
Chapter 1: Starting the Paid Service (1)

"I'm Dokja." (Dokja= can mean only son or reader).

I usually introduced myself to people like this, then the following misunderstanding would occur.

"Oh, are you an only child?"

"I am, but that isn't what I mean."

"Huh? Then?"

"My name is Dokja. Kim Dokja."

Kim Dokja (Kim Highly Respected Only Son)—my father gave me that name to be a strong man by myself. However, thanks to the name my father gave me, I turned out to be just a normal single and lonely man.

In short, it was like this. I was Kim Dokja, 28 years old, and single. My hobby was reading web novels on the subway.

"Then I'll go on my smartphone."

In a noisy subway, I raised my head reflexively. A pair of curious eyes were staring straight at me. They belonged to an employee from the human resources team, Yoo Sangah.

"Ah, hello."

"Are you going home from work?"

"Yes. What about Yoo Sangah-ssi?"

"I was lucky. The manager went on a business trip today." Yoo Sangah sat down soon as the seat next to me became vacant. A subtle scent came from her shoulders, making me nervous.

"Do you normally take the subway?"

"That..." Yoo Sangah made a dark expression.

Come to think of it, this was the first time I'd met Yoo Sangah on a subway train.

Starting with Personnel Manager Kang to Finance Manager Han... There were rumors that Yoo Sangah had men from the company driving her home every workday.

Yet unexpected words came from Yoo Sangah's mouth, "Someone stole my bicycle."

Bicycle.

"You commute by bike?"

"Yes! I have a lot of overtime these days and seem to be lacking exercise. It is a bit annoying, but it is worth doing."

"Aha, I see."

Yoo Sangah smiled. Looking closer at her, I could understand the feelings men held toward her. However, it was none of my business.

Every person had a genre of life, and Yoo Sangah was someone who lived a genre different from myself.

After the awkward conversation, we looked at our phones. I opened up the novel app I was reading on before while Yoo Sangah... What was this?

"Por favor dinero."

"Huh?"

"Spanish."

"...I see. What does it mean?"

"Please give me some money," Yoo Sangah replied proudly.

Studying on the subway while going home... She truly had a genre different from me. However, what was the use of memorizing words?

"You're working hard."

"By the way, what is Dokja-ssi looking at?"

"Ah, I..."

Yoo Sangah's gaze was fixed on the LCD screen of my smartphone. "Is it a novel?"

"Yes, well... I am studying Korean."

"Wow, I also like novels. I haven't been able to read lately because I don't have time..."

It was surprising. Yoo Sangah liked reading novels...?

"Murakami Haruki, Raymond Carver, Han Kang..."

I thought so.

"Dokja-ssi, what writers do you like?"

"You won't know even if I say their names."

"I've read a lot of novels. Who are the authors?"

At this time, it was really hard to say that I read web novels as a hobby. I glanced at the title of the novel in the app.

[The World after the Fall]

Author: Sing Shangshong (TL: The author uses the name of his previous novel and his author name, but with slight changes. I decided to go with the actual novel translation name)

I couldn't say that I was reading 'The World after the Fall by Sing Shangshong.'

"It is just a fantasy novel. That... Well, like the Lord of the Rings..."

Yoo Sangah's eyes widened. "Aha. Lord of the Rings. I've seen the movie."

"The movie is good."

The silence continued for a moment. Yoo Sangah was looking at me like she was waiting for me to say something.

Our conversation was becoming strained. So, I decided to change the topic. "It has been a year since I joined the company. This is my last year. Time moves really fast."

"Yes. At that time, we both knew nothing, right?"

"That's right. It seems like just yesterday, but the contract period is already over." I realized that I'd said something wrong when I saw Yoo Sangah's expression.

"Ah, I..." I had forgotten.

Yoo Sangah received credit for a foreign buyer last month and was already promoted to a full-time employee.

"Ah, right. My congratulations are late. I'm sorry. Haha, I should've worked hard to study a foreign language."

"Ah, no Dokja-ssi! There is still the performance review and..."

I hated to admit it, but the sight of Yoo Sangah talking was wonderful. It was like the world's spotlight was shining down on only one person. If this world was a novel, the protagonist would be such a person.

In fact, it was the inevitable result. I hadn't tried, but Yoo Sangah made an effort. I just read novels on the Internet, while Yoo Sangah studied hard. It was natural that Yoo Sangah would become a full-time employee, and that my contract would be terminated.

"That... Dokja-ssi."

"Yes."

"If you don't mind... Would you like to know the app I use?" Yoo Sangah's voice momentarily became distant.

It felt like the world was far away. I braced my mind and stared straight ahead.

A boy was sitting in the seat opposite me on the train. He was 10 years old or so. The boy held an insect collecting net as he sat next to his mother, laughing happily.

"...Dokja-ssi?"

What if I had a different life from now? I mean, what if my life genre was different?

"Kim Dok..."

If the genre of my life wasn't 'realism' but 'fantasy'... Could I be the protagonist? I didn't know. It would probably be unknown forever. However, there was one thing I knew.

"It is okay, Yoo Sangah-ssi."

"Huh?"

"It won't work even if you tell me the app."

The genre of my life was obviously 'realism.'

"Dokja has a solo life."

"Huh? What..."

"I am just someone like that."

In this genre, I wasn't a protagonist but a 'solo' person.

"The life of a solo..." Yoo Sangah had a serious expression on her face

However, I waved my hands to show it was really okay.

I didn't know why, but this person was really worried about me. Maybe because she was part of the personnel department... I was already aware of my performance though.

"Dokja-ssi is really good."

"Yes?"

"Then I will live an ivory life." (Sangah=ivory)

Yoo Sangah seemed to have decided something as she turned back to studying Spanish. I gazed at her for a while before returning to the novel.

Everything had returned to normal, but strangely, my scrolling of the novel didn't go well. Maybe it was because I realized the weight of reality that I couldn't scroll down.

At that time, a notification appeared at the top of my smartphone. [You have one new mail.]

It was from the author of 'Ways of Survival.' I opened the mail.

-Reader-nim, my novel will become paid from 7 p.m. This will be helpful. Good luck.

[1 attachment.]

The author said he would give me a gift. What was the gift?

...Like my name, I was also a reader by nature. So, I was excited to receive the mail.

Yes, it wasn't bad living as a reader.

I checked the time. It was 6:55 p.m. I had exactly five minutes before the novel became monetized at 7 p.m.

Then I opened up my list of preferred novels in the app. Since I was the only reader, I should leave a congratulatory comment and give strength to the author.

However...

-The work doesn't exist.

I tried typing 'ruined' several times in the search box, but the result was the same.

The bulletin board for 'Ways of Survival' had disappeared without a trace. It was strange. Had there ever been a case of a novel being deleted without notification when it was going to be monetized?

At that moment, the subway lights turned off, and the inside of the train became dark.

Kiiiiiiiik-! The subway train shook loudly and let out a metallic sound.

It caused Yoo Sangah to scream and grab my arm. Then I heard the sound of other people getting stirred up. Yoo Sangah gripped my arm so tightly that I paid more attention to the pain in my left arm than the sudden stop. It took a dozen seconds for the train to stop fully.

Then I heard confused voices coming from everywhere.

"Uh, what?"

"W-What is this?"

In the dark, one or two smartphone lights turned on. Yoo Sangah still held my left arm tightly as she asked, “W-What is going on?”

I pretended to be unconcerned. “Don’t worry. It isn’t a big deal.”

“Is that so?”

“Yes, it is probably a disturbance from a suicide. The engineer will soon make an announcement.”

As I finished speaking, I heard the engineer’s announcement, –Telling all passengers on the train.Telling all passengers on the train.

The loud surroundings became calm.

I sighed and opened my mouth, “See, it isn’t a big deal. Now an apology will air, and the power will come back on...”

–E-Everyone run away...Run...!

‘What?’

There was a beeping sound, and the broadcast turned off. The inside of the train became a mess.

“D-Dokja-ssi? What is this...?”

A bright light flashed from the front of the subway train. There was a loud drumming sound followed by a pop.

Something was heading this way in the darkness. It was just a coincidence that I saw the clock at this moment—7:00 p.m.

Tick, it felt like the world was stopping.

Then I heard a voice:

[The free service of planetary system 8612 has been terminated.]

[The main scenario has started.]

This was the moment the genre of my life changed.