

"GUMBO"

Written by
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INT. APARTMENT - BEDROOM - GIMJE, SOUTH KOREA - MORNING

JEONG JI-HO, 71, rouses from bed in a dark bedroom feeling the morning aches of old age.

JEONG HEE-SOOK (softly and in Korean)

Ahh, shit.

His wife, **KIM HEE-SOOK**, 68, faintly admonishes his profanity unintelligibly as her face is buried in her pillow.

Ji-Ho walks out to his kitchen and starts a pot of coffee. He takes out a serving tray and, with great care, fixes two cups of piping hot coffee and little pourer of milk.

He picks up the tray and walks directly past the bedroom door.

INT./EXT. JEONG JI-HO'S OUTSIDE PATIO - MORNING

Ji-Ho emerges from his apartment with tray in hand. His porch connects to that of his next-door neighbor, **CHOI IN-SU**, 70, who is already seated outside.

JEONG JI-HO (to In-Su in Korean)

What's the fool doing today?

Ji-Ho puts the tray down and hands In-Su a cup of coffee. In-Su says nothing but takes the coffee being handed to him and places it on a side table. He does not drink it. He never drinks the coffee Ji-Ho gives him. This is part of a daily ritual in their friendship that never makes sense and never changes.

JEONG JI-HO (laughingly and in Korean)

Still struggling with those stools?

CHOI IN-SU (in Korean)

See for yourself.

Ji-Ho sits and looks across the street into a shop with a large open shutter, where **AUGUSTE LEE**, 24, is chopping celery. On either side of him are two convection stoves, each with a large simmering pots.

JEONG JI-HO (in Korean)

He's cooking? Already? What is he cooking?

Mapo tofu?

In-Su shakes his head. They keep watching. Auguste has filled one bowl with chopped celery and moves to cutting peppers.

JEONG JI-HO (in Korean)

Those big pots, maybe it's Japanese ramen.

CHOI IN-SU (in Korean)

That's not for ramen.

JEONG JI-HO (in Korean)

Kids today all eat Japanese food.

CHOI IN-SU (in Korean)

There's no vegetables in ramen soup.

JEONG JI-HO (in Korean)

How do you know?

CHOI IN-SU (in Korean)

*(sighing) Ji-Woo watched a video once...
She tried making it.*

In-Su rubs his hands like in pain.

CHOI IN-SU (in Korean)

She made me scrub pig bones for hours.

Ji-Ho laughs and they keep watching the cafe.

An aroma from the pots makes its way across the street. Ji-Ho and In-Su sniff the air.

JEONG JI-HO (in Korean)

What is that?

In-Su says nothing but shakes his head.

Ji-Ho fidgets for a few restless moments, before standing to shout across the street.

JEONG JI-HO (in Korean)

What are you cooking over there?!

INT./EXT. - AUGUSTE'S CAFÉ - MORNING

Auguste looks up confused, not that he didn't hear Ji-Ho, but because his Korean is very rusty.

AUGUST LEE (to Ji-Ho)

Eh?

JEONG JI-HO (in Korean)

What will you be serving?!

AUGUSTE LEE (shouts back)

...Gumbo!

Back to the porch where Ji-Ho and In-Su look at each other confused.

JEONG JI-HO (to In-Su)

...Gum...bo?

CHOI IN-SU (in Korean)

So it is Japanese.

JEONG JI-HO (in Korean)

*Ahh... yes! I told you! Kids nowadays
all want to eat Japanese.*

From across the street they hear an electronic beeping version of 'Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star' as Auguste turns on his rice cooker.

At the café, Auguste scoops rice into a rice cooker, pours in water and starts it.

Across the street, Ji-Ho stands and inhales deeply as he's about to start shouting an unintelligible angry outburst.

Auguste reacts with alarm and confusion to Ji-Ho's shouting at him for not washing his rice. This goes on for some time.

Ji-Ho finishes yelling and sits back down.

JEONG JI-HO (in Korean)

*Can you believe that? That rice must
be filthy!*

CHOI IN-SU (in Korean)

That could just be a myth...

JEONG JI-HO (in Korean)

*I'd heard about the Japanese doing
some crazy things... but not washing rice?*

CHOI IN-SU (in Korean)

*...besides with all these machines nowadays...
maybe it doesn't really matter.*

Ji-Ho turns to In-Su very seriously.

JEONG JI-HO (in Korean)

Does Ji-Woo wash your rice?

CHOI IN-SU (in Korean)

*Always, but if you asked me if that's
important... I'm not sure I could say.*

Ji-Ho reacts with an unspecified grunt of disapproval.

Back at the café, Auguste finishes cutting vegetables into three large bowls. There is one pot full of gumbo that he made the night prior simmering on one side of him. The other pot is empty, save for oil simmering in the bottom. Auguste measures out some flour and dumps it into the hot oil, then begins stirring it slowly and continually with a wooden spoon.

A delivery van pulls in front of the café, obstructing us from Ji-Ho and In-Su across the street. The delivery driver gets out with a package and clipboard. Auguste motions the man over as he can't leave the pot. He signs for the package with one hand while stirring with the other.

Across the street, Ji-Ho sits impatiently like he's waiting for his TV program to come back. The delivery van leaves and they continue watching the café.

JEONG & CHOI'S WIVES (in Korean & O.S.)

Yeobo, lunch!

In almost perfect unison, Ji-Ho and In-Su's respective wives call them in for lunch. They both stand up and go inside.

At the café, Auguste stirs the flour and oil, forming a roux that's become the color of milk chocolate.

INT. JI-HO & IN-SU'S APARTMENTS - DAY

Ji-Hu and In-Su eat lunch silently with their respective wives in respective apartments, bisected in frame.

INT./EXT. - AUGUSTE'S CAFÉ - DAY

Auguste continues stirring the roux that has become the color of dark chocolate and shows the passage of time.

Ji-Hu and In-Su emerge from their apartments and return to their seats for their program. They watch as Auguste dumps the three bowls of vegetables into the sizzling roux with a mighty hiss that they hear from across the street.

JEONG JI-HO (in Korean)

Wow!

Auguste stirs the mixture and grabs the package from his counter. He opens it, revealing an 'OPEN' (in Korean) sign.

Ji-Ho and In-Su watch as Auguste plugs the sign in outside the café and turns it on.

JEONG JI-HO (in Korean)

He can't be open already! Is he serious?

Auguste takes out a large container of broth and pours it in the pot as he stirs. Then he pulls some whole chickens from an oven beneath him, and starts tearing meat from them and adds it to the pot.

Back to Ji-Ho and In-Su watching him.

JEONG JI-HO (in Korean)

I've never seen anything like this.

Have you?

CHOI IN-SU (in Korean)

The Japanese have some strange dishes.

A man in a suit holding a briefcase walks by the cafe and slows his walk.

Back to Ji-Ho and In-Su. Ji-Ho reacts with excitement.

JEONG JI-HO (in Korean)

Oh. Oh! Here we go.

In front of the café, the man sniffs the air and cautiously approaches the counter.

MAN IN SUIT (in Korean)

Hello? What are you serving?

AUGUSTE LEE

Gumbo.

MAN IN SUIT (in Korean)

Gumbo?... How much?

Auguste freezes and fumbles his words.

AUGUSTE LEE (in English)

Uh, umm, here.

Auguste scoops rice into a bowl and uses the rice paddle to carefully pack half the bowl horizontally. Then he ladles gumbo into the other half, places the bowl on the counter in front of the man and sprinkles green onions on top.

The man stands there awkwardly for a moment before taking a seat at the counter.

MAN IN SUIT (in Korean)

Th... thank you.

Ji-Ho and In-Su watch with confused anticipation.

The man meticulously crafts a spoonful and takes a bite.

He thinks about it carefully before smiling and continuing to eat. Auguste stands behind the counter writing in a notebook.

Ji-Ho and In-Su continue watching like it's a pivotal moment in a televised drama.

The man finishes eating and stands while reaching for his wallet.

MAN IN SUIT (in Korean)

Thank you... but, haha, you never told me how much it was. What do I owe you?

Auguste approaches the man while looking at his notebook. He speaks to him in Korean, but it is slow and very clumsy.

AUGUSTE LEE (in Korean)

There's... there's no charge. But would you tell me... how... how much you would pay... if I... if I were to charge you?

The man stands there confused.

AUGUSTE LEE (in Korean)

How much... would you pay... for that?

MAN IN SUIT (in Korean)

₩10,000?... maybe ₩11,000?

AUGUSTE LEE (in Korean)

Thank you.

The man walks away confused.

Ji-Ho and In-Su look on confused.

Auguste takes the man's bowl and starts washing it.

EXT. THE STREET A BLOCK AWAY - AFTERNOON.

YUN EUN-WOO, 11, a slightly chubby schoolboy, walks home from school. He's on his phone watching a mukbang video of a streamer eating a cheeseburger. He rubs his belly like he is hungry.

YUN EUN-WOO (in Korean)

*Ah! That **has** to taste good!*

He passes Auguste's café and is stopped by the smell. He peers inside, where two more people are eating gumbo. Auguste is talking to one of them and writing in his notebook.

YUN EUN-WOO (to Auguste in Korean)

What are you serving?

AUGUSTE LEE

Gumbo!

YUN EUN-WOO (in Korean)

How much?

Auguste motions the boy over to the counter and fixes a bowl.

AUGUSTE LEE (struggling with Korean)

It's not for sale.

YUN EUN-WOO (in Korean)

What do you mean?

Auguste puts a bowl in front of him and sprinkles green onions.

AUGUSTE LEE (struggling with Korean)
*Tell me what you think. That will be
your payment.*

YUN EUN-WOO (in Korean)
Where's it from?

AUGUSTE LEE (struggling with Korean)
*Do you always ask this many questions
when you eat?*

YUN EUN-WOO (in Korean)
Only when strangers give me strange food.

Auguste laughs.

AUGUSTE LEE (in Korean)
It's from America.

The boy is amazed and starts eating the gumbo with vigor.

YUN EUN-WOO (in English)
(with his mouth full) *Are you an American?*

Auguste thinks about the question for a moment.

AUGUSTE LEE (in English)
Yeah... I guess I am. How do you speak English?

YUN EUN-WOO (in English)
*They teach it in school... and you know...
Twitch.*

AUGUSTE LEE (in English)
What do you think of gumbo?

YUN EUN-WOO (in English)
It's... good.

AUGUSTE LEE (in English)
...anything else?

YUN EUN-WOO (in English)
*It's not as bold as I was expecting.
But not in a bad way. The flavor is
deep... but subtle... comforting.*

Yun finishes his bowl and pushes it forward as he gets up to leave. Auguste takes it.

AUGUSTE LEE (in English)

*Wow, they must use a lot of adjectives
on Twitch. Thank you for the feedback.*

Back across the street Ji-Ho and In-Su watch as the boy continues walking home.

JEONG JI-HO (in Korean)

*I told you these kids today all want
Japanese food.*

JI-HO & IN-SU'S WIVES (in Korean & O.S.)

Yeobo, dinner!

In almost perfect unison, their wives again call them for dinner.

Ji-Ho and In-su stand and walk inside.

JEONG JI-HO (to In-Su in Korean)

See you tomorrow, old friend.

Back at the café, Auguste says goodbye to the last diner and writes in his notebook, then starts cleaning up.

Across the street, Ji-Ho and In-Su eat dinner in their respective homes, bisected in frame.

INT. - KUN-WOO'S HOME. KITCHEN - NIGHT

Kun-Woo has dinner with his family.

INT. - AUGUSTE'S CAFÉ - NIGHT

Auguste stands and looks into the day's gumbo pot, from which less half was served. He tastes from the pot he made earlier and puts both pots in the refrigerator.

ENTER MONTAGE

INT. - THE FIRST CUSTOMER'S HOME. BEDROOM - NIGHT

The very first customer lies in bed enjoying a deep sleep.

INT. - KUN-WOO'S BEDROOM. NIGHT

Kun-Woo lies in bed enjoying a deep sleep as well.

INT. - JI-HO'S HOME. BEDROOM - NIGHT

Ji-Ho and his wife are in bed. She is asleep but he is restless, tossing and turning and struggling to find sleep.

INT. - AUGUSTE'S CAFÉ - NIGHT.

Auguste sits at the counter eating Mom's Touch while doing Korean language exercises on a tablet.

END MONTAGE

INT. - A SCHOOL LUNCHROOM - DAY

Kun-Woo is among a group of students eating lunch at a table in the school cafeteria.

YUN KUN-WOO (to the entire table)

...it must be the latest food craze from America!

ANOTHER BOY (to Kun-Woo in Korean)

Quit being stupid! Why would something like that ever be in Gimje? You should at least think before telling us these lies.

At one end of the table a girl, **HAN SEO-RA, 11**, quietly watches the argument.

YUN KUN-WOO (in Korean)

Why would I make all this up? Go there and see for yourself if you don't believe me, idiot!

The other boy waves his hand at Kun-Woo with a dismissive sound.

EXT./INT. - JI-HO & IN-SU'S PORCH - EARLY AFTERNOON

Ji-Ho and In-Su emerge from their respective apartments after lunch, rubbing their bellies with satisfaction. They look out across the street and see that a group of six men in suits, including the first customer from yesterday, are eating at the counter.

CHOI IN-SU (in Korean)

Looks like he's doing better today.

Ji-Ho looks at a chalkboard outside the café that reads, "Gumbo W10,000."

JEONG JI-HO (in Korean)

For that price people would eat anything.

EXT. - A NEARBY STREET - AFTERNOON

Kun-Woo walks home from school, heading back to the cafe. A half block behind him Seo-Ra follows him cautiously, secretly.

EXT./INT. - AUGUSTE'S CAFÉ - AFTERNOON

Auguste serves a bowl of gumbo to a customer at the counter and stands back with a cup of coffee to admire what he's built. He watches his customers, paying extra attention to their conversations, in the hope of improving his Korean.

Kun-Woo slinks in and sits at the counter. Auguste serves him, then looks up and notices Seo-Ra standing in the entrance. He greets her with a friendly nod.

ENTER MONTAGE

INT. - THE FIRST CUSTOMER'S HOME - BEDROOM - NIGHT

Auguste's first customer lies in bed enjoying a deep sleep.

INT. - KUN-WOO'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Kun-Woo lies in his bed enjoying a deep sleep as well.

INT. - SEO-RA'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Seo-Ra lies in her bed enjoying a deep sleep.

INT. - JI-HO'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Ji-Ho and his wife in bed, she is asleep while he still struggles to fall sleep.

INT. - AUGUSTE'S CAFÉ - NIGHT

Auguste turns off the neon sign and closes the outside shutter.

END MONTAGE

INT. - SEO-RA'S HOME - DINING ROOM - MORNING

Seo-Ra is having breakfast with her mother, father and older sister, **SO-RIN, 15.**

SEO-RA (to her dad in Korean)
*And it was so yummy! It's called gumbo
and it's the latest viral food from
America!*

SEO-RA'S FATHER (in Korean)
*America? (turning to So-Rin) I'm surprised
it's not your sister telling us about
all this.*

Seo-Ra turns to So-Rin, who is glaring at her as though she has unknowingly violated her territory.

EXT./INT. - JI-HO & IN-SU'S PORCH - EARLY AFTERNOON

Ji-Ho & In-Su sit and watch the café, which continues growing in popularity.

CHOI IN-SU (in Korean)
It looks like he's doing well.

JEONG JI-HO (in Korean)
They don't know he doesn't wash his rice.

CHOI IN-SU (in Korean)
*I bet if you ate unwashed rice you
wouldn't even know it.*

JEONG JI-HO (in Korean)
I'd know!

At the café, Auguste continues enjoying what he's created. Watching his customers, hearing their conversations, and understanding them more each day. He no longer needs the notebook.

He converses with one of them when the flow of everything is interrupted suddenly by So-Rin, who appears at the entrance holding a mounted camera that she is recording on.

SO-RIN (in Korean)
*Hello everyone! Today I'm trying gumbo,
the latest viral food craze from
America that has everyone talking!*

Auguste watches her with confusion.

SO-RIN (in Korean)

*And it's right here in Gimje! Come on
let's try it!*

ENTER MONTAGE

Cut to a series of people from all over Korea watching So-Rin's video. Their reactions of escalating excitement. Her view numbers climb into the thousands, then millions.

SO-RIN (in Korean)

*Oh wow! I can see why people have been
talking. The flavor is very deep and
rich, but it's not overpowering either.
It's really well balanced.*

Another series of shots showing people in various stages of travel, headed for Gimje. There are vloggers packing camera equipment, people on buses, trains, cars full of people driving. Many excitedly saying the word 'gumbo' for the first time.

EXT./INT. - JI-HO & IN-SU'S PORCH - MORNING.

Ji-Ho emerges from his apartment, coffee tray in hand. He holds out In-Su's coffee without looking at or noticing what's happening directly in front of him.

JEONG JI-HO (in Korean)

Morning, old friend.

In-su does not respond. He takes the cup of coffee and stares ahead blankly.

JEONG JI-HO (in Korean)

I said good morning! What's wrong with you?

In-Su still does not respond. Ji-Ho sits down, takes a sip of coffee and looks up. The street in front of their apartment is filled with people, many of whom are holding.

Ji-Ho inhales like he's about to start screaming but we cut away before it starts.

INT. - AUGUSTE'S CAFÉ - NOON.

The muffled sound of Ji-Ho's scream is faintly heard.

Auguste turns the lights on inside the cafe. He takes out his two pots of gumbo and places each on a convection burner and starts the rice cooker.

He yawns as he walks over to the shutter and fumbles with keys. He unlocks and opens it, revealing the mob of people standing outside.

The entire crowd all turn and look at him at once.

Auguste looks at them with a quiet, desperate terror.

EXT./INT - JI-HO & IN-SU'S PORCH - A FEW HOURS LATER

Ji-Ho & In-Su watch the chaos unfold, the sounds of the crowd drowning out the once quiet street.

CHOI IN-SU (to Ji-Ho in Korean)

It was chaotic at first, but he seems to be handling it better.

JEONG JI-HO (in Korean)

Eh?!

CHOI IN-SU (louder and in Korean)

He seems to be handling it better.

JEONG JI-HO (in Korean)

No...

CHOI IN-SU (in Korean)

No?

JEONG JI-HO (in Korean)

Look at him.

From their vantage point, Auguste serves a customer with severe mental anguish.

JEONG JI-HO (in Korean and O.S.)

He is a man drowning in his own creation.

Back in the café, everyone is eating and talking into cameras or phones. We hear various voices narrating their experience with gumbo.

Auguste looks around, lost in a bewildered cloud.

Auguste turns back to a customer holding his camera and waiting to order.

He looks down at his pot and sees that's it's empty.

AUGUSTE LEE (in Korean and to the customer)
Sold out.

CUSTOMER (in Korean)
But I came here from Daegu.

Auguste looks down and says nothing.

CUSTOMER (in Korean)
I said--

Auguste looks up and yells to everyone there

AUGUSTE LEE (in English)
*Well, there's no more, damn it! We're
sold out!*

A silence falls over the entire restaurant for Auguste's outburst.

Finally, one of the diners looks into his camera.

DINER (in English)
WOW! SUPER EXCLUSIVE! SO COOL!

The diners explode into a frenzy yelling variations of "SUPER EXCLUSIVE" into their respective cameras.

ANOTHER DINER (in Korean)
He yells just like Gordon Ramsay!

Everyone goes back to talking loudly and Auguste steps back from the counter with a look of frustration. Burying his face in his hands.

Across the street, Ji-Ho watches Auguste in horror.
Understanding his pain in that moment.

INT./EXT. - AUGUSTE'S CAFÉ - EVENING

The crowd is gone. Auguste cleans up the dining area slowly and solemnly.

He takes out the pot of gumbo for tomorrow and puts it on the stove to warm up.

JEONG JI-HO (O.S. & in Korean)

*So, you **did** have more?*

Auguste looks up and sees Ji-Ho standing at his entrance and smiles.

JEONG JI-HO (in Korean)

Why didn't you sell them this... gumbo?

You didn't want them to have it?

Auguste motions Ji-Ho to sit down at the counter.

AUGUSTE LEE (in Korean)

*Gumbo is always better the day **after** you make it.*

(beat)

It's made with simple ingredients, except for one... patience. Which, as I'm sure you saw earlier, I lost.

JEONG JI-HO (in Korean)

Hey! Your Korean has gotten much better. That isn't easy, you know? That... that's patience.

AUGUSTE LEE (in Korean)

My father was from this town.

JEONG JI-HO (in Korean)

Oh yeah?

AUGUSTE LEE (in Korean)

He left here and went to America... and opened a restaurant.

JEONG JI-HO (in Korean)

A Korean restaurant in America? That's bold.

AUGUSTE LEE (in Korean)

He tried selling bibimbap, but it didn't sell in those days, so he switched to Chinese food.

JEONG JI-HO (in Korean)

That's smart. He had a family to take care of.

AUGUSTE LEE (in Korean)

Yeah... but I think it always bothered him, you know? That there was this piece of him that he wanted share... only... no one wanted it.

JEONG JI-HO (in Korean)

Ahh, so that's why you're here?

AUGUSTE LEE (in Korean)

He... learned English by listening to his customers. So I thought...

JEONG JI-HO (in Korean)

You would make the same journey that he once made... only... back... to him... to your roots.

AUGUSTE LEE (in Korean)

Exactly.

JEONG JI-HO (in Korean)

Well, I can smell that gumbo. Are you going to fix me a bowl? Or do I have to sit here until tomorrow?

Auguste laughs and fixes two bowls of gumbo.

He places one in front of Ji-Ho.

Ji-Ho looks down and sees how the bowl is bisected. One half rice, one half gumbo.

JEONG JI-HO (in Korean)

I see. (pointing to each half) This is you... and this is you. You are each but here you are both.

Auguste sprinkles some green onions on top.

JEONG JI-HO (in Korean)

Hey! Don't be stingy with those. We're still Korean.

Auguste laughs and sprinkles more green onions on.

JEONG JI-HO (in Korean)

Ahh! It looks like a nice curry.

AUGUSTE LEE (in Korean)

Gumbo is similar to many dishes, but it's also totally unique. It comes from a part of America with a French history, but some ingredients you would expect to find don't grow there. So, it was made with what was available.

JEONG JI-HO (in Korean)

Like what your father did.

AUGUSTE LEE (in Korean)

Haha, yeah, I guess so.

Ji-Ho prepares a spoonful to take his first bite.

JEONG JI-HO (in Korean)

Well, it's time I see what all this fuss is about.

Ji-Ho raises the spoon to his mouth, but we cut suddenly before he takes a bite.

INT. - JEONG JI-HO'S BEDROOM - NIGHT.

From above, we see both Ji-Ho and his wife enjoying a deep sleep. Ji-Ho snoring loudly.

EXT./INT. - AUGUSTE'S CAFÉ - NIGHT.

From outside looking in, Auguste cuts vegetables. Preparing a 2nd pot of gumbo to get caught up on having sold out that day.

FADE OUT.