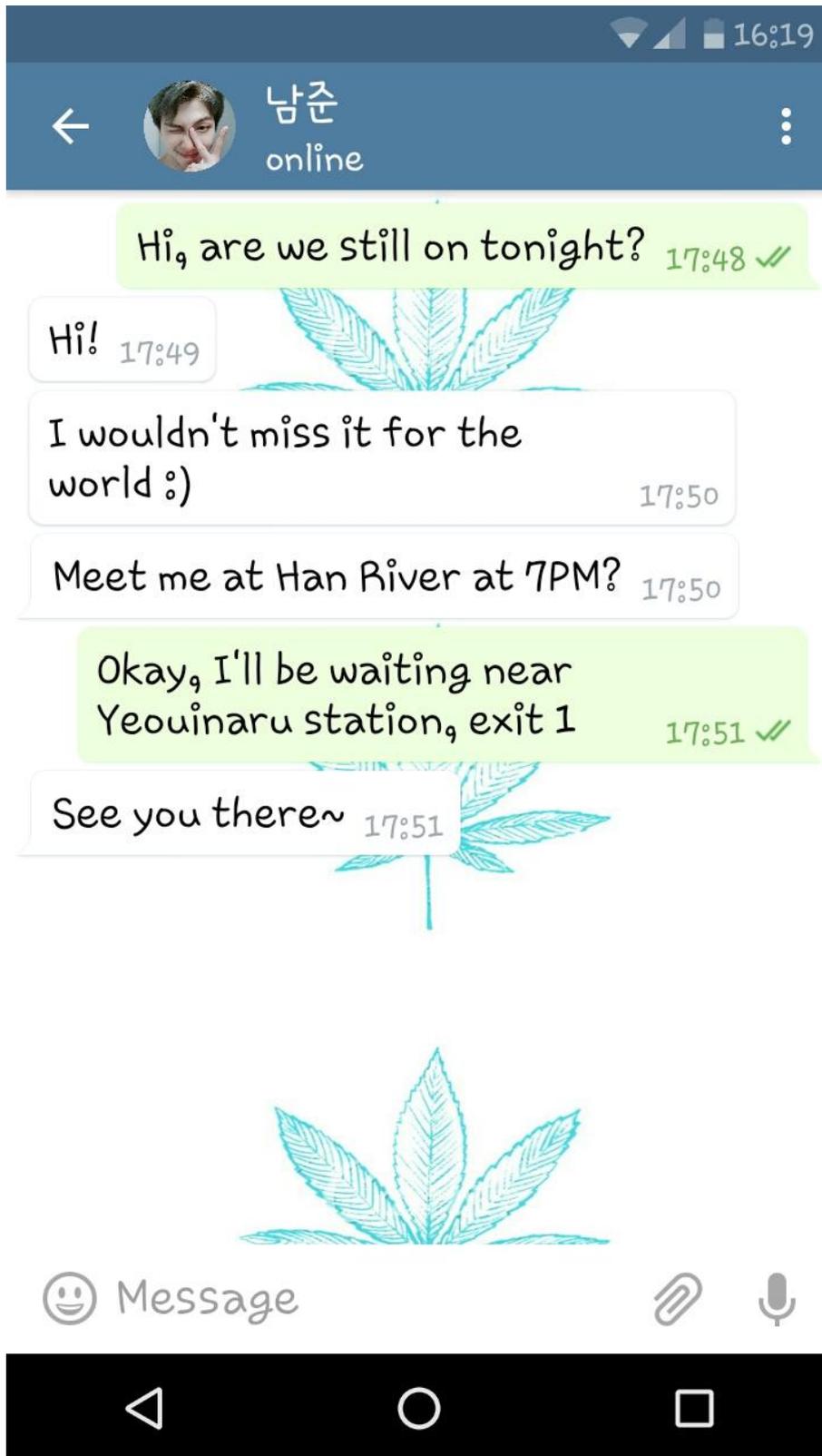


The intellectual one



Han river. This place held such an impactful meaning for Lilah. She's been to other Hangang parks, but she had yet to see the Yeouido one. She was relieved for having the chance to see it before her flight the next day. The weather was a bit chilly, so she wore the bomber jacket she was holding on top of her short light pink dress.

"Lilah?" a tall figure addressed her the moment she reached the exit. On top of the black beanie hiding his locks, he was rocking a light brown jacket, military pants, black sneakers.

"Hi, you must be Namjoon!" She let out a discreet smirk, "Nice to finally meet you!"

"Welcome, is this your first time in Han River?" he asked.

"I've been to Ttukseom, but it's my first time here," she replied.

"Come then, let me show you around," He offered.

The pair took a walk around the park. It was packed that night, with people sitting here and there. Some of them were couples having a night picnic, others were a couple of friends hanging out and drinking beer, while others were basking.

"So Lilah, tell me a bit about yourself," he initiated.

"What do you want to know?" she smiled.

"Surprise me," he smiled back.

"Okay so," she gathered her thoughts, "I recently got out of a long relationship, and I quit my job due to a work-related injury. I always wanted to come to Korea, so I thought this was the best opportunity for me to detox."

"So this is like a healing trip for you?" he asked.

"Exactly!" she was glad he understood her.

"How is it working out for you so far?" he showed his interest.

"I can't complain, it's been very rewarding," she said. "What about you?"

"As you already know, I'm majoring in English literature," he unveiled, "But I'm starting to invest more of my time in Music. I'm taking up a couple of part-time jobs to tend to my needs, and I spend the rest of my time writing, studying or working."

"Wow, your schedule must be very packed then!" she praised him.

"Yeah, I actually had to take the day off to meet you," he mentioned.

"Oh, I'm sorry if I got in the way," she apologized.

"Not at all, I wouldn't miss it for the world," he smiled.

"So, what do you write about?" she wondered.

"Lyrics, mostly," he replied.

"I bet you're a great lyricist," she implied, "I would love to read your work one day."

"Thank you, but it's mostly in Korean." He scratched the back of his neck, "What about you, what are your interests?"

"As a matter of fact, I write too," she divulged, "lyrics, poetry, free verses, and I'm a features writer for a webzine."

"That's cool! What do you write about?" he asked.

Lilah hesitated a bit before replying, "K-pop?"

"Ouah, that's interesting!" he said.

"You think?" she chuckled nervously.

"Well yes," he affirmed, "You must be busy trying to balance between your personal writings and your professional ones."

"It does get hectic at times, but I eventually manage I guess," she let out a chuckle.

Namjoon realized that they've been roaming aimlessly around the park. "Would you like to sit?"

"Sure, I'm starting to get a bit tired," she shyly confessed.

Namjoon spotted an empty bench, but it was located in a dark spot. "Oh, let's not sit there. It's too dark."

Lilah was impressed with his protectiveness. They later found an empty spot near the stairs across the river.

"The view is amazing," Lilah let out.

"I know, right?" he confirmed. "I always come here whenever I can, the scenery is very peaceful and it helps me keep my thoughts in check."

"I bet," she said before getting lost into her own thoughts.

"Can I ask you a question?" Namjoon said.

"Hmm?" was all she let out.

"What are your thoughts on religion?" he asked before realizing he might have crossed the line, "You don't have to answer if you feel uncomfortable."

"Oh no, it's okay," she reassured him, "I believe everyone is entitled to believe in something that gives them inner peace. To each their God ... or not, but either way I respect other people's beliefs."

"I share your point of view. I too believe that religion shouldn't be a problem for people to co-exist," he nodded.

"Agreed. Humanity is what truly unites us, regardless of our spirituality," she added.

"That's wise," Namjoon looked at her in an admirable way.

"Ha thanks, I guess," she looked away, unable to maintain eye contact. "Do you read?"

"Yes, religiously," he chuckled at his own reference.

"What was the last book you read?" she asked.

"Demian," he answered. "Are you familiar with it?"

Upon hearing the book title, Lilah almost lost her chill. She didn't know how to play it cool so she just exposed herself nonchalantly.

"Of course!" she carried on, "I don't mean to sound like such a fangirl, but if you're familiar with BTS's music, they based their "Wings" album on this very book. That's how I got to know about it actually."

Namjoon just looked at her, baffled. She knew that she probably just ruined the rest of the night for herself, but she wouldn't trade her dedication towards Bangtan for anything in the world, including an intellectual date.

"Yes, I actually like 'Blood, sweat & tears' a lot," he resumed the conversation.

“That’s my favorite one too!” she was relieved that her enthusiasm didn’t just ruin an interesting chat.

While they were relaxing by the river, an old man passed them by. He smiled to the both of them, nodded at Namjoon, and gave him double thumbs up. The two of them blushed at the scene.

“So, what do you think of interracial relationships?” he asked.

“Hmm, what about them?” she miserably failed to dodge the question. “I think that as long as there is a mutual understanding, it should work out just fine.”

“What about interreligious ones?” he pushed the interrogation.

“That one is a bit tricky,” she admitted. “I personally don’t have a problem, but ...”

“But your parents might disapprove?” he finished her sentence.

“Yeah, that’s the catch.” She explained further, “I mean, they have nothing against other religions, but they do believe in the necessity of having a similar faith under one roof.”

“I understand,” he said, “It’s the same case around here. Even interracial relationships are a bit challenging.”

“I know a thing or two about living in a conservative society,” she sighed.

As the night progressed, Namjoon and Lilah soon found themselves to be one of the few remaining couples at the park.

“By the way, what was your work-related injury if you don’t mind me asking?” he inquired.

“Ah sure,” she let out her arm, “I hurt my wrist and I was unable to use my hand for a while.”

“I’m sorry to hear that,” he apologized. “Are you feeling better now?”

She jokingly kept flaunting her hand around, “I think it’s healing properly, thanks.”

“So ...” he carefully measured his words, “What is your society rules about holding hands?”

“It’s pretty controversial, I guess.” Lilah soon caught up, “But it’s also a matter of choice.”

As they were seated next to one another, the gap between the two of them started to close. Namjoon suddenly put his right foot next to her left foot, “I just realized we’re wearing the same pair of sneakers.”

“Oh yeah?” was all Lilah could say.

A few moments later, Namjoon playfully kicked her foot, to which Lilah responded with an equally gentle kick. They stayed like that for a while, until Namjoon opened the palm of his right hand and rested it on his thigh.

After what seemed like endless hesitation, Lilah finally met him halfway and held his hand. Her gesture drew a wide smile on Namjoon’s face.

“What do you write about?” she revived the past conversation.

“Life, love, society. Everything, really,” he proudly stated.

“What’s your take on love?” she countered.

“Couples’ love?” he asked.

“Not necessarily. Love as a whole,” she specified.

“I think it’s a beautiful feeling that should be experienced at least once in a lifetime. Be it with your family, friends, or even yourself,” he elaborated. “That’s the kind of love that matters to me.”

“That’s quite deep,” she looked him in the eyes. “By the way, do you always wear your hat outdoors?”

“Yeah, I’m not very confident with my hair style,” he shyly let out.

“May I?” she let go of his hand to remove his beanie after asking for permission. “Why are you lying? Your hair is gorgeous.”

Brushing his hair multiple times built up his confidence, “You think so?”

“I know so,” she smiled back.

The moment was soon interrupted by droplets of rain. Luckily, Namjoon had an umbrella on him. Albeit small, it was enough for them to take cover underneath.

“I did not expect it to rain today as well!” Lilah was flustered.

“It’s always the case around this time of the year,” he smoothly put his arm around her, “Are you comfortable?”

“Yes, I am,” she slowly put her head on his shoulder.

“You know, I’ve been thinking of going on a trip abroad and visit new places,” he insinuated, “Maybe I can pay you a visit then.”

“That’s a great idea,” she agreed, “We have a lot of amazing cities that you might enjoy.”

“Are all women in your country independent like you?” he suddenly asked.

“For the most part,” She further explained, “My generation is a fierce one, and we like to prove ourselves out there ...”

“I respect that,” he nodded.

It was past midnight, and the rain only got heavier.

“I think we should probably head home. I’ll call us a cab.” Namjoon looked at his phone, “By the way, we should definitely keep in touch.”

“Sure,” she mumbled while looking at the horizon.

“I don’t know about you,” he got up his courage, “But I think we can make this work.”

Lilah didn’t know what to say at the moment, so she just nodded in agreement. Namjoon could feel her nod against his shoulder.

The pair stood under the pouring rain waiting for their ride. The weather kept getting worse every passing second, to the point that their lower halves got all wet.

“Come closer,” Namjoon asked Lilah as he took her in his arms while still holding the umbrella above their heads.

Lilah was not expecting the sudden move, but she obliged anyways. Her head rested on his chest for a good five minutes. She could hear his heartbeat, but hers was beating just as much.

She was about to turn her head to meet his gaze, when she suddenly felt his breath down her neck. From his body language, she could sense that he was leaning for a kiss. Unsure of whether she should go for it or not, she buried her face in his chest instead.

The cabbie arrived, and Namjoon kept covering her with the umbrella while opening the car door for her. They realized that they have spent 6 hours together, and they were equally tired. After they both got in the car, Namjoon ushered her to lay her head on his shoulder and gave the driver her address.

The ride back home was silent but very overwhelming. Namjoon sweetly held on to her hand throughout the entire ride while she briefly fell asleep in his arms.

It was still raining buckets when she made it home. Namjoon stepped out of the car and prepared the umbrella to drop her off at the guesthouse.

“We walked a lot today,” he walked her to the entrance, “Although we got rained on.”

“We sure did,” she held on to her hands nervously. “But I actually love the rain, so I don’t mind.”

“I wish we could stay together longer,” he said, “We could talk more.”

“Yeah me too, I really had fun tonight.” She looked inside the guesthouse and saw that her room door was open and the lights were on, “My friends are probably waiting for me to come home.”

Namjoon took a quick look inside, “Please tell them that I’m a good man, there is nothing for them to be afraid of.”

She held onto his hand one last time and let out a smile, “I’ll make sure to deliver.”

a few HOURS LATER

