

another pSecret pSociety pshort pstory



An Autumn Hike by Mike Bozart (Agent 33) | AUG 2016

I met Areum, a short, sexy, jet-black-haired, 20-something Korean American lass, at a headshop in Charlotte (NC, USA) in the summer of 1994. After making small talk with her at the pipe counter for several weeks, I asked her out to a casual lunch at the sandwich shop across the street. She consented and we immediately struck up an engaging conversation. However, when she sensed that I was angling to ask her out on a date, she quickly informed me that she already had a boyfriend (a self-absorbed flake who I had run across). I was decidedly deflated. I thought: *Just my rotten luck*. But then, Areum offered up an enticing proposal.

“Mike, how would you like to ask my sister, Hye, out on a date? She’s two years older than me; taller, thinner, smarter, and prettier.” *So complimentary*.

“Why, sure,” I replied. “Would you happen to have a photo?”

“I sure do,” Areum answered. She then extracted a wallet-size photograph from her purse and showed it to me. Yes, *her sister is quite pretty. Plenty pretty for a bloke like me*.

“Both of you are cover girls,” I proclaimed.

“Stop that, Mike. You’ll make me blush.”

“Areum, how old is Hye?”

“She just turned 26. How old are you, Mike?”

“I just hit the big ‘three-oh-no’ a few weeks ago.”

“Perfect. Your ages are closer and you’re both Cancers.”

“Treatable and terminal?” *What did he say?*

“Gosh! What a morbid sense of humor you have – just like my boyfriend.” *Just like my boyfriend ... bleh!*

“So, do I just call her up?” *Does he really expect me to do it for him?*

“Sure! I’ll give you her phone number. She gets home from work at 5:45.”

Areum then handed me the corner of the just-written-on napkin and looked directly into my green eyes. “Mike, there are some things that I need to tell you about my sister.” *Ok, here comes the catch ...*

“Ok, go ahead, Areum. I’m all ears.” *What?*

“All ears? What does that mean?”

“Sorry. It’s just an American expression that means that the person is intently listening.”

“Oh, ok. There are so many idiomatic expressions in English.”

“Yeppers.”

“Well, I’m going to be frank about this, Mike. Hye was sexually abused by our dad. It went on for several years. When my mom found out, we headed to Charlotte to get away from him. He’s still in Albuquerque.” [NM, USA]

“Damn! That’s horrible.” *Poor girl.*

“She’s in therapy now. Hye has never had a boyfriend. Our father has sexually traumatized her. She’s afraid of sexual

intercourse now. If you date her, don't expect to be rolling around in the sheets. At least not for a long while." *She certainly is frank – boldly blunt.*

"I see. Thanks for telling me. I'll be hands-off. If anything physical happens, she will initiate it. And lead it. You have my word."

"Thank you so much, Mike."

"By the way, does Hye get high?" *Let's get Hye.*

"Absolutely not. Never has. Don't even ask her to."

"Ok, I won't."

"Thanks, Mike. I tried to get her to take a draw off a joint [marijuana cigarette] one day to relax her mind, but she was afraid that it would make her bad memories more painful."

"I see. Say, does Hye like mountain hiking?" *Hye-king.*

"She does. But, I wouldn't suggest that on a first date."

"Ok, I will hold off until date number six, Areum."

"Thanks, Mike. If I didn't have a boyfriend ..."

"Oh, just stop the torture, Areum."

She giggled. I paid the bill. Then we got up and marched back across the street to her marijuana paraphernalia emporium.

"You will call her, won't you?" Areum asked as she opened the front door to the headshop.

“I will,” I answered. “Promise.”

“Ok, I’ll tell her that a tall, kind-hearted, though strangely humorous, red-haired gentleman will be calling her tonight.”

“Thanks, Areum. Don’t toke too hard.” I quickly did a fake cough. “I mean work.”

She smiled, turned, and went inside the weed accoutrement store. Her tight black shorts were my last image of Areum on that hot and hazy day. Her ass was simply to die for. *What a hottie she is. Well, time to focus on Hye. She’s not chopped liver by any means. And you’re no Johnny Depp, pal.*

That evening at 6:06 PM, I called Hye from my rented two-bedroom house in the Chantilly neighborhood. She had a very soft voice that was timid yet direct. We agreed to have our first date at a Korean restaurant on Monroe Road (now out of business) on Saturday, September 3rd.

We met in the restaurant parking lot at 1:01 PM. She looked even better than advertised. *Wow! I’m way out of my league once again. Remember what Areum said. Go slow.*

“Hello, you must be Hye,” I said to the slender, attractive, 5’-6” Asian young lady standing next to a silver Nissan Sentra.

“Yes, that’s me,” Hye said with a reserved smile. “And, you must be Mike.”

“That is I.” *That is I? Is that correct English?*

“Nice to meet you, Mike.”

“Likewise, Hye. You look great!”

She extended her right hand. I shook it gently.

“Let’s continue our conversation inside, Mike. It’s hot and I’m hungry.” *I’m so ready for this infernal summer to end.*

“Lead the way, lovely lady.” *Lovely lady? I hope that he doesn’t make a play for sex. Didn’t Areum tell him?*

And with that we walked into the darkened restaurant. We were promptly seated as there was no line. There were only three diners and one older Korean American guy at the bar sipping a beer while watching a baseball game. *Go Giants!*

Hye explained the menu to me. I told her that I was mostly vegetarian now, but would consider scallops or clams. She suggested a spicy grilled seafood dish and I agreed to try it.

The cute Korean American waitress took our order and winked at me as she left. *What did that mean? Does she know Hye? Or, does it mean ‘nice date, dude’? Ah, the mysteries of this strange life.*

I reignited the conversation. “Have you been here before, Hye?”

“Yes, one other time, Mike. The food was only so-so. But, I told them how they could cook it better to make it tastier.” *She actually told them how to improve their cooking? Wow! I’m sure the chef loved that.*

“Really, Hye?” *Does he have a hearing problem?*

“Yes, I know true Korean food. I was born in Seoul and lived there until the age of 12. They Americanized it too much here. Too bland. Hopefully they took my advice.” *Woah!*

“I guess we shall see.”

“We will,” she said with an impassive expression.

The conversation didn't flow as easily as the one with Areum. Beneath Hye's stoic countenance, I could sense the emotional hurt and the psychological damage. It made me feel immensely sad for her. *How could a father do that to his daughter? So much despicable madness in this human race.*

The food finally came. I thought it was pretty tasty. Hye agreed.

“They must have implemented your suggestions, Hye.”

“I'm sure that they did.”

We finished our plates. I paid the bill and gave the waitress an ‘I got this’ look before leaving, even if I had my doubts.

I invited Hye over to my house to check out my artwork. She followed me in her car. My house on Kingsbury Drive was only two miles (3.22 km) away.

Once inside, Hye took a seat on the couch and drank some Korean beverage from the restaurant.

I walked around the living room, telling her about my neosurreal artwork on the beige walls. She seemed mildly interested. Then she perked up.

“How many do you sell per month, Mike?”

“One is a good month – a very good month,” I replied.

“You'll never make it at that rate, Mike.” *She's right.*

“Yeah, I know.”

“Well, what do you do for real income?”

“Technical writing on safety issues.”

“Mike, I’d expand that into a consultancy. I’ve never met a single artist that could live off their sales. It’s a rainbow-chasing longshot proposition. You’re 30 now. Time to get practical.” *That was brutally honest.*

“Yeah, you’re probably right, Hye. It’s a disease that’s hard to beat.”

“Art’s a disease! I like that, Mike.” Hye then laughed uncontrollably. It was a manic, alien laughter, which surprised the hell out of me. *So much for impressing her with my art or my artist ambition. Dead in the water on that score.*

Hye then got up to leave. We hugged lightly. I didn’t dare try to kiss her, and she certainly didn’t solicit such. However, we agreed to go on another date next weekend, which we did (a lame, instantly forgettable, romantic comedy movie).

Over the next month we had a total of five platonic lunches, dinners and picnics. Hye seemed to be trusting me more. This was confirmed when she called me from work on Thursday, October 13th and asked if we could go to the mountains on Saturday to do some hiking and leaf viewing. I immediately thought: *Ah, Areum must have suggested that to her. I owe her ... a pinch.*

At 9:19 AM Saturday, Hye was knocking on my front door. She was in running shorts and a tank top with brand-new

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