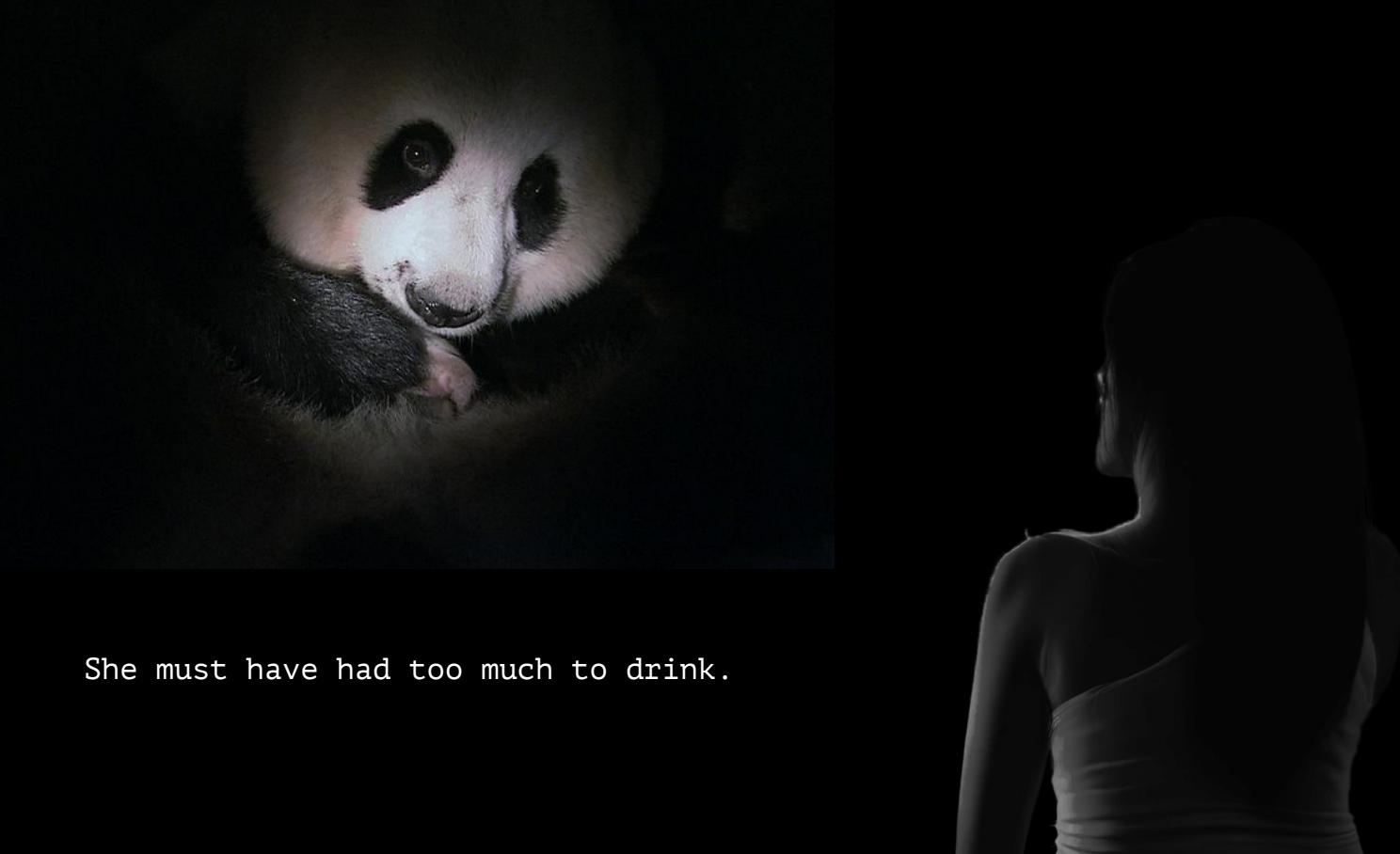
When the assistant director awkwardly leaves the conversation, Somi calls Sooyoung. Somi had gotten the role that Sooyoung had just auditioned for. Even worse, the production had reached out to *her*. Her face had auditioned for her, without Somi having to even lift a finger. Sooyoung grows desperate, the risk of dying seems fathomable in exchange for the chance to be looked at as more than a hopelessly ugly face. Sooyoung plans to drown her logic with alcohol and then take the gamble.



Sooyoung drunkenly wanders the streets, her cursed face lit by streetlights. She calls out Coco Chanel's famous quote-why shouldn't she judge others by their looks if everyone judges her for her looks?



Her frustration is interrupted by whispering trailing out of the nearby bathroom. Sooyoung enters the under-construction bathroom to investigate, and is surprised to see...a panda!



She must have had too much to drink.

The panda sobs, and Sooyoung, half-certain that this is just a hallucination, offers the panda a squid snack. The panda reveals that it's an alien on vacation and was experiencing unfortunate events on the trip. Panda had mistakenly bought an appearance altering device called "Custom For You," meant specifically for humans, rendering it unusable for pandas.



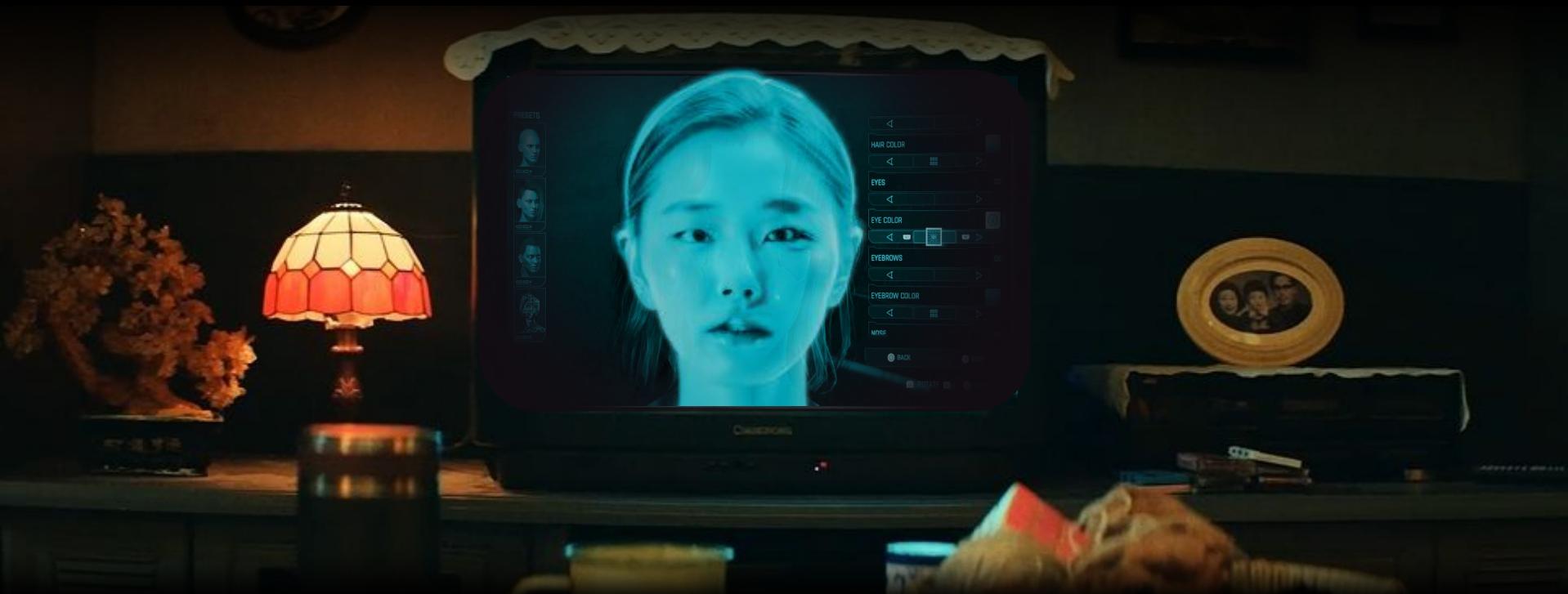
Sooyoung empathizes with Panda and continues to drink and dally with it while complaining about the injustices of their lives. Panda offers to give the machine to Sooyoung, as it would be of more use to her than it.



The next day, Sooyoung awakens to a trashed room, empty ice cream pints and ramen cups scattered across the floor. She turns on the television, listening to the talk show as background noise. The panda is nowhere to be seen, and in its place is the promised machine.



Sooyoung, curious, boots up the machine. The system resembles a primitive video game with even more primitive character customization. The controls are clunky and has no semblance of players' quality-of-life functionality.



Regardless, Sooyoung tries out the game by targeting someone on the television, giving the bald comedian a generous head of hair. She is taken aback, and is the only person surprised by the sudden change, as the talk show continues as normal. It's as if the man had always had that enviably full hair. There was no question as to what Sooyoung would do next with the remaining battery left on the device.



Big eyes, V-chin, sharp nose bridge, plump lips, a face meticulously crafted for 72 hours. A face made for the big screen. Sooyoung is even tempted to copy the face of her favorite actress, Audrey Tautou, but doesn't want to be called out as a fan gone too far.



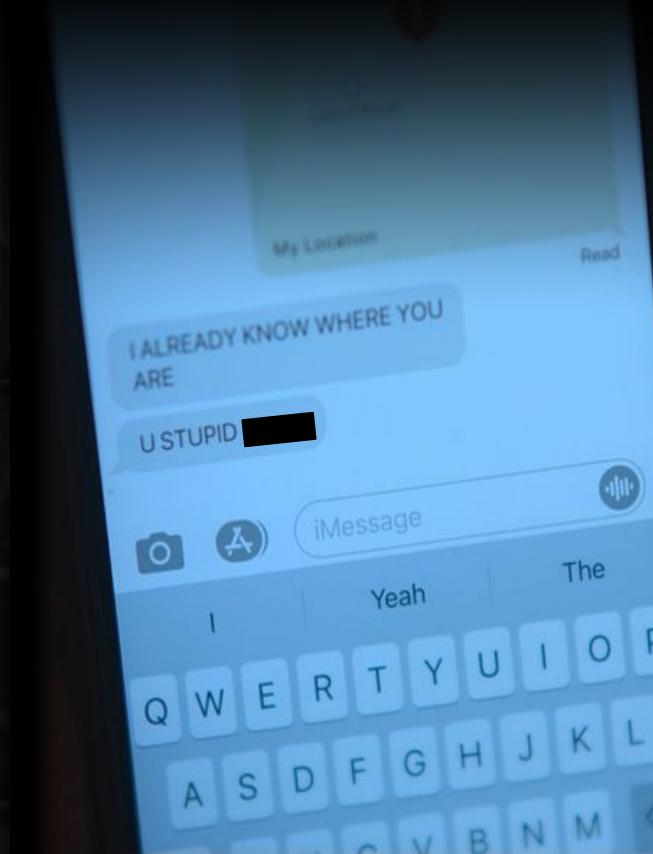
Anyways, Sooyoung gets what she needed-a prestigious agency scouts her and she is well on her way to appearing on television. Things are going smoothly until...



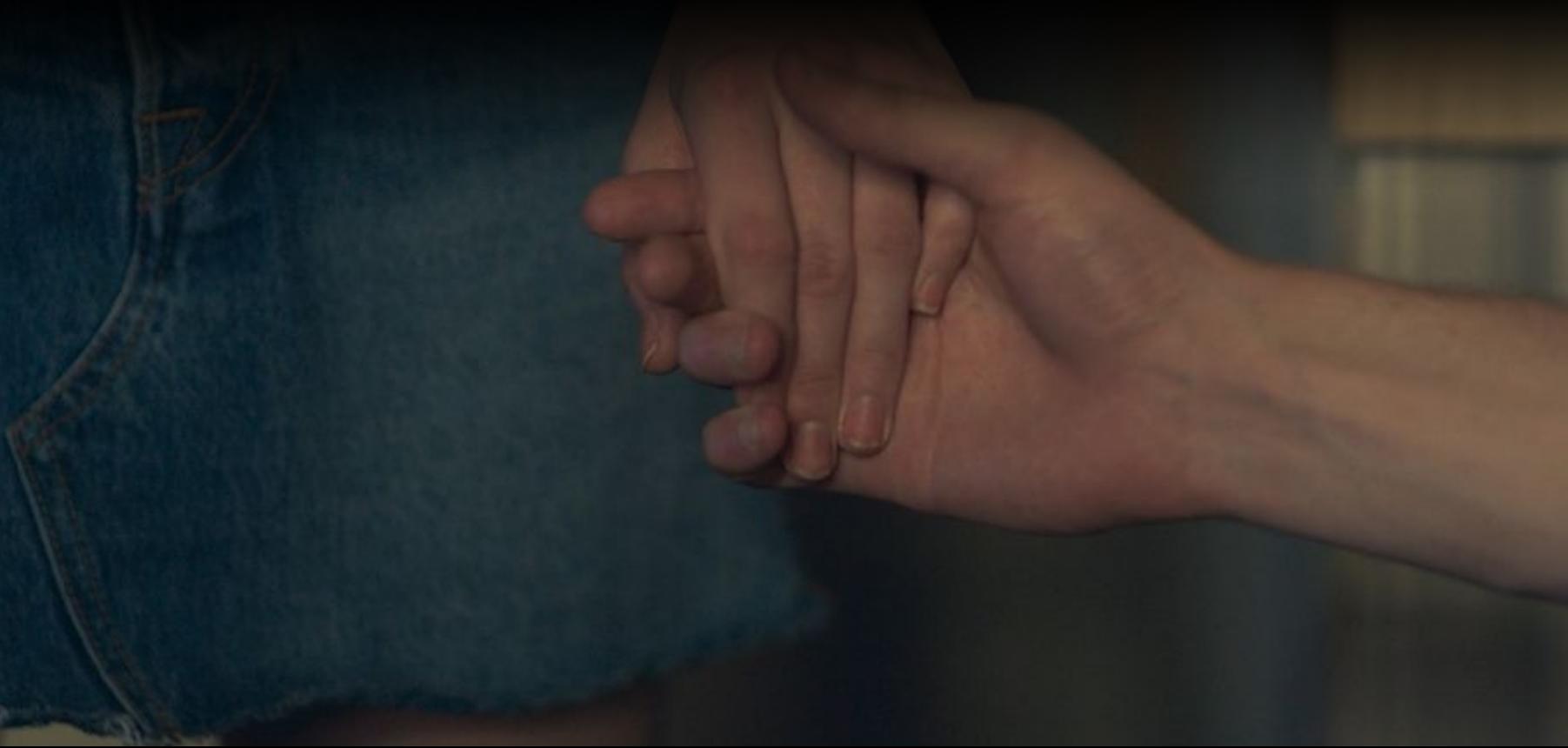
Sooyoung loses a role to another girl, who has a quirky look more suitable for the character. Sooyoung is dumbfounded that her objectively more beautiful face was turned away from this role she had sought so diligently.



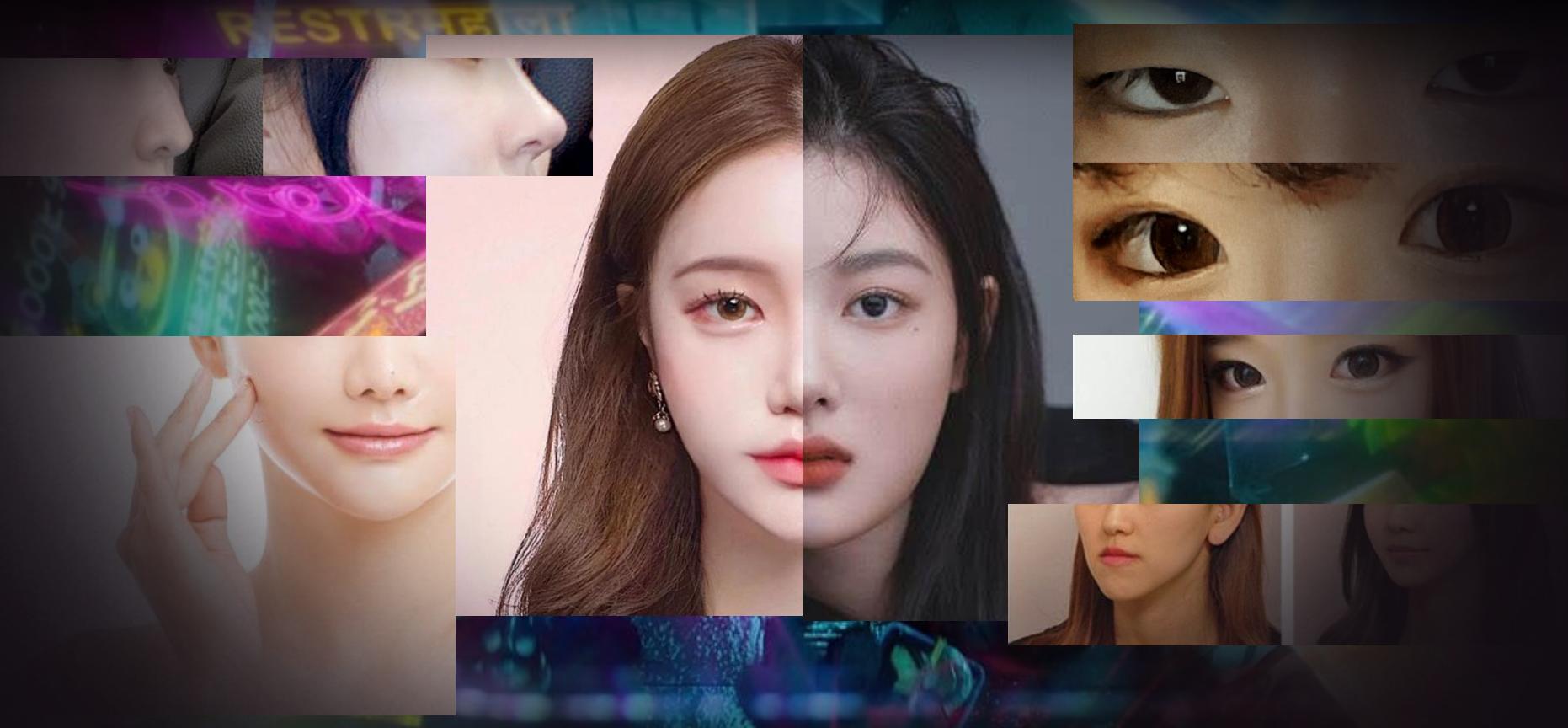
She meets Somi, who mentions a similar thing happening with her. Perhaps beauty isn't the end all be all in this industry. Somi expresses her concerns about a stalker who had been messaging threats to her socials. It's the burden of being pretty and the unwanted attention it draws. The two women find solace in each other's shared struggle-now that Sooyoung is also beautiful.



Sooyoung, when the pair were teenagers, had saved Somi from a kidnapping attempt. Somi, ever thankful to Sooyoung, follows Sooyoung around like a baby chick to the first thing it sees after birth.



Sooyoung, still intent on securing the role she had just lost, uses the machine again to alter her appearance, gaining an edge over her competition. After all, beauty standards are ever changing and she must keep up.



Somi's stalker actually goes through with the threats, attacking her with acid. Sooyoung rushes to the hospital. Her friend's face is wrapped under layers of bandage, the scraps left underneath a grim reminder of the curse of beauty that Somi had to live with. Somi wishes that everyone in the world had the same face, leveling the playing ground and negating the consequences of being too pretty or too ugly.



Sooyoung, faced with the rapidly evolving demands of what is beautiful and what is no longer beautiful, comes to an epiphany. Using the last of the machine's battery, she redesigns everyone's face, all eight million of them, except for her own. The reference: a face with a downturned mouth, unshapely jaw, and lazy eyes, resembling an arowana.





WE ARE ALL PRETTY

Stories worth the binge

Manta