

BLACK SCREEN

The rhythmic, muffled sounds of WATER SPLASHING.

Slowly, the screen FADES UP, but we are underwater. Murky, deep blue-green. Small, distorted flashes of color drift past—what look like a shimmering trail of fins and gills.

SUPERIMPOSED TEXT:

비 온 뒤에 땅이 굳어진다

The text shifts into an English translation:

"After the rain, the ground hardens."
— Traditional Korean Proverb

The text vanishes with a rush of bubbles.

The camera floats upward. The "ocean" suddenly reveals... a bright yellow pool noodle. A neon pink floatie. A child's pair of plastic goggles drifting by. A set of flippers. Kids laughing, screaming, splashing.

A sharp, deafening LOUD WHISTLE blows.

CUT TO BLACK

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

Ten seconds of silence. Then, a slow, melancholic, jazzy piano melody of Joe Hisaishi's "The Bygone Days" begins.

THOMAS PARK (late 20s, Korean-American) sits at an upright piano; not a Steinway or a Yamaha. His hands move with technical precision, but his face is entirely vacant. A few minutes in, he reaches the end, but as he hits the penultimate chord, he hovers his hand over the final note... and stops.

He closes his eyes. A heavy, quiet sigh. He stands, leaving the song unfinished.

INT. KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Thomas watches the e-kettle boil. He pours hot water over a mug of lemon and honey, taking a cautious, steaming sip while staring blankly out the window at the gray Oregon drizzle.

He walks over to his workspace in the corner of the room. He slides on a pair of reading glasses, wakes up his laptop, and double-clicks a file icon: Long-Ass Resume.

On screen, a dizzying, endless scroll of past employment: Head Lifeguard, Tech Staff, Cashier, Snack Bar Attendant, Newspaper Intern, Camp Counselor, Theater House Manager, Red Cross Volunteer.

The scroll bar seems to get tinier and tinier with each clicking roll of the mouse.

And at the very bottom:

Mail Handler Assistant - United States Postal Service
October 2024 - Present

Thomas stares at one word: Present

Click. He highlights it.

Type: March 2025.

Click. Save. Close.

Thomas slumps back on his chair, lazily staring at his laptop.

INSERT TITLE CARD (Korean): 백수 / The letters shift into the English translation: BAEKSU.

(Note: A Korean term for the educated, voluntarily unemployed – literally meaning "white hands," untouched by work)

The title card fades away.

SERIES OF SHOTS - THOMAS'S AFTERNOON

A) CLOSE ON MUG - Steam billows aggressively from the hot tea.

B) THE LAPTOP SCREEN - A job posting for "Customer Service Associate" pops up. Click. Close.

C) THE SCREEN - A job posting for "Data Entry Clerk." Click. Close.

D) THE MUG - The steam is thinner now. Only a faint wisp.

E) THE SCREEN - A new tab: Oregon Unemployment Benefits. Click. Submit weekly claims. He scrolls down his history - weeks upon weeks of identical, meager payouts. Close.

F) THE SCREEN - YouTube. Search bar. Movie reactions. Scroll. Click. Lean back.

G) THOMAS'S EYES - Widening slightly behind his reading glasses, reflecting the cold blue light of the screen. Blink.

H) THE MUG - The shot focuses on the mug as the room slowly loses daylight, and the steam from his tea stops rising.

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

The room is dark, illuminated only by the harsh blue glow of a television. An explosive, chaotic Michael Bay action sequence plays.

Thomas is wrapped in a thin blanket on the couch, eating popcorn. He mimics the onscreen action, raising his hand like a gun, pointing at the TV -

The FRONT DOOR clicks open. RILEY (late 20s, beautiful, blonde) walks in, carrying her work tote, flipping the light switch on.

RILEY

Hey babe, I'm back.

Thomas flinches, instantly dropping his hand. He lunges off the couch, frantically brushing popcorn crumbs off his sweatpants and clearing his throat.

THOMAS

Oh, hey. Welcome home. Good day?

RILEY

Same old. I'll tell you over dinner.

Riley turns around and notices what's on the TV. Robot fighting robot. Her shoulders drop.

RILEY (CONT'D)

Really, Thomas? *Transformers* again?

THOMAS

What? It's a guilty pleasure. Visuals nowadays can't hold a candle to what Michael Bay did.

RILEY

(smiles, heading to the kitchen)
If only you brought that passion to your interviews.
Oh, I'm making your favorite tonight, by the way.

THOMAS

(brightening)
Wait, you know how to make Seolleongtang?

Riley stops in the kitchen doorway. Her smile drops into a blank, guilty stare.

RILEY

Oh. *That* was your favorite.
(beat)
Fuck. And I ended up buying ingredients for cheesy ramen.

THOMAS

Technically, it's pronounced "ramyeon". And don't get me started on gimbap, or "sushi" if you wanna hit a nerve.

Riley gives him an exhausted look. Thomas immediately shrinks back, feeling the shift.

THOMAS

...I'll help set the table.

RILEY

(a tight, practiced smile)
Better.

INT. DINING ROOM - LATER

The two sit opposite each other. Riley is talking animatedly, gesturing with her fork, but her voice slowly FADES INTO AN INAUDIBLE MUFFLE.

Thomas is entirely spaced out. Her words don't resonate.

He takes a sip of red wine. His face immediately contorts in disgust, jarring him back to reality, his long audible wincing snapping back to normal.

THOMAS

Oh God, remind me to never buy Merlot again.

RILEY

(laughs)

Well, look who decided to rejoin the living. Keep drifting off like that and I'm making you see my therapist.

THOMAS

Sorry.

RILEY

I do agree, though. I think Pinot Noir works better.

THOMAS

Yeah, I'll take any white wine over red.

RILEY

I swear, you have the palate of a sommelier. You sure you weren't one in a past life?

THOMAS

Pretty sure my mother, the wine captain, does. It's all hands-on-deck the moment the soju appears. Though... she was a little weird on the phone about coming out here.

RILEY

I told her she didn't have to accept the invitation if she didn't want to.

THOMAS

She'd never say no to me. Even Melody called the second my mom got the flight info.

RILEY

Oh, I miss Melody! We need to hang out. Give her a call tomorrow.

THOMAS

I'm pretty sure she misses me more than you.

RILEY

(scoffs)

Ouch. Oh, by the way — I saw your resume folder on the table, next to the clinic papers. Did the post office get back to you about that permanent track?

Thomas suddenly freezes mid-sip. He slowly lowers his glass.

THOMAS

Oh. Uh... actually...

Riley sets her glass down with a soft click. The playful atmosphere vanishes instantly as she reads his face.

RILEY

You gave your two weeks?

THOMAS

(hesitantly)

Immediate... notice...

RILEY

(sighs, annoyed)

Thomas, you promised me you'd wait out the season for the benefits.

THOMAS

I'm sorry, but I'm not spending another year waiting for promises they don't intend to keep.

RILEY

Didn't you say you liked it there?

THOMAS

I might have once.

RILEY

So, what, did you hate it there?

THOMAS

Not exactly.

RILEY

What do you mean by that?

THOMAS

I was just a glorified greenhorn to them, Riley.

Thomas throws himself back on the chair, arms crossed.

THOMAS (CONT'D)

This is what I get for waiting for someone to tell me I matter.

RILEY

(softening, but frustrated)

Look, I know it's hard. But you have to stay somewhere long enough to—

THOMAS

(defensive)

I'm trying, okay? It's a tough market. What about that one guy who sent out a hundred entry-level applications just as a test, and only got two callbacks. Two!

RILEY

I saw that video too, but we live in Oregon, not a statistics chart.

THOMAS

It's the same story everywhere.

(beat)

Fine, I promise I'll keep looking or... something...

RILEY

(quietly)

Look, I just don't want you to end up like my dad. Checking out when things get heavy, leaving my mom when things turned out worse for him.

Thomas looks down, the fight leaving him. He gathers their empty plates and walks to the sink.

INT. KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Turning on the warm water, Thomas grabs the soapy sponge and starts scrubbing the dirty plates.

RILEY

How do your parents do it? All that fighting and yet they're still together?

Thomas pauses, staring down the soapy water.

THOMAS

I guess... that's just who they are, how they grew up. They think it's selfish for parents to put their own happiness before their children, only to make it even harder for everyone.

RILEY

(pensively)

So... if we argued a lot, would you divorce me?

THOMAS

(stops scrubbing and turns around)

Divorce? Now, why would I do that?

RILEY

I'm just asking.

THOMAS

No. I wouldn't even dare. Besides, I'm pretty sure you fell in love with the guy on the piano, not the one doing ghost shifts at the post office.

RILEY

(conceding)

Yeah, you're not wrong there.

THOMAS

Didn't you mention one of your high school friends going through a divorce because of what?

RILEY

(rolling her eyes)

"Irreconcilable differences."

THOMAS

That's her excuse? Of course there's going to be differences. Can't you just learn to accept the other person as they are, agree to disagree, or concede a losing battle?

Thomas pauses at the irony of his words —concede a losing battle. His jaw tightens slightly, knowing he rarely does.

Riley catches the micro-expression, letting a knowing, faint smile touch her lips as she steps up behind him.

RILEY

Wow. Real deep thoughts for someone without a Master's in Psych.

THOMAS

(jokingly)
Eh, I don't like the hours.

RILEY

Well, hopefully my therapist takes referrals.

THOMAS

I'll make sure to get you a discount.

RILEY

Only a discount?

She slides her arms around his waist, pressing her face against his back. Thomas's breathing hitches slightly. He feels tense, rigid.

THOMAS

You know I haven't taken my shower yet, right?

RILEY

(teasing, winking)
Then you better hurry up... doctor.

Thomas tries to smile, but as Riley turns away, he runs a hand through his long, thick hair. He winces. His fingers come away slick with grease. He definitely needs a shower.

INT. BATHROOM - NIGHT

Steam thickens against the glass shower panel, obscuring Thomas's frame as he lathers his hair in shampoo. Under the rushing water to rinse it all off, his face shifts from relaxed to deeply, profound sadness.

The glass door squeaks open.

Riley steps into the shower fully unclothed, slowly wrapping her arms around his wet chest. The water drenches her hair as suds escape Thomas's husky body. She turns him around and pulls him in.

Their lips meet. Their arms locked over the other, over their hairs, on their chests, around their body. It's passionate, desperate and wanted on Riley's end.

Mid-kiss, Thomas freezes. His eyes remain shut, his body shivering, but not from the cold.

Riley feels it. She pulls back, opening her eyes. She looks at him, concerned. She reaches over to turn off the faucet. The silence in the bathroom is deafening.

She reaches up, running her fingers through his dripping, unruly hair, trying to break the tension.

RILEY

(shaking her head)

You really need a haircut. You're starting to look like the cast of *Goblet of Fire*.

THOMAS

Salons are expensive. Didn't you say you'd do it?

RILEY

Nice try, Mr. Money Miser. I'd probably give you a bowl cut instead.

THOMAS

(a weak laugh)

Like my grandmother did? Okay, I'll find something.

Riley ruffles his hair again as he turns the hot water back on and reaches for the soap.

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

Thomas is in bed, glasses on, staring at his phone. Riley finishes rinsing her mouth at the sink, clicks off the bathroom light, and climbs under the covers beside him.

RILEY

So. What's the plan for tomorrow? I kinda miss seeing you in work pants.

THOMAS

Don't worry, I applied to a few places today. An aquatic center, a bank receptionist...

RILEY

A receptionist? You?

THOMAS

What? Male receptionists exist, don't they?

RILEY

Yeah, but you hate talking to angry strangers.

THOMAS

(turns off his phone, sets his glasses down)
I'll figure it out, Riley.

Riley looks at him for a long moment, then kisses his cheek.

RILEY

Just promise me you'll at least do one new thing tomorrow. Start by getting out of the house, okay?

THOMAS

Okay. I promise.

They click off their respective bedside lamps. The room plunges into darkness. Riley sighs deeply from her much-needed rest, But Thomas stares wide-eyed at the ceiling, completely sleepless.

FADE TO BLACK.