

4:00 AM

Von Lightwood-Bane

Peppermint tea.

It was one of these ice cold mornings, when Jiyong noticed him for the first time. Seoul was quiet at this time of the morning, well, somehow it still was night. It was 4:00 AM.

The air was cold and on every blade of grass that grew on that little meadow next to Jiyong's working place hung a drop of dew.

On the cars parking outside, there even was some ice. It was a very cold day in march, and the young man pulled his jacket more around his slightly shaking shoulders. He shouldn't have forgotten his scarf when he left for work last night.

Jiyong closed the door of the little house that appeared to be his working place. The young man was a night-watchman of a large multistoried car park and in charge of the night shifts. He started working on 8 PM and his shift ended on 4 AM when the parking lot closed for two hours. At 6 AM, one of his co-workers would open the lot for the new day. At this time, Jiyong would be at home again and going to bed for a few hours of sleep.

He closed the large roller shutter and locked it with his master key. Jiyong, 22 years old, had been working for almost 4 years at the parking lot. He kind of liked it. In this part of Seoul, there wasn't too much traffic at night, so his job was laid-back. And the money was good.

While Jiyong was walking down the street towards a certain place, his footsteps echoed between the tall buildings. The wet concrete beneath his feet absorbed some of the sound, but besides that, it was completely silent. Not one soul was out on the street, Seoul seemed to be asleep entirely.

Rubbing his cold hands together to get some warmth into his fingers, Jiyong crossed the corner and entered a little café. It was a very tiny place, the furnishing and decoration based on the 1960s. It was the only café in the area and Jiyong loved to have a nice cup of hot tea here and read the early morning newspaper after his night shifts.

The waitress, a middle-aged lady, knew Jiyong already. For the last four years, he came almost daily to have his peppermint tea after work.

"Good morning, Jiyong-ssi.", she greeted him, smiling. "Like usual?"

Said young man nodded and took place at the single-seat at the window – the place he always was sitting. At that time of the day, rarely other costumers found their way into the small but very comfortable café. Jiyong liked the cosy, warm atmosphere, but he wondered why the café was open 24 hours a day. Most of the days he was the only one to be there at night.

With a cup of hot, steaming tea the waitress made her way to Jiyong, placing it in

front of him on the table. "Here you go, young man.", she said. Tonight, I made some apple pie. Here you have a slice, of course on the house."

Jiyong looked up to hear and replied her kind smile. She had warm, almost black eyes and reminded him of his mother. "Thank you.", he answered politely. "I'm sure it's delicious."

"I hope so." The waitress went back to the counter. A few moments later, the aromatic smell of freshly brewed coffee was in the air. For some seconds, Jiyong closed his eyes and enjoyed. He loved the smell of coffee. He did not like to drink it – the taste was too heavy for him – but he liked the smell, but only if the coffee was brewed freshly.

Jiyong took a bite of the apple pie and smiled. It was simply delicious. Like his mother had made it when he was still a young boy. Jiyong missed his mother. While he was living in Seoul, she had moved to Busan and both of them rarely saw each other.

While slowly eating the apple pie and enjoying every bite, Jiyong opened the newspaper and began to read. The news looked like every day – a car crash somewhere in the city, the fall of the stock market and a burglary in one of those huge shopping centers.

With a sigh, he folded the newspaper again and put it back on the table, taking a sip of his tea. Everyday, there was nothing but bad news in the newspaper. He was so tired of reading how many people had to suffer or how many criminals were at it again these days. The young watchman just wanted to live peacefully.

Jiyong's life was okay. He did not have too much to complain about. His job was nice, he had a nice little flat and enough money for a living. Not too much, but he did not have to worry about an empty fridge. But sometimes he wished he had more friends. Or at least one real friend. When he was honest, he did not have any friends either. Most of the people he called friends in high school went to college or even studying abroad while Jiyong himself didn't know what to do with his life.

He did not have a dream like his friends. He just wanted to live a peaceful life without troubles.

So, he got the job at the parking lot directly after graduating from high school and did the night shifts ever since then.

Slowly he had lost contact to all of those so-called friends who didn't have time for him, the loser who wasn't going to college, anymore. And for the others it was difficult to meet up with him because on day he was sleeping while on night he had to work. And so Jiyong ended up lonely and without any friends. This was the only thing in his life that made him feel miserable sometimes. He really was lonely. Although he was a handsome guy, he was single, too. His last girlfriend had left him about three years ago and until now, he didn't even had the time to get to know some new faces. With the flow of time, Jiyong almost got used to being lonely. Maybe he just wasn't meant to be with someone, he thought. Even his own mother wasn't near him anymore. And that's why he enjoyed the presence of that kind waitress. She really reminded him of his mother and although they did not speak that much, he liked to be in that café.

About half an hour later, Jiyong had finished his pie and the tea. He wanted to rise from his seat and go to the counter for paying, when the doorbell rang and another customer entered the café.

The young man closing an umbrella that protected him from the rain that started a few minutes ago was the most beautiful creature Jiyong ever laid eyes on.

Black, silky hair framed a flawless face with large, black eyes, the longest eyelashes

Jiyong's had ever seen and a pair of lips that looked like pure sin. His body tall and well proportioned. This man's beauty couldn't be put in words and Jiyong couldn't help but follow the stranger with his eyes when he walked over to the counter.

"Good morning.", he greeted the waitress with a dark, manly voice. "I'd like to drink a peppermint tea."

Jiyong was totally stunned. That tall, dark and handsome guy ordered the same drink he used to have everyday. "Please take a seat, I'll bring your tea in a few moments.", the nice waitress smiled. Mr Handsome smiled and nodded. Then, he walked over to one of the tables, sat down very elegantly and crossed his legs.

With red cheeks, Jiyong tried not to stare too obviously in the direction of that stranger. He never felt something like that. Jiyong wanted to walk over to him, to talk to him, to ask what his name was, hear his amazing dark voice again. He wanted to know everything about him. Where did he work? Why was he sitting alone in a café at almost 5 AM in the morning? And why the hell was he such a fascination to Jiyong? The young watchman wanted to touch the dark-haired man. To kiss him. He never ever had felt something like that. It was like the presence of that handsome guy put a spell on him. So he decided to stay a little longer than usual.

"I'd like a second tea.", he told the waitress. She beamed at him. "Sure, Jiyong-ssi."

Smiling, he nodded and then felt a gaze on him. He looked over to the other table, where the black haired guy sat and suddenly seemed to avoid his gaze.

Jiyong really tried just to walk over to him. But he couldn't. It was like he was glued to his seat, his shyness holding him back from doing what he wanted to do the most at this moment.

And another thirty minutes later, that gorgeous human being rose from his seat after drinking his tea and reading the newspaper. With elegant movements, he walked to the counter and paid for his tea.

"Thank you, Mister, I hope you'll visit us again.", the waitress smiled. The black haired just smiled and walked past Jiyong. Before he left the café, he suddenly looked back and linked his gaze with Jiyong's who froze instantly. A mind-blowing smile was on the lips of the tall man and after that, he was gone. Leaving an absolutely confused Jiyong behind.

On the next day, Jiyong couldn't wait for his shift to end. Usually, he enjoyed his work, but now the only thing he wanted to know was whether the mysterious, beautiful guy would be at the café again or not.

So after closing the roller shutter again, he almost ran down to the little building at the corner. When he entered, the café was empty except for the nice waitress. Silently, Jiyong sighed. He was kind of disappointed the man wasn't there. But what did he expect? They only met once. Maybe he'd never see him again.

"Good morning, Jiyong.", the waitress smiled. "Like usual?"

Like usual, Jiyong just nodded, taking his seat at the table at the window. And that's when he saw the dark haired guy walking towards the café. Instantly, his heart started beating faster and a smile struck his face.

"Good morning.", the dark voice was to be heard after the doorbell rang. "Oh! Good morning! Nice to see you again!" With a grin, the waitress greeted him and bowed a little.

"I'd like a peppermint tea please."

He sat down at the same place like the night before. After receiving his tea, he opened an attaché case and took out a book.

When Jiyong got aware what this beautiful man was reading, his heart almost

dropped.

The book was "Jamilia" by Chingiz Aitmatov.

That was Jiyong's favorite book. He loved that beautiful love story that took place in Russia during the second world war. Jiyong shared Louis Aragon's opinion of this book being "the most beautiful love story in the world." He loved Aitmatov's description of Jamilia's and Daniyar's slowly growing love and the beautifully written pictures of the Russian landscapes.

He couldn't believe that man read his favorite book. And the copy Mr Handsome had looked like it'd been read more than just once.

"D-do you like that book?"

Jiyong could've slapped himself for stuttering such a silly question. But at least he managed to say a complete sentence without messing it up entirely.

The stranger looked up to Jiyong and smiled.

"Yes. It's my favorite."

Wow. Jiyong's heart beat faster, again.

"Mine too.", he said.

"Oh, really? Most of the people I know aren't aware of the fact that an author named Aitmatov even existed.", the tall man replied. Jiyong nodded. "I know. His work is really underrated."

Suddenly, the stranger stood up. He took his portfolio, the book and his cup of tea and walked over to Jiyong. "Mind if I took a seat?", he asked, pointing at the table Jiyong was sitting at. Instantly and with red cheeks, the young watchman shook his head. "No, please, take a seat."

With a smile, that beautiful guy took one of the chairs of the neighbored table and sat down at Jiyong's.

"So, you like Aitmatov. That means you're into literature?" Jiyong nodded. "I love literature.", he said with a tiny voice, suddenly very shy. But that did not seem to bother the dark haired man, he continued smiling.

"I'm studying literature.", he said. "It's my passion."

"Wow.", Jiyong commented. "That's awesome." Then, he looked outside the window for a second. "I don't want to sound rude to you, but...", he started, rotating the hot cup of tea in his hands, "What are you doing at a place like this at this time of the day when you're a student?"

A slight chuckle escaped the taller's lips what made Jiyong's heart skip a beat.

"That's a good question.", the black haired answered, taking a sip of his peppermint tea. "Well, I am working at that bureau over there." He pointed at a dark and huge building across the street. "I'm working there to finance my study. My shift begins at 6 and I like to drink a nice cup of tea and read a little before I'm starting to work, that's all." He smiled at Jiyong.

"And what are you doing here?"

"I'm the watchman of the parking lot at the end of the street.", the latter explained.

"And my shift ends at 4. Every day after work I'm here to drink a nice cup of tea before going home." Jiyong smiled at the similarities of their stories.

"So you do have often night shifts?"

Jiyong nodded. "I only have night shifts. I like it that way."

It was amazing. Suddenly, he could talk openly to that guy he just got to know five minutes ago. But he felt like they'd known each other for long. Again, that was a feeling that Jiyong never had experienced in his whole life.

"Well, I guess we'll meet again since I want to come to this place more often.", the

taller said.

"Seems so.", Jiyong responded, nodding. Then, he pointed at the other's cup.

"Don't you drink coffee before work?"

The man with those sparkling black eyes shook his head.

"No. I don't like coffee. I like the smell, but I don't like the taste of it."

When Jiyong chuckled, his smile got wider.

"What's so funny?"

"Well, it's the same with me.", Jiyong told him. "I don't like coffee either. But I like its smell."

"Seems like we have a lot in common.", the literature student said.

Again, Jiyong nodded, taking the last sip of his tea.

"I totally forgot to introduce myself.", the taller suddenly spat out and reached out his hand to Jiyong. "My name is Seunghyun. It's very nice to meet you."

Beaming at the now not-so-unknown-anymore-stranger, Jiyong shook the hand of the other.

"I am Jiyong. It's a pleasure."

For the next sixty minutes, both of the young men stayed at the café, talking about literature and their lives. Jiyong always had loved to read and he liked to talk about that passion with someone who shared it. When they parted just before 6 AM, Jiyong had gotten to know that Seunghyun used to study business economics for a few semesters because his parents did want him to. But soon, the dark haired man had noticed that this wasn't what he wanted to do for a living. He wanted to become a professor of literature to teach at a school and so he had quit his study.

After a big fight with his parents, Seunghyun had moved out and went to Seoul all by himself. And now he had to work besides his study to finance it. Jiyong was stunned by the taller and admired his courage to stand out for his dreams.

They shook hands before they parted.

"Well, see you tomorrow.", Seunghyun grinned. "Okay. Have a nice day at work.", Jiyong answered. Seunghyun nodded, waved a short goodbye and walked away, hands in the pockets of his blue jeans.

And Jiyong went home smiling like an idiot.

For the next two months, Jiyong and Seunghyun met every day at 4 AM at the café, except for the weekends. On the weekends, Seunghyun did not have to work at the office and stayed at home. Jiyong enjoyed their conversations. Every day, they were talking about literature, politics and all the topics that occupied their minds.

It was like they were friends for years. They shared almost every opinion and soon, both of them called each other a good friend.

Slowly, Jiyong started to feel not lonely anymore.

But then, after two months, Seunghyun suddenly disappeared. He just stopped showing up at the café. The first day, Jiyong wondered where he could be, but thought the other just had something to do or a day off.

On the second day Seunghyun was absent, Jiyong started to miss him badly.

After a week, he was worried sick about the whereabouts of his dear friend.

After two weeks, he really thought Seunghyun did not want to see him again.

So, he started to drink his tea alone again in the morning. The two months together with Seunghyun started to feel like a distant dream.

"Like usual, Jiyong-ssi?"

On a warm day in June, Jiyong entered the café again at 4 AM in the morning and nodded.

"Yes.", he answered quietly. Since Seunghyun's disappearance, he felt lonely and empty. Sometimes he even wished they had never met, because now he know what loneliness really felt like.

"The nice young man with the black hair was here last morning.", the waitress suddenly said to Jiyong. He looked up to her. "Really?", he spat. "What did he say?" She smiled softly. "He asked me to give this envelope to you." She gave a small white envelope to Jiyong who beamed at her happily. "Thank you!"

Instantly, he opened the envelope. In there, he found a small folded piece of paper. Written on it, there was an address and the number of an office.

"Come visit me. I'm working Monday to Friday 10 AM to 6 PM. Seunghyun"

For the first time since Jiyong started working at the parking lot, he did not go home after he had his cup of tea. At least not to sleep. He only went home to shower and to change his clothing. He even made two bentos and at 9 AM, he took the subway to the address Seunghyun had given him.

With a fiercely beating heart, he entered the huge office-building and took an elevator to the fifth floor. The building seemed to be rather abandoned. He looked for the office with the number E110 and when he found it, he took a deep breath. It was 10:18 AM.

The young man knocked.

There was silence for a few seconds and Jiyong almost thought Seunghyun wasn't there, but then the door opened.

"Jiyong." Suddenly, Seunghyun wrapped his arms around Jiyong and hugged him tightly.

Jiyong's eyes widened and he stiffened a little. "I'm sorry I wasn't at the café the last few weeks.", Seunghyun said and Jiyong relaxed, smiling softly. "It's okay. I'm sure you had your reasons, Seunghyun.", he said, raising his free hand to reply the other's hug.

"Yes." Seunghyun looked at Jiyong, smiling. "I'm glad the waitress gave the letter to you. Come on in." He took Jiyong's hand and dragged him into the office room.

"My boss told me I had to work here now.", he explained his absence from the café. "I didn't want to change my working place, but he said there is no other way."

The young men sat down at a small desk and Seunghyun looked at Jiyong apologetically.

"I hope you are not mad at me and did not think I wanted to end our friendship."

Jiyong swallowed slightly but smiled. "Well... to be honest, I thought something like that. But... I'm glad it isn't so."

"I... I missed you.", Seunghyun said suddenly, sharing a deep glance with Jiyong who blushed.

"I missed you too.", the younger one mumbled shyly.

Seunghyun's smile became even softer. He raised his hand and placed it on Jiyong's, squeezing his fingers tenderly.

With widened eyes, Jiyong looked at his friend. His heart sped up more and more and he took all his courage. With red cheeks, he laced their fingers together, which seemed to fit perfectly.

Without hesitating, Seunghyun dragged the younger one closer to him, wrapping an arm around his waist. Then, their lips touched for a soft kiss. Jiyong felt like melting and closed his eyes. He enjoyed every second of their kiss.

When they parted again, Seunghyun's gaze was full of tenderness.

"I won't leave you alone again.", he whispered, holding Jiyong tight in his arms.

The younger hugged his friend and now lover.
"Thank you.", he whispered. "Please stay with me."
They kissed again.
And from now on, Jiyong wouldn't be lonely anymore.