

LBRIS

We know
books

**i want
to die
but i
still
want
to eat
tteokbokki**

**further conversations
with my psychiatrist**

Baek Sehee

translated by Anton Hur



BLOOMSBURY PUBLISHING

LONDON • OXFORD • NEW YORK • NEW DELHI • SYDNEY

LIBRIS BLOOMSBURY PUBLISHING
Bloomsbury Publishing Plc
50 Bedford Square, London, WC1B 3DP, UK
Bloomsbury Publishing Ireland Limited,
29 Earlsfort Terrace, Dublin 2, D02 AY28, Ireland

BLOOMSBURY, BLOOMSBURY PUBLISHING and the Diana logo are
trademarks of Bloomsbury Publishing Plc

죽고 싶지만 떡볶이는 먹고 싶어 2 *I want to die but I still want
to eat Tteokbokki*

By Baek Sehee

Copyright © Baek Sehee, 2019

All Rights Reserved.

Original Korean edition published by HEUN Publishing.

English translation rights arranged with Bloomsbury Publishing
Plc through BC Agency.

First published in Great Britain 2024
This edition published 2025

English translation © Anton Hur, 2024, 2025

Baek Sehee has asserted her right under the Copyright, Designs and Patents
Act, 1988, to be identified as Author of this work

This book was published under an agreement with the author's psychiatrist.
Identifying information on the relevant clinic has been withheld by request.
We ask for the reader's understanding on this matter.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be: i) reproduced or
transmitted in any form, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying,
recording or by means of any information storage or retrieval system without
prior permission in writing from the publishers; or ii) used or reproduced in
any way for the training, development or operation of artificial intelligence
(AI) technologies, including generative AI technologies. The rights holders
expressly reserve this publication from the text and data mining exception as
per Article 4(3) of the Digital Single Market Directive (EU) 2019/7790

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN: HB: 978-1-5266-6365-8; TPB: 978-1-5266-6790-8; Waterstones
special edition: 978-1-5266-8040-2; PB: 978-1-5266-6366-5;
eBook: 978-1-5266-6367-2; ePDF: 978-1-5266-6364-1

4 6 8 10 9 7 5 3

Typeset by Newgen KnowledgeWorks Pvt. Ltd., Chennai, India
Printed and bound in Great Britain by CPI Group (UK) Ltd,
Croydon CR0 4YY



To find out more about our authors and books visit www.bloomsbury.com
and sign up for our newsletters
For product safety related questions contact productsafety@bloomsbury.com

CONTENTS

<i>A Note on the Content</i>	ix
<i>To the Readers of the English Edition</i>	xi
<i>Prologue</i>	xiii
1 What's Wrong with Wanting to Be Loved?	1
2 Thinness: The Pressure I Can't Escape	21
3 Seeing Myself through the Eyes of Others	37
4 I Needed a Wound I Could See	51
5 Because I Fear Both Living and Dying	69
6 That Someone Wishes for My Safety	87
7 The Anniversary	99
8 Widen that Middle Ground Within Me	109
9 It's Not Like Other People Have Lived My Life	125
10 Being Myself Whether in Honesty or Hypocrisy	137
11 Do I Have Gumption or Not?	149

LIBRIS | We know books

12	Flexible Thinking and the Courage to Rest	163
13	To See the Parts of Myself that Shine	177
14	Because Life Goes On	189
	<i>Afterword</i>	203

A NOTE ON THE CONTENT

For readers who appreciate a warning: this book contains material that some might find disturbing, including accounts of self-harming behavior, disordered eating, and suicidal ideation.

This book is not intended as universal advice nor as a substitute for individualised professional attention but rather as a record of one individual's experience.

PROLOGUE**CONFRONTING THE WOUNDS I NEVER
THOUGHT I HAD**

I've thought about self-pity a lot in preparation for this second book. Excessive self-pity often leads to depression for me. There are inner wounds that haven't healed, and my therapy has enabled me to realise, bit by bit, what kind of wounds they are and their reasons for existing.

But to know one's wounds and to pity oneself for them are two different things. Self-pity isn't necessarily bad, but perhaps people think badly of it because those who self-pity tend to concentrate on their own suffering and ignore the pain of others. I was afraid I was such a person or would become such a person.

The more my therapy progressed, and the more my wounds healed and the scars turned faint, the more vulnerable I became to suffering. It was too easy to uncover buried hurts and immerse myself in depressive thoughts again.

Familiarity felt like safety to me. Which is why, whenever depression or emptiness came calling, I was

all too eager to open the door of self-pity and go right inside. It was a comfortable room where I had spent a lot of my time before. And despite how easily I could've stepped out of it and moved on with my life, I often locked myself inside. As if this familiar suffering was something I could enjoy to my heart's content before going back to my life.

I no longer consider depression as 'the flu of the mind.' For someone who has lived with depression as long as I have – to the point where it's like your second shadow – the disease is more like an incurable chronic illness than a brief cold. It needs constant management, and while you might get better, it's a lifelong journey. So I've decided to expunge the term 'completely cured' from my mind. I'm not simply accepting that this is the way it is and always will be, though. I am trying to find ways not to resort to familiar self-indulgent tendencies whenever I feel depressed, not to feel sorry for myself because of my wounds, or entering that dark room of self-pity. I want to feel what I am feeling and not measure my pain against the pain of others.

This book will not be a useful guide to those seeking a complete cure for depression. But it will be enough, for me, if showing the deepest inner wounds of an individual helps the reader see into their own darkness within. I have held the hands of many people already – and I am ready to hold the hands of many more.

1

**WHAT'S WRONG WITH WANTING TO
BE LOVED?**

'The "size" of human suffering is absolutely relative.'

—Viktor Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning*
(trans. Ilse Lasch)

Early one Saturday morning, I picked up a new release by Roxane Gay: one of my favourite authors. It was a book titled *Hunger*, and it was my first time reading her autobiographical essays, which made me open to the first page with a feeling of anticipation. But astonishingly – even to me – I burst into tears at the foreword and spent the rest of the time reading the book in pain, putting it down on occasion to rest, though my tears would not stop flowing. It made me realise I had never been honest with myself, even as I'd baldly declared how revealing my darkness to the light was the way to become free. Every childhood memory where I was lonely and hurt and sad from lack of love (maybe not every memory) rose to the surface, unfurling in vivid scenes in my mind.

My crushes had been constant since middle school, but no one had ever accepted my affections. In my third year when I gripped the sleeve of a boy I liked, teasing him, his friend standing nearby picked up on my interest and mocked his friend, saying 'Baek Sehee must like you!' My crush looked embarrassed. In high school there was someone who treated me like I didn't exist once they realised I had a crush on them. There was also the one who toyed with my emotions, and, inevitably, the ones who liked my friends more than me. There were times when I was loved, of course. But as I read *Hunger*, only the hurt from those times came to mind. Memory is not accurate, and it can be rearranged any way you want: to be more extreme or more stimulating.

But it was as if a few pieces of the larger puzzle – the reason for my passivity in my relationships or the cause of my anxiety over the ones where I'd been the side to initiate – were falling into place. 'The person I like doesn't like me. I wanted to be loved by this person, or maybe I wanted to be loved by everyone, but I will never be loved.' These thoughts kept me in the thrall of self-hate and feelings of unworthiness. And I also questioned whether I could ever truly love someone.

Yesterday, I told my partner all of this at length. I hadn't forced myself to consider why I was telling, and I wouldn't have had a clear answer. Would I get better by saying it out loud? I feared my partner would be disappointed once they learned how worthless, how unloved, and how dismissed I had been in my past.

Psychiatrist: (*A sore throat has made it difficult for them to speak.*)

Me: So, doctor, I've been well, but there was a moment where I crumbled for a bit. Does therapy help me bounce back better from setbacks? Because I think my recovery speed has improved a little. I recently read this book titled *Hunger* by Roxane Gay. It's full of the author's candid thoughts on her body and life. She goes into the darkness a lot, and I started crying right from the foreword. And all these memories, not ones I erased completely but ones I wanted to forget and tear up and suppress, they kind of gushed up inside me. Is that something that can happen?

Psychiatrist: Of course.

Me: It was fascinating. Reading that book made the memories unfurl in my mind's eye in a panorama. I jotted down the memories as they came. And I realised that I haven't been honest with myself. What I mean is, of course we don't need to be completely honest with everyone. But it made me realise, *I haven't been honest with myself, even, I've only been honest with myself insofar as I could stand it.* It was so devastating in that moment that I had this unbearable feeling, you know? (*Rummages, looking for my notes.*) In other words, 'I realised I had never completely accepted

LBRIS | We know books

myself as I am, that I had never embraced my past and wanted only to rid myself of it, and ended up suppressing it, and now my past self and present self cannot connect or separate properly and are in a kind of limbo.'

Like this, for example: If I'm not going to embrace the past-me, then I should bury her and live my life being satisfied with the present me, but I can't do that, and present-me, which is supposed to be different from and stronger than past-me, ends up being tangled up with past-me, making me think, 'Oh, I'm just the same as the old me. This is just a shell.'

Psychiatrist: Can you tell me more about past-me?

Me: (*Talks about the times I was denied love.*)

I thought a lot yesterday about whether I would tell you or my partner first, but seeing how unwell you are now makes me glad I told my partner first (*because the psychiatrist can't speak well today*). If I hadn't let it out yesterday, I would not have been in a good place today. I guess everyone has different ways of healing. I think there's no need for absolute truth all the time. And there's nothing more violent than forcing the truth out of someone, making them confess against

their will. But still, I know myself. The path to freedom and relief has always been letting the light in as opposed to burying something or running away from it. No matter how hard it may be. This letting in the light has made me stronger and minimised a lot of things that used to loom large for me. Like growing up in poverty or having eczema.

I think the past that I really wanted to keep hidden just wasn't ready to be revealed yet. That's my interpretation of it, at least. I'd locked it away in my subconscious and pretended the past was past and the old me had nothing to do with me, but that didn't mean I was healed, it had remained a wound this whole time. Maybe, if I were to put a positive spin on it, the memories resurfaced because I am ready to accept them now?

Psychiatrist: Was it difficult bringing it up with your partner? What went through your mind?

Me: I did worry whether they would look down on me. I was nervous about it, but I really wanted to tell them. As I've said in here before, I would rather reveal myself, and if the other person wants to leave me because of that, they can leave. But my partner couldn't understand why I would think they'd look down on me