

Mr. Joo's Ms. Tae

1. The CEO can't read a children's book. The book is a Korean translation of Yuichi Kimura's *The Wolf and The Kid*. At one point in the story, the wolf loses his memory of the kid when his pack assaults him for fraternizing. The CEO doesn't start by not reading this book or series of books. Actually, he hasn't read a book in 14 years.

We've been watching him fail to read from within his corporate office for a while now. Mr. Joo has youthful good looks, an ascot, and a double-breasted suit. His long desk is mahogany. I might as well mention he can't read because, the last time he did read, he read from the same book aloud several times. The book was Agatha Christie's *And Then There Were None* translated into Korean. There's a decontextualized memory of him reading this book into a cellphone a hand holds under one bright light. Important women to the plot own houses in England.

2. Ms. Tae opens the double-doors to Mr. Joo's office. We watch her enter from the inside. I think she moves like a young Diane Keaton in whatever she does. Aside from looks, the understated throughline of this story is the occluded nature of Ms. Tae's subjectivity. We'd assume she's pretty—she is pretty—her beauty is tied up with her abilities in an unarticulated way. At first we can't tell what she's thinking because she's too scared of what she's showing the audience to interpret her actions for us in a sophisticated way. Then her inner experience seems hard to get at because she plays the feminine role beside Mr. Joo in comedic and affecting situations accumulating over time.

Her opaque mental reality is finally revealed to be a situation. Ms. Tae's quirk—her plot-driving quality—is the situation of incommensurability. As a situation, the text provides defining terms if you'd like to put them together. Tae Gong Shil's ability to communicate with ghosts gives the audience something to look at primarily.

3. Mr. Joo has two relationships with Ms. Tae. He has three.

4. The term “candy” and its semantic branching take place at the symbolic register. Candy, the cartoon golddigger, and her cartoon lover, the CEO, live in the conversations of Ms. Tae, Mr. Joo, Ms. Tae, and Ms. Tae. Perhaps Candy is a kind of vocal dress. Early on the second lead gives Ms. Tae a childishly large, flat lollipop because I think he might be bad at dating. Broken in the course of her first adventures with Mr. Joo, Ms. Tae almost cries in front of the second lead when she shows him. A broken candy is fortunate, he says, because now there’s a half for each of us to eat: they consume the lollipop outside her rooftop apartment. It’s been a long time since anyone has expressed romantic interest in Ms. Tae due to her mental condition. The second lead, however, is excluded from the Candy discourse. Mr. Joo’s initial problem with Ms. Tae is that she refuses to play Candy. This refusal gives him expectations and something to think about. She took my arm, why? Mr. Joo begins demanding remuneration of her for each touch as an experiment or dialect.

5. The second lead falls in love with the second lead as a plot point.

6. We mostly saw Mr. Joo’s magical quality as a plot device to facilitate early physical contact between our couple, but think about it from Ms. Tae’s perspective. The moment I touch him, my entire interest is engaged in the present surface. Events unfold in sequence. I walk beside the Han River without seeing the water ghost. No one speaks through me. I can’t see anyone beyond the present Mr. Joo, and no ghosts enter my body. Maybe the practice of absolute physical presence is the vision of love in which imagination mirrors the material contours of each amorous encounter, as though you’re entirely in bed with him every time. Mr. Joo’s ability to dispel Ms. Tae’s ghostly supplicants with a single touch is a mask for this deeper ideal. Regardless, this is fucking real life.

7. We never see the water ghost. We’ve seen so many of Ms. Tae’s ghosts: the water ghost lacuna stands in for what Ms. Tae can’t tell us
how fear feels in my body how fear feels I imagine

ue itemizing the ways Ms. Tae might touch his body. To some extent it's a soothing mental exercise. Although not directly stated in the narrative, I get the impression that Mr. Joo's delusion of self-sale is the obverse situation. He didn't create his value to Ms. Tae. He finds himself translating the ambiguous nature of her desire to touch him into terms he understands. It's interesting that though Ms. Tae can't pay up—he rarely enforces his prices—they are a direct reflection of what a man in his position would be accustomed to offering a woman in hers. He fantasizes she's in the position to afford him. The only girl he loved before Ms. Tae pretended to be an orphan and secretly owned houses in England. Stranger things have happened.

11. Throughout the story, the comprehensible mechanism of capitalism—making money—functions as a language game between the lovers, as a recording surface. They trace the figures for advantage and longing onto the numeric ripples of the hypermodern economic situation. Ms. Tae begins to make more and more money as the story progresses to become involved in the things that hold Mr. Joo's interest, just as he comes along on her otherworldly house calls.

Some lovers wear couples' costumes on Halloween,
or support the other's sports teams and favorite musicians.

I know one couple that fell in love over what one gave the other to read.

I know several couples like that.

Ms. Tae buys a house in England during their third act separation while she struggles to communicate to herself what Mr. Joo's spirit wished conveyed to Ms. Tae. Upon returning to South Korea, Ms. Tae buys a high-rise apartment building downtown and invites Mr. Joo to her rooftop for dinner.

12. When Mr. Joo was fifteen, he was held hostage. A gun was held to his head while he read the Korean translation of Agatha Christie's *And Then There Were None* into a cellphone in order to prove to his father he was still alive and worth the ransom. Money became a vital language to Joo Joongwon in his traumatic situation. Money has value here that bears a direct, personal relationship to his vocabulary of self-evaluation. Couldn't anything be a material for expression? We're invited to stop privileging money as too good or bad to function symbolically in a romantic story. His entire adult life Mr. Joo hasn't read a business contract he's negotiated.

13. “People kept dying in that book.”

14. I had been in a coma for three years. Actually, I never woke up. The ghosts always come to find me

This one doesn't have half his face. If I had really woken up I would still be Ms. Tae, top of my class at Seoul National University. I am studying international relations. I speak Japanese, Chinese, English, French, Italian. I've always been interested in how people communicate. I was proud of my popularity at school because it came easily to me. Listening sympathetically, offering solutions, and sharing my feelings in an assertive way are my natural tendencies. My popularity at school was fortunate because it allowed me to focus my attention on higher order intellectual tasks. I had been talking with my professors about pursuing further study at the Sorbonne. I am 28

I am a janitor at the mall Mr. Joo owns. I took this job in an effort to touch his body. I am leveling the texture of social relationship

It's just a recording surface for my perceptual experiences.

15. Sleeping beside him helps. Pretending we're partners in business or crime-solving helps. Prices for what I touch and what I reveal to have seen help. Discussing how we'll end our relationship also helps. It's a question the audience wouldn't expect to be answered by the end of the hour.

16. Ms. Tae spends a year apart from Mr. Joo after he recovers his memories of her. She goes abroad with a clairvoyant photographer named Martin Jang. Martin Jang was the first person to find her body after the accident in 2006. She spent three years as a spirit at his side. She doesn't remember any of it. In 2013, Ms. Tae flips haunted hotels in Europe and charms trade secrets out of the ghost of Steve Jobs at a Castilleja High lacrosse game in Palo Alto, California. Later while wandering around the SoMa neighborhood of San Francisco, she buys a notebook with a pastel design in a stationary shop, then brushes up on her English with the ghost of a twenty-five-year-old Googler who keeps showing up at Sightglass and pretending to inhale the aroma of coffee. Martin Jang has taken his camera to Lands End at sunset. She imagines the pictures he'll take of the Bay, how the water goes gold-plated at eight

o'clock. At some point the surface of events accumulating over time has left a record on Ms. Tae. The ghosts populate an oscillating fraction of her motivations.

17. It's hard for me to talk about, but I do remember how I got this way. In my traumatic situation, I followed him like a ghost for three years. Away from my body, I often forgot who I was before I went to sleep. I met so many lovely fragments of people, self-sustaining last-word recursions. They seemed as real as I am real. I shared their language. When I woke up, I began to experience myself as two people. I am that third person now. I thought I'd let you know I'm not entirely here. I'm so glad you've joined me for dinner.

"MR. JOO'S MS. TAE" IS AN EKPHRASIS OF THE SOUTH KOREAN SOAP OPERA, *THE MASTER'S SUN* (2013).