

Don't Stop Believin'

Edited by Changmo Kang

Characters:

Kyung Hee - A young Korean girl that moved from Busan, South Korea to New York City in the sixties

Ben - A foreign exchange student from New York, a boyfriend of Kyung Hee

Thesis:

New York City is a place which provides equal chance for everyone

Scene 1

Set in Busan, South Korea, 1965.

It is another hot summer day in Busan. I wiped the sweat off my forehead with my linen handkerchief, and glanced at the thermometer on the wall. The temperature was above thirty-two celsius. Thirty-two degrees celsius, what would that be in Fahrenheit? I try to convert it for my friend who is still not familiar with celsius. All I need to do is multiply 1.8 and add thirty-two. Dealing with numbers is easy for me since my major is mathematics. My critical way of thinking is a gift. After I got the answer, I opened my wallet to see a picture of my friend who I am waiting for now. He was smiling brightly in front of the Statue of Liberty. Even though it was a black and white photo, I could picture his vivid blue eyes and blond hair waving in the wind.

Yes, he is white. More precisely, he is American. This peculiar stranger is currently attending Busan National University as an exchange student. We took a class together but never spoke to each other until we met one night at the theater. I was mesmerized with Audrey Hepburn walking down 5th Avenue with cigarettes in her hand. In the dark, someone

tapped my shoulder and I looked behind. That night, we walked the Haeundae beach together and learned more about each other. He was from a wealthy family in Long Island, New York who recently came to South Korea. He was surprised to know that I was familiar with American culture more than he could imagine. I remember his disappointed face when he realized that my American dream mostly ends as a daydream.

His name was Benjamin, totally different from mine, Kyung Hee. I imagined America as a place where people with exotic names actually exist. They would eat food that I have never tried, and speak English to each other that sounds so rhythmical and graceful. As we meet each other more often, my best friend Jin Suk warned me about falling for him. She went over and over about how much of a calm person I was, suddenly changed into a girl who fantasize of an absurd world. I unconsciously placed my hand on my pearl necklace. Have I changed? Am I a girl who chases after a dream that cannot be seized? What is my ultimate goal? Do I even want to be here? A pearl necklace given to me by my mother meant a lot. It symbolized the mother figure who devoted herself for family. A wise, obedient woman who shall be someone's wife and mother in the future. That is the ideal image of a female what the 70's Korean society expects from us. Suddenly, my necklace felt like shackles that chained my destiny. I see Ben among the crowd. We will watch the "The Great Gatsby" at the theater tonight. Those western girls with bob hair and short skirts on the movie poster looked stunning. Can I ever be like them? Ben is walking toward me. He is waving at me with a smile on his face. The other night, he asked me to go to New York City with him. It was so abrupt and I did not know what to say. He probably wants an answer by tonight. Am I ready to say it out loud? A sudden fear swept me and I moved my hands toward Ben.

Scene 2

They enter the apartment - laughing and giggling after coming back from their date to celebrate their anniversary. Ben took her to a very lavish restaurant.

KH looks at her watch.

KH - It's already 12 in the morning?? I didn't notice that at all...

Ben looks over KH as she's taking her coat off. Pellets of water dripped down the surface of the hat. It was a rainy day.

Ben gives a cheeky smile, he pulls her over to his bedroom.

KH giggles

KH - Stop it, stupid! You're so impatient!! (she complains jokingly)

Ben - Did you have a good time?

KH - Yeah. I can't believe you did all of that for me. Seriously. How could you afford all of this?

Ben - That's the surprise.

KH - Surprise?

Ben - I got promoted to creative director at the firm. Creative. Director. My pay has increased tenfold!

KH looks distraught. Her face tells him that she's so happy for him, but she feels somewhat envious of BF.

KH - Ten times? You're kidding. (gives a skeptical look)

Ben - You're right. I am. (he smirks and laughs gently) But I'm making way more than I ever have. So I figured that I should spend it on my favorite person.

KH - Aw you're so sweet, but you didn't have to!! I'd rather have you spend that money on yourself or to further your career. I'm gonna get there someday, so don't let me catch up to you!

Ben - Kyung Hee.

KH - What?

Ben - I think we should talk about something.

KH - What? You're scaring me.

Ben - I don't want you to take this the wrong way, but I think you should just quit your job. It's pointless at this point. I joined the company after you, yet your paycheck won't even compare to mine! It's always going to be difficult for a woman to succeed in this world. You know that. Yet you keep on trying, so relentlessly. Just let me handle everything.

KH seems like she's about to speak, but stutters and shuts up.

Ben - You know I'm right.

KH - Look, that's really sweet of you, but I won't quit my job. You know how hard I tried to be in this position. I don't care about how much I make. I am happy that I work and get paid like any other men in my office.

Ben - (Laugh Slightly) You just don't get it. Do you think you will ever earn as much as those men in our job in the future? I don't mean to underestimate your effort, but it's just a waste of time.

KH started to tear up

KH -You are missing the point. I just said it's not about money. After overcoming hardships in the states, do you expect me to simply stay at home and do house chores? What about my career?

Ben pauses as he looks into the eyes of KH.

Ben - (Sighs) Honey, you're right. I'm sorry. I forgot how important this is to you.

KH stands up and walks to the window. She wipes her tear with her hand.

Ben - Kyung Hee, please don't cry. Of course I know why you moved to the states with me. I know you're trying your best to achieve your goal here. I just didn't want you get hurt after realising it's a man's world out there.

KH - (Looks straight into Ben's face) No, it's not. I believe things will be changed. Women are working vigorously here to gain respect and live a life that they want. Today, my boss complimented me in public for finishing my last project successfully. I am happy that you promoted, but also because I can be as well in the future. Please don't neglect my past effort because I know it's not a waste after all. If you really understand me, I need you to support me.

Ben - Of course. I have a firm belief that you will be successful in this city no matter what. Please forgive my foolish comments. I will take it back since I realized that you are too brave and talented enough to stay in the house. You should continue your journey here that started all the way from Korea. I am so proud of you that you are actually standing in front of me.

KH - (With smile on her face) You inspired me. Thank you, Ben. I know I can do this.

Congratulations with your promotion again. I think we need another toast.

Ben - What? it's nearly 1 am now. We can celebrate tomorrow.

KH - I think there's one champaign left in the fridge. Come on, the night is young. And so are we.

Ben - (With laughter) You're right. Okay, be ready in the bedroom. I will bring it with some strawberries.

They hug and glance at each other romantically

Scene 3

Set in New York City, 2005. Kyung Hee is in her sixties, and has gotten more wise and has matured, after learning lessons from one of the tumultuous place in the world. Kyung Hee is now a successful fine artist and fashion designer, dabbling in various forms of art. She owns her own high fashion brand that has retail stores all over America. Recently, she has undertaken an optimistic, driven apprentice that reminded Kyung Hee of herself when she was young and could only see through a rose colored lens. Kyung Hee reminisces about her past in a cafe.

It was Monday, during one of New York's humid summers, when I vividly remember the sweltering heat and smell of wet umbrellas in the air. I glanced at the pouring rain that soon

blurred the street through the cafe's foggy window. People began to run while grasping their drenched clothes. I closely observed them. Joy, surprise, and anger were rising upon their faces. One cat was cringing inside of a wooden box on a rainy street. It seemed like the poor cat did not have anywhere to go. Suddenly, I sympathized with the scene that was penetrating through my eyes. There was a time when I felt a turmoil of emotions. I aimlessly walked under the moonlight while having no idea where to go. It seemed like I was the only one who was left in this gigantic city. I had a pivotal moment, and that was when things changed. I have spent approximately forty years in New York City, and on certain days it felt like forty years was not a total waste after all.

“Kyung Hee, are you not excited to be here? It's New York City, the best city in the world!” Allow me to elaborate: New York City is six thousand, nine hundred and eighty-eight miles away from Busan - my home, family, and my everything. I left all of that to fulfill my dream which was inspired by an American who I met back home. This beautiful stranger named Ben made me wonder about the life that seemed so distant. I dreamed a dream, and I could not wait to live that dream in a foreign country. We had magical moments, binged American films until the sun came up, fell in love and moved to New York City together.

I admit. I was a naive girl in search of something meaningful. I could have lived my whole life in Busan, became a housewife and had beautiful children. However, I decided to bravely accept what America has to offer to me. I was ready to live a new life at the place where women and men were treated equally. I did not want my dream to be ended vainly after realizing American films were merely fantasy. I was confident that I could get myself a job that will ultimately bring fame and fortune. I worked at an advertising firm, Sterling Cooper, one of the companies that hired foreign employers. I was overwhelmed with the fact

that I get to work with men while handling the same tasks. Working in office where the majority of workers were male was tough, but I soon learned how to handle them through experience. Women in my office never tolerate any unfair events that were given to us against men. It seemed like New York was a place where only few progressive women run. Everything was so different and new to me, but I was thankful about the fact that my rank in the states was never inferior that I expected to be. My boyfriend, Ben, supported me in order to adapt to foreign life. We stayed together in a small apartment in Manhattan, and everyday with him was like a movie. He tried his best to make me feel comfortable, and understood the reason why I came here. He soon started to believe like me that women deserve equal rights like men. We were not sure yet whether New York City was coping with our belief, but I could gradually notice changes. My male boss finally acknowledged my hard work, and decided to promote me for a better position. It was indescribable joy that my rank in office got higher, and my salary as well. I learned that America is truly a land of opportunity, but nothing can be gained without endless patience and effort.

After saving enough money at work to start my own business, I opened my own boutique in the Meatpacking District. It was a small shop, but I could not be happier to sell clothes that I made. With endless support of my companion and business partner, Ben, the shop became famous among the yuppies in the city. That was the start of my life as a fashion designer. I cannot believe that was already forty years ago. I looked out the window. The sky filled with dark clouds seemed clear now. I checked my phone. My secretary informed me about my business trip to Paris next week. This diligent girl reminds me of my young days in New York City. She might needs a guide, a mentor who can aid her to survive in this competitive city, like Ben did for me. He is already in Paris to meet with the clients. He has

always been my best supporter, and I cannot wait to enjoy holiday with him in Europe after work.

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